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"Madame ma chère fille": The Performance of Motherhood in the Correspondence of Madame de Sévigné, Marie-Thérèse of Austria, and Joséphine Bonaparte to their Daughters

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“Madame ma chère fille”: The Performance of Motherhood in the Correspondence of
Madame de Sévigné, Marie-Thérèse of Austria, and Joséphine Bonaparte
to their Daughters

A Thesis Presented

by

MEAGEN ELIZABETH MORELAND

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DEDICATION

For my mom, whose voice I am always glad to hear.

ABSTRACT

*"MADAME MA CHÈRE FILLE": THE PERFORMANCE OF MOTHERHOOD IN THE
CORRESPONDENCE OF MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ, MARIE-THÉRÈSE OF AUSTRIA,
AND JOSÉPHINE BONAPARTE TO THEIR DAUGHTERS*

MAY 2012

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This paper conducts a critical comparison of the correspondence of Madame de Sévigné, Empress Marie-Thérèse of Austria and Joséphine Bonaparte. These women instruct their daughters through a writerly exchange that implements a remarkably similar use of language that indicates a “performance” of her maternal role, meant to implement a personal or political agenda that requires her daughter’s acknowledgement and reciprocation. This project analyzes the construction of the maternal figure in a historical context, its representation in the letters of each woman with their daughters, the motivations for a “performance” of the maternal role, and the subsequent characterization, reaction, and liberation of the daughter’s voice.

The paper addresses: (1) The conducive nature of the epistolary genre to the mother-daughter exchange and the construction of the maternal voice; (2) The development of specific criteria underlining the similarities in each epistolary exchange and proving a “performance” of motherhood, with particular attention paid to the women’s strategic construction of the character of the “devoted mother” and their means of educating and advising their daughters through writing; (3) Examinations of the motivations for a

“performance” of the maternal role implementing major concepts introduced by J.L. Austin’s speech act theory and Émile Benveniste in order to inform a discussion of the mother’s use of *language* to develop an image of herself with the intention to *control* her daughter. This chapter also analyzes those goals, specific to each mother’s circumstance, that rest at the heart of her maternal instruction, motivate her performance, inform her use of language, and contribute to defining her maternal identity. Finally, the fourth chapter consists of an analysis of the daughter’s character as constructed by the mother or, in the case of Marie-Thérèse’s letters to Marie-Antoinette, as compared to the daughter’s actual written response. This chapter applies further use of speech act theory to inform an investigation of how the daughter uses language to affirm (and liberate) her own voice from the mother’s, in which she opposes the mother’s instruction, makes independent or opposing choices, and, ultimately, becomes a mother herself.

Key words: mother, daughter, motherhood, performance, performativity, identity, epistolarity, speech act theory, subjectivity

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CHAPTER I

CONTEXTUALIZING THE CORRESPONDENCE

In 1671, Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, the marquise of Sévigné, wrote to her daughter: *“Ma douleur serait bien médiocre si je pouvais vous la dépeindre; je ne l’entreprendrai pas aussi. J’ai beau chercher ma chère fille, je ne la trouve plus, et tous les pas qu’elle fait l’éloignent de moi.”* (Duchêne, Vol. I, 6 Feb., 149) Over half of the letters which remain in Madame de Sévigné’s prolific correspondence¹ are destined for her daughter, Françoise-Marguerite de Sévigné, the countess of Grignan; each marked by a dramatic anxiety and depression associated with separation from her daughter, intimate details of personal thoughts and events, and the insistence of the daughter’s acceptance and reciprocation of the epistolary exchange. Throughout the correspondence, Sévigné’s letters to Madame de Grignan suggest a mother that is totally devoted to her daughter, and whose own happiness - even existence - is dependent on the return of the daughter’s affection and acknowledgment of the mother’s instruction.

While Madame de Sévigné’s writing has reached great literary fame and achievement, consistent trends in the invention and expression of her maternal identity – how she defines herself as “mother” in her writing - are reflected in later feminine correspondences. The dominating maternal voice that characterizes Sévigné’s letters is joined, over the course of the proceeding two centuries, by those of the Empress Marie-Thérèse of Austria and Joséphine Bonaparte, the first wife of the Emperor Napoléon. Each of

¹ Note on spelling: I will use the English “correspondence” in the general text and the French “*correspondance*” when specifically referring to the titles of epistolary collections or citing in the original language.

these three women maintain epistolary exchanges with their daughters which begin at the moment of initial separation and serve as a means of sustaining a written portrait of themselves as “mother” that not only displays remarkable similarities in style and language, but emphasizes a carefully crafted maternal voice characterized by excessive devotion and maternal instruction.

On May 4, 1770, just after the departure of her daughter, Empress Marie-Thérèse writes: “*N’oubliez pas une mère qui, quoi qu’éloignée, ne cessera d’être occupée de vous jusqu’à son dernier soupir. Je vous donne ma bénédiction et suis toujours votre fidèle mère.*” (Lever 46) Like Sévigné and Marie-Thérèse, Joséphine Bonaparte places particular emphasis on the physical distance between herself and her daughter, stressing an emotional connection and preoccupation that bind mother and child together. Almost three decades later, On March 6, 1797, Joséphine writes to her daughter, Hortense de Beauharnais: “*Je ne puis m’accoutumer à être éloignée aussi longtemps de mes chers enfants; j’ai besoin de les serrer contre mon sein. J’ai cependant tout lieu d’espérer que ce moment n’est pas très éloigné et cela contribue beaucoup à me remettre de l’indisposition que j’ai eue.*” (Chevalier 49) It is clear that, despite marked differences in their filial relationships, historical circumstances, and conditions surrounding their correspondence, each woman’s preoccupation with distance and *éloignement*, directly linked with their health and maternal devotion, exemplifies a significant and consistent trend in the way each of these woman represent themselves as mothers.

This project will prove that each distinct exchange of letters engage these three women in a dialogue that suggests a conflict between the nature of each woman’s true relationship with her daughter and the altruistic maternal figure represented in their

correspondences. Ultimately, I argue that consistent trends in the way each woman represents herself as “mother”, despite contextual differences, suggests that they are conducting a “performance” of motherhood. Each woman is dependent on her daughter to enact a personal or political agenda and, therefore, creates an image of herself as the ideal mother figure in order to maintain a bond and develop a *confiance* with her daughter, thereby sustaining an epistolary relationship in which the child is dependent upon the mother’s influence and approval and receptive to her instruction.

This study will begin by outlining the biographical and historical context of each correspondent and the resulting publication of their letters, followed by a contextual analysis of the social role of the family and maternal figure in each subject’s respective historical era.

In the following chapters, I will discuss the correspondences in greater detail, beginning with an analysis of the repeated form and language of the mothers’ letters. I will address the relevance of epistolarity as an “acceptable” outlet for feminine expression in order to answer the question: what are the characteristics of the epistolary genre that make it conducive to the mother-daughter exchange? *How* does each woman perform the maternal role? How does the expression of the ideal mother figure present itself in terms of form, style, and content in the letter? In addition to studying the structure of the letter, I will outline a specific set of characteristics – or criteria – that recur in each correspondence, including the expression of the mother’s excessive devotion, evidence of the mother’s struggle between the daughter’s former childhood and present adulthood, depression and illness linked with the mother’s separation from the daughter, the necessity of the daughter’s reciprocation, the domination and control of the daughter’s time, and the mother’s continuing education and instruction.

Once I have outlined *how* the performance of the maternal role is constructed, I will delve into *why* it is necessary. The third chapter will also analyze those goals, specific to each mother's circumstance, that rest at the heart of their maternal instruction, motivate their performance, inform their use of language in the correspondence, and contribute to defining their maternal identity. What are the mother's motivations and personal agenda? Why is her daughter's faithful reciprocation of the epistolary exchange necessary to carry out the mother's specific instructions? How does presenting herself as the ideal mother figure serve as a means of controlling her daughter's actions? Why is a "performance" of motherhood necessary? In addition to considering each woman's specific motivations, I will discuss the way in which the maternal influence is weakened by the physical separation with her daughter, instigating the correspondence as a means of filling the gap with language. Furthermore, I will consider major concepts introduced by John Austin's speech act theory to analyze the interplay of constative and performative statements in the maternal correspondence as a means of interpreting her use of language to direct the "performance" of her role.

In the final chapter, I will investigate the development of the daughter's character, considering her adherence to epistolary formalities and the expectation of her reciprocation. I suggest that, in order to maintain a positive relationship with her mother, she participates in a "performance" of her own, in which she acknowledges the mother's instruction through a reciprocal epistolary exchange, but demonstrates evidence of resistance or rebellion against the mother's influence. While the epistolary relationship benefits the mother as a means to maintain a certain influence over her daughter, it is the physical separation that, ultimately, makes her control through the use of language only as effective as the daughter permits.

Ultimately, my arguments will be based on evidence provided by the mother's language and through existing correspondence from the daughter (this will come largely from Marie Antoinette's letters to Marie-Thérèse), in order to determine a liberation of the daughter's voice. This evolution, resulting in a certain loss of the mother's influence, occurs when the daughter becomes a mother herself or, in the case of Marie Antoinette and Hortense de Beauharnais, becomes a queen.

For the purposes of this study, I will analyze the most contemporary and complete editions available of each woman's correspondence, which I will outline and contextualize in greater detail below. While each collection includes letters to additional correspondents, I am specifically interested in the exchange between mother and daughter - any outside parties will serve only as reference. I will also consider the arguments of Janet Altman, whose 1992 work, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, serves as a fundamental study of the nature of epistolarity as a functioning medium and the relationship between correspondent, *destinataire* and third party reader. In addition, I will consider the work of Michèle Longino Farrell, whose 1991 publication, *Performing Motherhood: The Sévigné Correspondence*, raises many pertinent questions of Sévigné's excessive devotion and the expression of a maternal ideal.

Madame de Sévigné, the earliest chronological subject of this study, was born February 5, 1626 in Place Royale (now Place des Vosges), in Paris. In 1644, she was married at the age of eighteen to Henri de Sévigné. She gave birth to a daughter, Françoise-Marguerite, on October 10, 1646 and a son, Charles, on March 12, 1648. Three years after the birth of Charles, on February 4, 1651, Henri de Sévigné was killed in a duel with Miossens, the chevalier d'Albret, over a mistress, Madame de Gondran. To her good fortune,

Madame de Sévigné had commissioned Christophe de Coulanges to separate her assets and Parisian property from her husband's a year prior, preserving her fortune in the event of his death. Her daughter, Françoise-Marguerite, was married to the Comte de Grignan (then aged 37 and twice widowed) at the Hôtel de La Rochefoucauld on January 29, 1669. In November, Madame de Grignan miscarried her first child in Livry and, in that same month, her husband was appointed Lieutenant General of Provence. M. de Grignan left Paris in April of 1670, leaving behind his mother-in-law and wife, who did not follow him to Provence until February 4, 1671, marking the first significant separation of mother and daughter in Sévigné's correspondence.

There are eight significant documented separations between mother and daughter, marking the most prolific periods of writing from Madame de Sévigné.² On average, the separation of mother and daughter lasts between a few months and a year. While the dates show that Madame de Sévigné and her daughter spent more time together than apart, of the 1,372 total letters that exist in Roger Duchêne's most complete edition of the Sévigné correspondence, approximately 767 – over half - of those letters are destined for Madame de Grignan. There is evidence that some of these letters were written while Sévigné and Grignan are, in fact, in the same house. While the purpose of this could be for a number of mitigating factors – privacy, illness – some historians argue that such letters were written during arguments between mother and daughter, and that Sévigné's relationship with her daughter could be complex and tumultuous, despite how it is constructed by Sévigné in her letters.

² The dates marking the beginning of each separation are recorded as followed: 4 February 1671, 24 May 1675, 8 June 1677, 13 September 1679, 12 September 1684, Sept-Oct 1687, 3 October 1688, and 25/26 March 1694.

Madame de Sévigné died in Grignan on April 17, 1696. There is some speculation that Madame de Grignan, although present in the home, was not at her mother's bedside.

Overall, Madame de Sévigné's letters mark detailed accounts of major historical and political events, as well as provide a valuable portrait of courtly life and – the focus of our study – the maternal voice in 17th century France. She recounts the events of La Fronde (1648 – 1653), the condemnation of Fouquet (December 20, 1664), the invasion of England by William of Orange (November 1688), and the rise of Louis XIV's famed mistress and personal friend of Sévigné, Madame de Maintenon. The letters span almost fifteen years, from September 1680 to April 1696. Sévigné's cousin and frequent correspondent, Bussy-Rabutin, assembled the first edition on December 28, 1680 in a private edition for Louis XIV, including letters exchanged between Sévigné and himself between 1673 and 1675.

Aside from samples of certain letters appearing in Bussy's memoirs and 1697 and 1709 collections of his own letters, the next official publication was not released until 1726 by Sévigné's granddaughter, Madame de Simiane, the only surviving child of the Comte and Madame de Grignan (born August 16, 1676). Working with editor Denis-Marius Perrin of Aix-en-Provence, Madame de Simiane published 614 letters between 1734 and 1737, followed by another 772 in 1754. This edition, and all that followed, included only Sévigné's letters written in her own hand, as Madame de Simiane burned her mother's responses. In 1773³ appeared in Paris the *Lettres nouvelles ou nouvellement recouvrées de la marquise de Sévigné et de la marquise de Simiane*, followed by the *Lettres Inédites* in 1814, containing

³ It can be noted here that the Sévigné letters were published only three years after Marie-Thérèse's correspondence begins with Marie Antoinette and nine years before the beginning of Joséphine Bonaparte's collected correspondence. It can be argued that, due to the popularity of Sévigné's letters and the overlap of certain dates, Marie-Thérèse and Joséphine would have been aware of the discussion surrounding Sévigné's letters or may even have read them. However, her influence on their respective maternal exchange is speculative. This will be addressed in more detail later on.

letters to Guitaut, Hacqueville and Madame de Grignan. Following several updated editions of the *Lettres Inédites*, the first edition of the 10-volume *Correspondance Complète* appeared between 1810 and 1819 by Monmerqué. Today, historian, literary scholar, and Sévigné biographer, Roger Duchêne, assembled the most complete edition of the correspondence, a three-volume edition published by Gallimard in 1972, which I will use for the purposes of this study.

The next central figure of the second correspondence, the Empress Marie-Thérèse of Austria, occupies a unique position of political power that informs and sculpts her relationship with her children, whom she places on their own thrones to maintain the security of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Born on May 13, 1717 (only two years after the death of Louis XIV of France) in Hofburg Palace in Vienna, she was the eldest daughter of Charles VI, who found himself the last male heir to the Austrian Empire. Prepared for the possibility that a daughter would occupy his throne, Charles VI issued the Pragmatic Sanction in 1713 that guaranteed the right of succession to his oldest child regardless of gender. On February 12, 1736, Marie-Thérèse married Francis Stephen of Lorraine, to whom her father assumed she would cede royal authority over the Empire. Upon her father's death on October 20, 1740, Marie-Thérèse (Maria Theresa at the Viennese court) became the only woman ruler in the 650-year history of the Habsburg dynasty. Upon her ascension to the throne, Prussia, Bavaria and France (under Louis XV) invaded Habsburg lands from the west, marking the beginning of the War of Austrian Succession (1740-1748). While the war ended with the Austrian loss of Silesia, the state remained intact and her husband was recognized as Holy Roman Emperor, although he maintained a life-long position as co-regent to Marie-Thérèse's ultimate authority. As she did not cede total power to her husband, as her father had

expected, Marie-Thérèse was forced to compensate for a lack of education in politics, warfare, and matters of state over the course of her forty-year rule.

Between 1738 and 1756, Marie-Thérèse bore sixteen children, of which thirteen survived infancy. Her youngest daughter, Marie Antoinette (Maria Antonia at the Viennese court) was born, along with four other siblings, during a peace between the War of Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War, on November 2, 1755. Due to Austria's frequent state of warfare, largely caused by threats to the Empress's rule, the court at Vienna was slightly less extravagant than it had been during the reign of Charles VI, which had employed some 40,000 servants. Madame Campan, first lady-in-waiting to Marie Antoinette and later tutor of Joséphine Bonaparte's daughter, Hortense de Beauharnais, recalls in her *Memoires sur la vie privée de Marie-Antoinette* that, while the court at Vienna was more informal than the French court, Marie-Thérèse inspired fear and respect from her daughters, rather than a maternal intimacy, thus creating a distance that, according to Campan, Marie Antoinette attempted to avoid with her own children.⁴ Although supervised by the Empress, Campan describes Marie Antoinette's education as "*très-négligée*", a difficulty that would affect her understanding of politics later as queen of France.⁵ In Vienna, the children were educated at court, with particular attention paid to the arts and languages. Campan recounts an incident in which, desperate to please the Empress, one of Marie Antoinette's tutors was released for first

⁴ "*La reine parlait souvent de sa mère avec un profond respect, mais elle avait formé tous ses projets pour l'éducation de ses enfans d'après les choses essentielles qui avaient été négligées dans la sienne. Marie-Thérèse, imposante par ses grandes qualités, inspirait aux archiduchesses plus de crainte et de respect que d'amour; c'est au moins ce que j'ai remarqué dans les sentimens de la reine pour son auguste mère; aussi désirait-elle ne jamais établir entre elle et ses enfans cette distance qui avait existé dans la famille impériale.*" (Campan 37).

⁵ "*On s'en aperçut bientôt à la cour de France, et de-là vient l'opinion assez généralement répandue qu'elle manquait d'esprit.*" (Campan 39)

transcribing the young archduchess's assignments in pencil, which Marie Antoinette would copy over with ink. (Campan 39)

In 1756, Marie-Thérèse managed to secure an alliance between Austria and France to jointly attack Frederick II of Prussia, only to be attacked first by Frederick himself upon his surprise invasion of Saxony, marking the beginning of the Seven Years' War. By the end of this war, on August 18, 1765, Marie-Thérèse's husband, Francis Stephen, died of a massive stroke at Innsbruck. Following his death, Marie-Thérèse's eldest son, Joseph II, assumed his role as Emperor and co-regent at twenty-four years old.

Five years later, in an attempt to secure the alliance with France, Marie-Thérèse approved the marriage of Marie Antoinette with Louis XV's grandson and heir apparent, Louis XVI. The couple was married by proxy on April 19, 1770 and Marie Antoinette, age fourteen, was officially handed over to French relations on May 7, 1770 on an island on the Rhine River near Kehl. Marie Antoinette's departure marks the first and permanent separation between mother and daughter and, consequently, the beginning of their correspondence. The first letter in Evelyne Lever's edition of Marie Antoinette's correspondence from Marie-Thérèse to her daughter is dated the 21st of April, 1770 – "*jour du départ*".

A ceremonial wedding took place at Versailles on May 16, 1770. Following Marie Antoinette's ascension to the French throne following the death of Louis XV, on May 10, 1774, Marie-Thérèse urged Marie Antoinette to be cautious of wasteful spending and acknowledge social instability, encouraging her daughter to follow her own example. In-depth study of the correspondence that follows will show that Marie-Thérèse often employs a sentimental, affectionate maternal voice to appeal to her daughter's careless approach to

political matters, while Marie Antoinette becomes more dismissive of her mother's instruction as her reign progresses.

Following seven years of an unconsummated marriage, Marie Antoinette gives birth to a daughter, Marie-Thérèse Charlotte (known as Madame Royale), at Versailles on December 19, 1778. There is a documented miscarriage in July of 1779; although there is some discussion that Marie Antoinette may have experienced pain related to an irregular menstrual cycle, which she mistook for a lost pregnancy.

Marie-Thérèse dies on November 29, 1780 at Hofburg Palace in Vienna, marking the end of a forty-year, forty-day reign and her correspondence with Marie Antoinette. The following year, on October 22, 1781, Marie Antoinette gave birth to a son, Louis Joseph Xavier François, who dies of tuberculosis in 1789. Another son, Louis Charles, born on March 27, 1785, dies in prison following the fall of the monarchy. Another, Sophie Hélène Béatrice de France, is born on June 9, 1786 but dies eleven months later. After over fifteen years of Louis XVI's reign, excessive spending, the deterioration of Marie Antoinette's reputation, and negligence in the face of excessive political and social unrest led to the abolition of the monarchy on September 21, 1792. Marie Antoinette was executed on October 16, 1793, following the death of her husband, summoning her mother's eerie forewarning dated November 1, 1770, the first year of their correspondence: "*Vous regretteriez, mais trop tard, d'avoir négligé mes conseils.*" (Lever 61)

The first letter in Marie Antoinette's hand following her death appeared publicly in 1822. By 1843, her letters were being sold at auction at highly elevated prices, resulting in the creation and distribution of many forgeries created to turn a profit. In 1864, an edition edited by the publishing house Feuillet de Conches released the *Correspondance inedite de*

*Marie-Antoinette et Madame Elisabeth, Lettres et documents inédits.*⁶ A decade later, Alfred Ritter von Arneth, a director of the Imperial Archives in Vienna released the total correspondence preserved between Marie-Thérèse and Marie Antoinette from 1770 to 1780, exposing the imposture of the last two editions, which included numerous skillful fabrications and additions to the original texts. In 1874, von Arneth and Auguste Geffroy released the *Correspondance secreete entre Marie-Thérèse et le comte de Mercy-Argenteau, avec les lettres de Marie-Thérèse et de Marie-Antoinette*, which exempted several passages related to the sexual problems of the royal couple “for the memory of the queen”. The next significant edition was edited and released by Georges Girard in 1933. Finally, Evelyne Lever released *Marie Antoinette: Correspondance (1770-1793)* in 2005 through Tallendier Editions, the publication to which I will refer throughout this study.

The correspondence spans from April 21, 1770 to April 8, 1793. However, this study is uniquely interested in the exchange between Marie Antoinette and her mother, which largely dominates the first ten years of the edition, concluding with Marie-Thérèse’s last letter to her daughter, dated November 3, 1780. Unlike the Sévigné correspondence, there are no significant gaps due to reunions between mother and daughter, as Marie Antoinette does not see her mother again after her departure from Vienna. Any existing gaps in the correspondence are mostly due to the loss of a few letters written by Marie-Thérèse and certain significant evolutions in the dynamic of the exchange.

On average, mother and daughter exchange between 4 and 15 letters per year. The most prolific year for both women is 1778, when the Empress writes 15 letters addressed to

⁶ Madame Élisabeth (1764-1794), a recurrent figure in Marie Antoinette’s letters, is the younger sister of Louis XVI and a confidant of the young queen at Versailles. She is executed during the Reign of Terror.

her daughter, while Marie Antoinette writes 14 addressed to her mother. Overall, 73 letters remain written by Marie-Thérèse to her daughter over the course of their ten-year correspondence, while 95 remain written by Marie Antoinette.

This exchange serves as a unique tool for research of this nature, as it provides not only letters from the daughter (Madame de Grignan's and Hortense de Beauharnais's have been destroyed), but it also includes the exchange between Marie-Thérèse and her ambassador who accompanies Marie Antoinette to Versailles, the comte de Mercy-Argenteau. Mercy, as he is referred throughout the correspondence, is by far the most prolific of the three correspondents represented between 1770 and 1780. While he only writes 87 letters to the Empress, they are frequently longer than any others - to the extent that Evelyne Lever includes only "essential" passages from certain lengthy letters. Mercy is both advisor to Marie Antoinette and spy for Marie-Thérèse.

The Empress sends Mercy instructions on counseling her daughter and relies on his observations of the queen's actions, the atmosphere at court, and the word of Mercy's own network of spies within Versailles. During one particular incident in May and June of 1775, Mercy reports to Marie-Thérèse that the queen has gone hunting and dining with the Comte d'Artois, whose poor reputation has a detrimental effect on Marie Antoinette. (Lever, 18 May 1775, 211) In an effort to maintain the strict secrecy of her exchange with Mercy, Marie-Thérèse scolds Marie Antoinette, claiming that she heard about the incident in "*des feuilles imprimées*", writing: "*Vous devez savoir mieux que moi que ce prince n'est nullement estimé, et que vous partagez ainsi ses torts*". (Lever, 2 June 1775, 214) Ultimately, while the Sévigné and Bonaparte correspondences feature only the mother's letters and limited relevant references by third party sources, the exchange between Marie-Thérèse and Marie Antoinette

lends proof of specific instances of the necessity of the mother's instruction and frustration by the daughter's dissent – evidence which will inform and enhance a discussion of similar patterns in the correspondences where this research must rely totally on the maternal voice.

The third and final subject of this study, Joséphine Bonaparte, begins her collected correspondence in 1782, lasting through the fall of the monarchy, her own imprisonment during the Terror and execution of her husband, the Directory of the Five that governs France following the Revolution, and the rise and fall of Napoléon. Born on June 23, 1763 in Trois-Ilets, on the French island of Martinique, the future Empress was christened Marie-Joseph-Rose de Tascher de La Pagerie. Known as Rose or her nickname, Yeyette, to her family, she doesn't identify as "Joséphine" until Napoléon insists upon it in the early years of their marriage. Joséphine is descended from a relatively modest background in Martinique, the daughter of a landowner and soldier of lower nobility.

Through family connections, Joséphine left Martinique (sparking an ensuing correspondence with her own mother, Rose-Claire de la Pagerie) and married Alexandre de Beauharnais, the vicomte of Beauharnais, in Paris on December 10, 1779. The couple had a son, Eugene de Beauharnais, born in Paris on September 3, 1781 and a daughter, Hortense de Beauharnais, born two years later, on April 10, 1783. In December of 1783, citing that Alexandre spent more time at Versailles with mistresses than at home, Joséphine successfully obtained a legal separation from her husband – a rare victory.

In June of 1788, a slave uprising in Martinique forced her to return to her parents' home with her two children until September 6, 1790, when she returned to Paris in the wake of political unrest and revolution. From June 21, 1791 through mid-1793, Alexandre served 2

consecutive terms as President of the *Assemblée constituante*, until internal disputes caused him to lose favor with the Jacobins. Alexandre was arrested on March 2, 1794 and sent to the Prison de Carmes, where Joséphine joined him on April 21. Alexandre was executed three months later, on July 23, 1794, only days before the deposition and execution of Robespierre. Joséphine, whose execution was delayed due to personal illness, was released on August 6.

Joséphine's letters during this period are precarious and scattered. Many perhaps did not survive the period or were destroyed. The first letter to her daughter, Hortense, appears in August 1792, marking the initial separation of mother and child. While Sévigné and Marie-Thérèse's daughters leave them for marriage, Joséphine is separated from her daughter several times during this period due to traumatic circumstances and imprisonment. In 1792, near the date of the first letter, Joséphine places Hortense and Eugene in the care of friends planning to seek refuge in England. However, Alexandre, who insists they be educated according to the new Republican model, calls the children back. During their parents' imprisonment, Eugene is apprenticed to a carpenter and Hortense was put in the care of her governess, Madame Lannoy, a seamstress. Following the Revolution, in 1795, Joséphine placed her children in schools: Hortense at Madame Campan's school in Saint-Germain-en-Laye and Eugene at an Irish school for boys under the supervision of Abbé MacDermott.

While Eugène was educated for a military and political career, education for girls after the Revolution was focused on republican morality and virtues. Campan, a close friend of Joséphine's, taught courtly manners that originated from the Old Régime, and were considered by some families as inappropriate for use in Republican households. The Directoire prohibited the teaching of French history in favor of primarily classical Latin and Greek histories, which were deemed enough for the education of young *citoyennes*. Against

anti-religious edicts, Madame Campan opened a chapel, which was immediately closed, and was discovered teaching from a Bible several times a week. She also notoriously possessed a picture-frame that bore the Rights of Mans on one side and a portrait of Marie Antoinette on the other. Hortense, at age 12, was accompanied by her cousin Emilie de Beauharnais and joined by Napoleon's younger and largely unpopular sisters, Caroline and Pauline Bonaparte.

In the years following the Revolution, Joséphine was left with significant financial hardships, but was supported by a particularly wealthy and powerful group of close friends, including Paul Barras, the main executive leader of the Directory regime that ruled France from 1795 until 1799. Through Barras, a frequent correspondent, Joséphine was introduced to Napoléon Bonaparte (then known as Buonaparte), who was promised a position as commander of the Italian Army in the event of his marriage to a French woman. At the urging of Barras and in need of financial security, Joséphine, thirty-three years old and six years his senior, married Napoléon in Paris on March 9, 1796. Following this event, Joséphine accompanies her new husband to the Italian front, marking a series of several letters to Hortense (still at Mme Campan's school).

On November 9, 1799, known as the coup d'état of 18 Brumaire, Napoleon, backed by his brother Lucien, certain influential political leaders and several troops of grenadiers, overthrew the Directory and forced Barras, Joséphine's long-time confidant, into confinement at his estate and then exile – also marking the conclusion of Joséphine and Barras's existing correspondence. Following the insurrection, Napoléon named himself the head of a governing triumvirate and First Consul of France, until finally declaring absolute authority. During this time, on January 3, 1802, Hortense was married in Paris to Napoleon's brother, Louis Bonaparte, and gave birth to their first child, Napoléon-Charles, on October 11

of that same year. The time following the completion of Hortense's education with Madame Campan in 1797 and her appointment as Queen of Holland in June of 1806 marks the most significant gap in the exchange of letters between Joséphine and her daughter. With only brief separations – and letters - when Joséphine travels, particularly to “take the waters” for infertility at Plombières, it is not until Hortense departs for Holland that Joséphine's letters to her daughter become especially prolific.

Joséphine's coronation as Empress of France took place on December 2, 1804, followed only two weeks later by the birth of Hortense's second son, Napoléon-Louis. Two years later, on January 14, 1806, Eugene is married in Munich to Auguste-Amélie of Bavaria, who would bear him eight children. Eugene, who was sent to work at Napoleon's side during his first Italian and Egyptian campaigns, is separated quite frequently from his mother, but is the recipient of only half the number of letters exchanged between mother and daughter.

The latter years of Joséphine's marriage saw the death of her oldest grandchild, Napoléon-Charles, to the croup in The Hague on May 5, 1807. A year later, on April 20, 1808, Hortense and Louis gave birth to their third son, Louis-Napoléon, the future Napoléon III. Hortense's marriage to Louis was notoriously unhappy, marked by tumultuous fighting and periods of long-term separation. Following the birth of her youngest son, Hortense was allowed to return to France under the pretense that it was a better environment for her children.

On December 15, 1809, Napoléon and Joséphine, whose marriage had been wracked by severe emotional swings, numerous failed attempts at pregnancy, and infidelities by both parties, were officially divorced. Joséphine's retirement was marked by visits to property she retained in Navarre and permanent installment at her estate, Malmaison. She writes that

Napoléon visited her at Malmaison on several occasions in the period following the divorce, but his contact subsided drastically following his marriage to Marie-Louise, an archduchess of Austria, in March of 1810.

That same year, his brother Louis unsuccessfully sought a divorce from his wife, but, rather than grant his appeal, Napoléon forces Hortense to return to Holland with her children, judging her presence inappropriate at court due to his recent remarriage. Hortense remained in Holland only a few months, when she returned to Paris due to health concerns, marking a permanent separation from her husband. On October 21, 1811, Hortense gave birth to an illegitimate son, Charles Auguste, the son of Colonel Charles Joseph, the Comte of Flauhaut and allegedly the illegitimate son of Napoléon's advisor, Talleyrand. The birth occurred at Joséphine's home in Switzerland, near Lake Geneva – a voyage that is mentioned in the correspondence but there is a noticeable abstention of any direct reference to the pregnancy. On April 11, 1814, the Treaty of Fontainebleau forced Napoléon into exile on Elba. One month later, on May 29, Joséphine died at Malmaison of a fatal throat infection at age fifty-one.

Overall, Joséphine's correspondence is very fragmented, especially when compared to that of Sévigné and Marie-Thérèse. This could be due to the precarious and unstable conditions of the period surrounding the Revolution, but also because Joséphine's style of writing is consistently brief and perfunctory. Like Marie-Thérèse, she is not interested in literary prowess. However, Joséphine's instruction and insistence in letters to her daughter are pointed and direct, lacking any gratuitous detail or information Joséphine deems unnecessary.

There are 650 complete letters in existence in Joséphine's hand, and about 2000 fragments of letters that appear between 1779 (the year of her arrival in France) and 1814 (the year of her death). In 1833, the publishing house Firmin-Didot, at Hortense's request, constructed a relatively incomplete edition. In addition, there are only two known letters to Napoleon, as the Emperor burned the rest in 1814 upon fleeing Fontainebleau. In 1996, with Editions Payot et Rivages in Paris, Bernard Chevalier, Maurice Catinat and Christophe Pincemaille published the first complete edition of Joséphine's collected correspondence, which includes private and intimate letters that span thirty-two years of her life, beginning January 10, 1782 and concluding June 2, 1814 in a letter marking the former Empress's death. Of the 525 letters in the collection, 129 are destined for Hortense – about 25 percent – with the bulk appearing after 1806. Unfortunately, there are only a few examples of letters that still exist in Hortense's hand – mainly written to her sons and sold in rare auctions - as most have disappeared and were most likely burned. The only direct indications of Hortense's voice are in notes attached to letters written by Joséphine and destined for another correspondent.

A fundamental link between all three correspondences, despite the nature of the ever-present maternal voice that will be discussed in greater detail in the second chapter, is each mother's emphasis on maintaining a regular epistolary exchange with her daughter. Based solely on the volume of letters from the mother destined for her daughter, it can be concluded that the mother places a certain importance on this particular exchange. In general, mothers from the reign of Louis XIV through the Napoleonic era have a particular social interest in maintaining the mother-daughter relationship based on the daughter's potential (greater than the son's) for social mobility. While placing the son in a disadvantageous union can affect

the outcome of finding socially suitable marriages for all remaining children, the daughter's marriage is more economically and, in some cases, politically essential for the mother. In the case of Madame de Sévigné, whose monetary resources and protection were wavering in the years since her husband's early death, Madame de Grignan's successful marriage granted her and her children a more esteemed social status and additional financial security. Later, Marie-Thérèse strategically married each of her daughters to aristocratic or royal partners in order to enhance Austria's relationship with neighboring monarchs. Finally, Joséphine Bonaparte, widowed during the Revolution, marries Napoléon to eliminate her struggling financial situation, and eventually must place her daughter, Hortense, in a politically strategic union in order to secure political and financial status for herself and her children, becoming the grandmother of the heir-apparent to Napoléon's throne.

Likewise, staying close to their mothers could be especially beneficial to daughters in strategic positions of social or political power. In a world dominated by supervision of feminine behavior and influence made by social and political connections, a mother could prove to be the daughter's greatest ally, most often through guidance, counsel, and education carried out in letters. Unlike the daughter, a son is not dependent on or subject to a maternal authority as he enters adolescence and adulthood. He is permitted to go out into the world, accompanied and supported by other educated men, where he may fondly remember his mother's love, but he does not depend on her influence. (Walker 165) Daughters, however, do not independently pursue military or professional careers as men do, but are relegated to the *nourrice*, the mother's home, the school (in the case of Hortense de Beauharnais) and the husband's home. While the daughter may benefit from the mother's experience as a confidant, mothers and daughters are mutually inclined to maintain a positive relationship, as

each woman's mutual social, political, or familial status is often dependent on the success of the other. Such a unique link differentiates the mother-daughter relationship, and thusly the epistolary exchange, from any other.

The subsequent chapters of this study will seek to contextualize and prove that similar structures, language, and thematic content in the maternal correspondences of Madame de Sévigné, Marie-Thérèse, and Joséphine Bonaparte indicates a crafted "performance" of the maternal role, in which the mother appeals to the daughter's memory and physical distance. The mother constructs an image of herself as an ideal mother figure as a means of enacting a personal agenda that requires her daughter's involvement. Madame de Sévigné's correspondence, in particular, has been characterized and analyzed as a fundamental literary example of maternal devotion, provoking a phenomenon of popular discourse on the maternal voice (the mother in her own voice) that began almost immediately following the first significant publication of her letters in 1726. While Sévigné's correspondence did not *directly* influence the essential narrative of the mother-daughter relationship in the letters of Marie-Thérèse and Joséphine Bonaparte, early critical and popular reception revolves around the ingenuity of Sévigné's epistolary style, her unique self-expression and her effusive, dominating maternal voice. I suggest that evolutions in political, literary, and social discourse in the eighteenth-century create an atmosphere that is strategically appropriate to engage the Sévigne letters in a discussion of maternity that glorifies and amplifies Sévigné's role as "ideal mother". Accompanied by other voices of the Enlightenment and eventual conservative backlash to feminine presence in the public sphere, Sévigné's letters circulate at the center of an evolving fixation on the "mother" that would have indirectly impacted

popular notions and expectations of motherhood and duty as interpreted by the Empress Marie-Thérèse (and Marie Antoinette) and specifically affected Joséphine Bonaparte.

In the context of 17th century France, the record of feminine writing on maternal recollections of nurturing and childrearing was virtually absent. Children of the ruling classes were separated from their mothers at birth for the *nourrice*, followed by supervision and education by nursemaids, tutors, or (if female) nuns in a convent. (Jensen 39) However, by the event of the publication of the Sévigné correspondence – which appeared twenty-nine years after her death – changes in the social and political framework of the eighteenth-century between 1670 and 1770 made the epistolary novel – especially a novel focused on motherhood – particularly influential. (Altman, “Letter Book”, 49)

Janet Gurkin Altman refers to a rise of the personal literary drama, in which strict limitations of speech and self-expression are alleviated after the death of Louis XIV¹¹ and rising interest (and criticism) of the nature of court on a *personal* level become more present in popular consciousness. Altman writes: “With the impact of Richardson, Mme de Graffigny, Mme Riccobini, and Rousseau in the 1740s and 1760s, the representation of domestic interiors and the daily dramas of individuals far removed from the court and salons will bring about the bourgeois revolution in the novel. Within the history of published literary correspondences, we can discern a comparable influx (or rather return) of personal historical consciousness in the same period.” (“Letter Book”, 50) Careful attention paid to the organization of Sévigné’s letters in the earliest editions highlights a significant shift toward historical narrative as an essential point of interest. Letters in each edition are

¹¹ The first substantial publication of Bussy-Rabutin’s correspondence in 1697 (which included the first appearances of letters by Madame de Sévigné) was posthumously offered to posterity as a means of redeeming Bussy’s political position at court, not as an in-depth account of the *personal* that characterizes Sévigné’s letters – reserved from publication for another three decades.

carefully dated and chronologically organized, responses are given when available to convey as complete a story as possible and establish a dialogue, and new letters are inserted and carefully integrated into new editions. (Altman, “Letter Book”, 52) Perhaps most importantly, each new edition features a significant increase in letters written from mother to daughter, focusing on Sévigné’s maternal voice. The first formal edition in 1725 contained only 28 letters. Titled *Lettres choisies de Mme la marquise de Sévigné à Mme la comtesse de Grignan, sa fille, qui contiennent beaucoup de particularités sur l’Histoire de Louis XIV*, this first edition – while it only included letters from mother to daughter – focused on anecdotal accounts of 17th century Versailles. Editions that followed included 614 letters between 1734 and 1737, and 772 letters in 1754. By the release of later editions at the turn of the 19th century, the Sévigné correspondence was devoted almost completely to the content and style of her maternal discourse.

“Sévigné’s freedom of speech,” Altman writes, “erupts upon the eighteenth-century scene as a singular phenomenon at precisely the time when other, more explicitly intellectual and political movements were beginning to propound their own alternatives to the existing monarchic courtly system.” (*Ibid.* 57) Sévigné’s writing refrains from being excessively politically subversive, unlike some burgeoning pamphlets and literary works of the pre-Revolutionary period, but her unique personal style and dissent from epistolary standards separate her writing from the traditional literary canon. Contemporary critics, such as the Rousseauiste Louis Philipon de la Madeleine, attribute the “special qualities of Sévigné’s personal style to her assumption of political independence from the aristocratic linguistic system.” (*Ibid.* 58) Ultimately, there appears to be a fundamental balance between subversion

or uniqueness and acceptable social norms at work in Madame de Sévigné's letters that make her a point of popular discussion and infatuation.

While Sévigné's epistolary style contrasts with established seventeenth and eighteenth century models, her initial choice of the epistolary medium as conducive for feminine expression allows her a certain amount of security in the face of criticism following the first publications. Likewise, the dominant effusion of her maternal devotion is noteworthy to critics, but its very nature as a feminine expression of motherhood gains positive notoriety and acclaim in the context of eighteenth-century discourse. Lesley Walker, in *A Mother's Love*, writes that: "Sévigné's expression of *la tendress maternelle* was recognized by some early critics as new and innovative while others viewed it as excessive, strange, and repetitive." (26) Sévigné's construction of her maternal identity – marked by expressed devotion to her child and dedication to her role – is the manifestation of Sévigné's acknowledgement of the essentiality of her role as "mother" at court, strategically defining her identity and providing a correspondent – her daughter – that would enable and reciprocate a profusion of her satisfaction and talent for writing.

I would argue that the construction of Sévigné's identity is written for herself and her daughter alone. Her personal interest and pleasure in the act of writing *requires* her daughter's acknowledge, encouragement, and reciprocation. Therefore, the development of Sévigné's maternal voice is based on the simultaneous need to appeal to her daughter's sensibilities (her "performance") and exercise her literary prowess (her personal agenda) – a unique and unprecedented balance. Subsequently, the manifestation of Sévigné as a model of the ideal mother in the mid-18th century is dependent on the external evolution of the socio-political climate – not necessarily on the foresight or ultimate intentions of Madame de

Sévigné herself. In other words, the circumstances surrounding French society by the time of the correspondence's publication is ripe for Madame de Sévigné to assume the popular representation of the maternal ideal.

By the 1760s, Diderot, Rousseau and Voltaire were receiving voluminous mail from admirers seeking their intellectual, artistic, and personal advice. Their correspondences grew so influential that letter books appeared before their deaths purporting to document their lives through authentic letters. (Altman, "Letter Book", 59) Simultaneously coinciding with the evolution of Enlightenment thought and the popularity of the epistolary genre, popular ideologies of mothering and motherhood became a topic of debate, marked in particular by the release of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, published in 1761, and *Émile* in 1762. *Julie* and *Émile* make motherhood an undeniably popular topic. "In these varied works, the mother is utterly present: she is an educator, counselor, healer, writer, composer, and translator. Her central preoccupation is the education of the daughter – a task she executes with great zeal." (Walker 27)

Julie recounts the story of a young noble, Julie d'Étanges, who shares a love with her tutor, Saint-Preux, which is eventually consummated. Due to her father's suspicion of an inappropriate relationship, the two lovers are separated and Saint-Preux seeks exile in London and Paris. In his absence, Julie is forced to marry the older Monsieur de Wolmar, for whom she renounces her love for Saint-Preux in the name of dedicating herself to her role as wife and mother. The moralist and romantic narrative of *Julie* is conducted through a series of letters between Julie, Saint-Preux, and other secondary protagonists. Harkening to the medieval example of *Héloïse and Abelard* – a consummated love expressed through letters - Rousseau develops his theories on romantic love, femininity, and motherhood through an

epistolary dialogue. Julie's husband, Wolmar, who assumes a didactic and philosophical role resembling Rousseau himself, engages in discussion and *instructs* Julie in proper feminine and social behaviors. In return, Julie represents a contemporary model of the ideal wife and mother, who rejects her own passions and desires to fulfill her feminine obligations.

Motherhood becomes a central focus of *Julie*, even more so than in *Émile*, in which the protagonist's mother is noticeably absent. In the universe of ideal motherhood created by Rousseau, Julie immerses herself in maternal and domestic responsibilities to such an extent that she is unable to – and does not desire to – participate outside of the domestic and private sphere. (Trouille 28) Julie is presented as the ideal mother-educator, the model upon which other women pattern their behavior. Her cousin and beloved correspondent, Claire, offers her own daughter for Julie to raise in her place, proclaiming: “*La voilà, cette aimable enfant; reçois-la comme tienne; je te la cède, je te la donne; je résigne en tes mains le pouvoir maternel; corrige mes fautes, charge toi des soins dont je m’acquitte si mal à ton gré; sois dès aujourd’hui la mère de celle qui doit être ta bru, et pour me la rendre plus chère encore, fais en s’il se peut une autre Julie.*” (Rousseau 439)

The popularity of *Julie* at its release in 1761 points to an interest and subsequent evolution in the discussion of and cultural patterns of childrearing and interpretations of the maternal role. Claude Labrosse considers the *Correspondance complète* of Rousseau as a means of deciphering public fascination with *Julie*. He concludes that, in 1761, 44.44 percent of Rousseau's correspondence is dedicated to the discussion of the novel, peaking in February of that year with 71 total letters related to *Julie*. (27) He goes on to argue that Rousseau's correspondents' need to write is linked with their reading of *Julie* and interest in ethical discussion presented therein: “*Mélant la passion sexuelle à une méditation*

permanente sur les ordres constitutifs de la vie humaine et sociale: amour, amitié, famille, religion, assise morale des sociétés, la fable et le discours de la Julie, en passionnant l'éthique tendent à enraciner la trace de lecteur dans le cours de l'existence des lecteurs. Leur besoin de correspondre fait en somme partie de leur lecture." (29) By the release of *Émile*, letter writing and the reading of published literary works go hand-in-hand – one medium enhancing the reading of the other. (31)

As Rousseau's *Julie* and *Émile* exemplify, popular involvement in the reading and analysis of the epistolary novel (both fictional and non-fictional) is related to a philosophical focus and cultural shift towards a fascination with the private sphere and individual dramas (domestication) and motherhood. Madame de Sévigné's letters to her daughter are released in several editions – each more complete than the last – in the same period as other *didactic* and philosophical epistolary novels and correspondences by Enlightenment thinkers. As a result of social and literary evolutions of the eighteenth-century, Sévigné's letters become a convenient source and reference on the expression of an ideal maternal voice. While originally readers were interested in Sévigné's accounts of life at court (indicating Sévigné's involvement and presence in the public sphere), by the time that Rousseau's theories on motherhood are published, major criticism and adaptation of her letters become more focused on the extreme devotion of her maternal voice and the epistolary "education" of her daughter.

Forty years later the interest in Madame de Sévigné's portrayal and expression of herself as mother continues to grow. In 1805, after the coronation of Napoléon, the playwright Jean-Nicolas Bouilly writes a play entitled *Madame de Sévigné*, which exalts Sévigné as a model of maternity. In the eighth scene, Sévigné's character reads a letter to Madame de Grignan in its entirety aloud on stage. She begins by applauding her daughter on

the brilliance of her last letter, addresses issues of her own health, relates light-hearted anecdotes of the court, and concludes by proclaiming: “*Je finis cette lettre: je me fais une extrême violence pour vous quitter. La tendresse que j’ai pour vous est tellement mêlée avec mon sang, qu’elle est devenue moi-même. Adieu, ma chère Comtesse, adieu! j’embrasse tous vos entours, mais chemin faisant, pour aller jusqu’à vous; car vous êtes le centre de tout.*”

(Bouilly, Scene VIII, 16) By the Napoleonic regime, the expression of Sévigné’s unusual and obsessive devotion for her daughter is not questioned, on the contrary it is exemplified as a popular model of the ideal mother.²⁵

The mother glorified as the omnipresent figure, projected by popular literary models, would not have been lost on feminine figures of literate and noble background or, in the case of this study, the Empress Marie-Thérèse. While the Empress likely did not read Rousseau or Sévigné, she would have been aware of their presence and significant influence in upholding social expectations and definitions of “ideal mother”, and the relevance of their effect in an epistolary exchange with Marie Antoinette. To put the correspondence in context, Rousseau’s publications in 1761 and 1762 occur a little less than a decade before Marie Antoinette’s marriage – at a formative point in her education – and the most complete edition of the Sévigné letters of the 18th century, published in 1773, occurs three years after her marriage and would have been popular amongst the literate elite of the French court. Even though Marie-Thérèse may not directly consider the implications of Rousseau and other theories of motherhood that arose during the Enlightenment (and does not mention them), they are in the air, circulating in conversation and present in popular consciousness.

²⁵ This play is followed in 1808 by Emmanuel Dupaty’s *Ninon chez Madame de Sévigné*, in which Ninon, the famous courtesan, gives up Charles de Sévigné’s love for the sake of his mother, Madame de Sévigné, and his chosen bride.

At the French court, where women still maintained a certain amount of sexual choice in the mid to late eighteenth-century, a noble woman must still ensure – first and foremost - that her daughter fulfill her role as “mother” and “wife” over and above the pursuit of her personal desires. As “mother”, she must fulfill her social and familial obligation, preserve her marital relationship in order to bear more children, and, ultimately, maintain her reputation at court. In aristocratic families, the mother’s choice of hiring a *nourrice* becomes a particularly controversial subject that puts the strategic balance of her role into question. (Knibiehler & Fouquet 138) Breastfeeding by the natural mother, while considered a marital duty, is also considered destructive to the child if the wife is participating in her “conjugal obligations”. A faithful wife must choose between engaging in sexual intercourse with her husband and contaminating her breast milk, or deny her husband and abstain from hiring a *nourrice* in favor of feeding the child herself. Fromageau, in his *Dictionnaire des cas de conscience*, published in 1740, addresses the issue, concluding, “*La femme doit, si elle peut, mettre son enfant en nourrice, afin de pourvoir à l’infirmité de son mari en lui rendant le devoir, de peur qu’il ne tombe en quelque péché contraire à la pureté conjugale.*” (cited in Flandrin, 198) While a woman is advised to hire a *nourrice* to satisfy her husband, such a decision separates mother and child and, as the case may be, allows the woman to maintain a certain independence from maternal obligations.

On the other hand, a woman who chooses to breastfeed her own child is lauded as a particularly devoted mother. According to Rousseau’s writings, she is encouraged to avoid a *nourrice*. In one letter dated June 22, 1775, Marie Antoinette is influenced by the perception that Mme de Cossé, who has recently lost a four-year old son, must have been especially devoted to him as she breastfed the child herself: “*Je le craignais depuis longtemps, mais je*

n'ai pu me refuser au triste état de son enfant, dont cette pauvre mère sèche sur pied: il n'a que quatre ans. Elle l'a nourri elle-même...Je la regrette fort, parce que c'est une femme de mérite et des plus honnêtes que je puisse jamais trouver." (Lever 215) Marie Antoinette's allusion to a desire to breastfeed her children underlines the influence of the evolving role of the mother in popular culture. The young queen wishes to accommodate the changing trend but her royal status makes such breaks with conventional tradition impossible. Ultimately, it is Marie Antoinette's generation that is most affected by the focus on the maternal role – initially popular amongst women because it provided them a distinguished and defined function in society and placed them at the center of a social dialogue. However, it is the young, female, wealthy survivors of the Revolution – namely, Joséphine Bonaparte (who is eight years younger than the fated French queen) - that are the most directly and significantly impacted by conservative backlash of the years following the Terror and the Napoleonic Regime that relegated women *strictly* to the home and revoked any liberties of participation in the public sphere they were afforded during the Old Regime.

A discussion of the transition of women's liberties to the strict conservative environment of the Napoleonic Regime necessitates a brief summary of the evolution of political and legal rights afforded to women at the turn of the nineteenth century. Prior to the Revolution, a resurgence of the *coutumes* (an unorganized system of local customs and legal codes) was directly associated with the deterioration of women's legal rights. (Heuer 77) Women had been prohibited from occupying the French throne and were incapable of transmitting hereditary rights to the crown. Married women were particularly oppressed under French law, prohibited from being independent landowners, and had little jurisdiction over their children. Conversely, the evolution of French law over the course of centuries

made the *coutumes*, in some ways, favorable to women despite pre-established fundamental restrictions. Women's financial interests passed down from a father were protected – a benefit that, for example, allowed Madame de Sévigné, in the 17th century, to preserve her assets in the event of her husband's death. Binding marriage contracts, once strong from the 13th to 15th centuries, were weakened largely by the gradual elimination of rights protecting abusive husbands in the 16th and 17th centuries. (It was under the *droit de renonciation* as understood in the *Coutume de Paris* that Joséphine sought a separation from her first husband, Alexandre de Beauharnais, just before the outbreak of the Revolution.) (Flandrin 124) In pre-modern societies, the husband was held responsible for the wife's actions yet, by the 16th and 17th centuries, a woman's choices were considered less dictated by her husband and more by a moral and virtuosic guidance. In this way, the husband was no longer qualified to survey and correct his wife's behavior, but to serve alongside her, as a companion, in religious and spiritual devotion. (*Ibid.* 126)

Quintessential evolutions to political procedures and social expectations – particularly that of a woman's responsibility for her own actions - combined with the extravagance of the French court from the reign of Louis XIV through the fall of the monarchy led, in aristocratic circles, to relative sexual liberties. Sexual choices outside of a marriage, which still functioned predominantly as a political and reproductive union, resulted in a *refus de l'enfant*, in which families made conscious decisions to limit their rate of childbirth, women invested in limited visits with their children, and some engaged in existing methods of contraception.³¹ At court, the woman fulfills the role of both sexual object and mother, where

³¹ « *La limitation volontaire des naissances dans les familles de la grande noblesse nous est connue par Louis Henry et Claude Levy...Selon Jean-Marie Gouesse, les paysans bas-normands, dès le début*

she is given a relative freedom of self-expression, personal will, and sexual choice, but she is responsible for completing her familial and social obligation of reproduction in order to preserve the family's title and political influence.

Following the Revolution, there is a noticeable shift in the role of the “mother” in the familial dynamic, marked by a peak in feminine power and presence and accompanied by the conservative backlash of the Napoleonic Regime. During the years of the Revolution, as Yvonne Knibiehler points out, the paternal image of the king was replaced with a symbolic feminine figure of the nation and patriotism. (162) The role of “woman”, particularly that of “mother”, becomes both present and exposed in the public sphere while continually relegated and reserved to the private sphere – she exists and exerts a voice in both domains. It is the dawn of a new social phenomenon – the awakening of the political consciousness and participation of females in public society – in which she is characterized by two basic foundations: *humanité* and *maternité*. (*Ibid.* 162) *Humanité*: the woman is considered her own entity as a part of the greater whole, afforded the same “*droits naturels*” as men. *Maternité*: the woman, put into the world with the unique ability and obligation to bear children, is fundamentally responsible for the education of children invested in service to their country. (*Ibid.* 162)

On October 30, 1793, the Jacobin leader Jean-Baptiste Amar proposed a decree before the Committee of Public Security suppressing all women's political clubs that passed with little debate, laying the groundwork for continued exclusion of women from public spheres and their legally enforced domesticity throughout the nineteenth century. Under the Napoleonic Empire, women maintain a significant role in the image of a thriving global

du XVIIIème, scandalisaient leurs confesseurs par leurs pratiques anticonceptionnelles... Pourquoi ce refus de la maternité ? » (Knibiehler & Fouquet 120)

power, but their foundation in *humanité* becomes overshadowed by their *maternité*. In other words, the fulfillment of her role as “mother” *defines* her service to her country, rather than operating as merely a part of the greater whole of her character.

The *Directoire*, led by Joséphine’s close friend Paul Barras, abolished the *coutumes* that had provided some security over feminine assets. These legal changes affected Joséphine’s social and financial security and made her dependent on direct male support. Barras – possibly a homosexual and not Joséphine’s lover – was most likely her largest financial supporter until she married Napoléon in 1796. For Napoléon, Joséphine was a strategically wise choice for a political marriage. Barras, who had recently taken the young corporal under his wing (recognizing the benefits of his political and military prowess and the threat of his erratic ambition), offered Napoléon the Army of Italy and the glory of the Italian campaign if he married a French woman. (Napoléon, the young Corsican still known as Buonaparte, was considered too Italian for such a powerful position in the French Army.) Joséphine offered the beauty and grace of a dutiful wife, was popular within aristocratic circles, and had numerous strategic personal and political connections at Napoléon’s disposal. For Joséphine, Napoléon offered financial security and the possibility of a rising career and political title that would ensure her future and that of her children. However, the loss of personal liberties accompanied by her remarriage was exacerbated by the further restriction of privileges introduced by Napoléon’s *Code civil*, adopted in 1806. (*Ibid.* 171) As her husband’s career develops, Joséphine becomes less useful to the young Emperor. Her political connections have little importance after Napoléon overthrows the government and, once it becomes clear that she is unable to bear additional children, her security becomes especially tenuous (and, in turn, Joséphine becomes more desperate to maintain it).

The *Code civil*, assembled by Napoléon and four assisting jurists, implements and legalizes *puissance paternelle*, a concept introduced by the *droit romain* that places the father as the governing head of the family. Under the Code, divorce is only allowed in case of adultery, a court sentencing, or grievous insult. Even in the case of infidelity, women could only prosecute if it occurred in the conjugal home. Under *puissance paternelle*, “legislators retained a universal age of majority, fathers were reinvested with the power to punish minor children for various misdeeds, to accord or withhold their consent to marry to sons younger than twenty-five and to daughters under twenty-one, and to bequeath property as they chose.” (Heuer 130) As a result of the Code, the wife remained totally dependent on the husband, who exercised sole power over governance of the family unit as long as he lived. The wife could inherit that power following his death or disappearance, but only under the counsel and supervision of a male family member. (Knibiehler & Fouquet 171)

The family of the *Code civil* resembled the structure of the classical Roman familial unit. Incapacitated politically, the mother is entirely sacrificed and submissive to the husband. Her primary occupation is producing and educating children for the benefit of the Empire. Such emphasis on her patriotic and obligatory “contribution” resulted in a popular literary and artistic exaltation of maternity. Furthermore, in 1806, Napoléon created the first medical chair of obstetrics, although not for the sake of the mother, but the health of the infant (and possibly future soldier). Ultimately, Joséphine’s own infatuation with the perpetuation of an ideal of her maternal identity in the correspondence may not be indicative of her own desire to be perceived as an ideal mother figure, but rather of her exposure to prominent literary, social, and political influences (such as the letters of Madame de Sévigné) encouraging maternal devotion and education of the child, which she employs on a strictly

utilitarian basis, mimicking and regurgitating clichés of a literary expression of the ideal mother, established in part by Sévigné, to enact and promote her own needs and agenda.

CHAPTER II

CONSTRUCTING THE MATERNAL VOICE

In a letter dated March 13, 1671, Madame de Sévigné wrote to her daughter, “*Me voici à la joie de mon cœur, toute seule dans ma chambre à vous écrire paisiblement; rien ne m’est si agréable que cet état*”. (*Lettres Choisies*, 67) Through a carefully constructed use of language, Madame de Sévigné manages to capture her own image in a contented state, independently embracing the intimate, maternal joy of writing to her daughter. Such an image is essential to the mother-daughter correspondence, in which the mother asserts her total devotion to the act of maintaining the correspondence, a means of communicating her love and commitment to her child. As a result of the physical separation from the daughter, the use and choice of *language* becomes fundamentally important to the carefully crafted letter from the mother, who must assert her presence through the tactile material of the letter and ink, the memory of her physical presence, and the resonance of her own maternal voice through the writing.

This chapter will answer the question: *How* does the expression of the ideal mother figure present itself in terms of form, style, and content in the letter, constructing each woman’s “performance” of the maternal role? How does the epistolary medium provide a socially appropriate means of expression for women, while simultaneously creating an intimate exchange and tangible connection between correspondents? Such characteristics make the epistolary genre conducive and, ultimately, essential to the mother-daughter exchange. Following an analysis of the utility of the medium, I will deconstruct the basic elements of the letters as they recur in each correspondence penned by Sévigné, Marie-

Thérèse, and Joséphine Bonaparte to her daughter, in order to establish a fundamental set of criteria that is employed by each mother in her construction of an ideal maternal image.

Michèle Longino Farrell, in her study *Performing Motherhood*, argues that Madame de Sévigné's letters were a socially acceptable means of expression due to the "femininity" of the genre. Such an understanding of maternal writing is not limited to Sévigné's letters, but is especially relevant to the mother-daughter correspondence in general, which, in this study, involves six women; each engaged in an intimate, writerly exchange. As an object and a practice, the letter itself is "assimilable within the constraints of other-oriented daily life", and is, therefore, considered feminine by its very nature. Farrell argues: "Writing a letter can be understood as simply another gesture of domestic sociability, proper to the concerns of the burgeoning private sphere – woman's place. As such, therefore, feminine incursions into writing through the practice of letters might be tolerated." (33)

Through letters, which have the potential for circulation within the public and private sphere, the woman adheres to and even perpetuates a "domestic sociability" associated with the feminine role, tied to the home and domestication of maternal duties. The letter itself allows for distraction, interruption, and even incomplete or jumbled thought. (*Ibid.* 18) In addition, despite the actual conditions under which the letter was written, it creates in the mind of the reader the picture of the writer sitting quietly at a desk, pen in hand, in a state of mind that is thoughtful, diligent, and faithful.

A perpetuation of this "domestic sociability" is especially relatable to the woman's epistolary construction of herself as "mother" and the mother-daughter exchange. Due to the nature of the epistolary genre to operate, sometimes simultaneously, within the public and private sphere, maintaining a regular exchange between mother and daughter fulfils a

particular public social function. If the letters are circulated publicly – such as those of Madame de Sévigné – popular interest in the exchange, supplemented by the content of the letters, serve the mother to perpetuate the “ideal” of a constructed maternal identity. On the other hand, even a strictly private exchange continues to demonstrate a regular interest and maternal devotion on the part of the mother to the recipient and any third parties who may be aware that the woman regularly writes to her daughter, even if the content of the letters are private.

Considering the letter as a tangible document, its very existence raises its potential for publication. Even when strictly intended for a single addressee, it is always subject to circulation within a larger group, passing freely from the private to the public sphere and back again. Janet Gurkin Altman provides a significant investigation into the nature of the genre that addresses the letter’s potential for circulation: “The movement from the private to the public in much of the epistolary fiction lays bare another paradox: as a reflection of self, or the self’s relationships, the letter connotes privacy and intimacy; yet as a document addressed to another, the letter reflects the need for an audience, an audience that may suddenly expand when that document is confiscated, shared, or published.” (187) This begs the question: How does the possibility for circulation outside of the private defined exchange inflect the mother-daughter exchange? Other than perpetuating social expectations of the woman’s role as “mother”, the possibility of public circulation has the potential to work in the mother’s favor, as it provides concrete evidence of the mother’s devotion in writing, which can be preserved privately by the daughter, shared willingly with friends, or passed on through an exchange with another correspondent. However, even if the mother is aware of or encourages outside readership, each letter is destined primarily for one correspondent – the

daughter – thus giving importance and priority to the relationship and encouraging trust and *confiance* between mother and child. In a private exchange, the threat of interception or readership by an uninvited party can still serve in the mother’s favor. While such an event may be unfavorable, the nature of the concealed exchange between mother and daughter adds significance to the sharing of intimate or emotional testimony, further establishing a filial bond and garnering the daughter’s trust.

Each of the three correspondences considered in this study are subject to different degrees of circulation. There is various theories as to Madame de Sévigné’s intent to distribute her letters. Though her correspondence was not formally published during her lifetime, there is evidence that suggests she circulated her own letters amongst circles of friends. In the seventeenth century, due in part to a lack of general privacy in aristocratic circles, there was little distinction between the public and private spheres. As evidenced by Sévigné’s writing, a private correspondence, when circulated or published, was capable of attracting as much attention as a novel. As I discussed in the greater detail in the first chapter, throughout the next two centuries, the compiling and publication of correspondence was particularly common, even for living subjects. For example, Bussy-Rabutin, in 1680, assembled a two-year long exchange of letters between Marie de Sévigné and himself as a gift for Louis XIV – the first “publication” of Sévigné’s correspondence.

Michèle Longino Farrell bases much of her discussion regarding Sévigné’s letters on the assumption that her creative aspirations (although Sévigné denies her work as “literature”) informed her writing style, always careful to stay within a ‘patriarchal

framework⁴² and emphasized a public display of even the more intimate letters exchanged with her daughter. (136) Ultimately, Farrell addresses a significant critical dissention concerning Sévigné's intentions. On the one hand, she is considered '*auteur épistolaire*', employing literary technique to reach past the creatively narrow, yet socially acceptable, limitations of the epistolary form. On the other, she is '*épistolaire*', demonstrating an effusive style that was the result of careful attention paid to epistolary stylistic precedence and personal expression. (Horowitz 15) I would like to offer the suggestion, at least for the purposes of this study, that Madame de Sévigné's letters *do* inform her role at court, but rather than focus on a literary ambition, they represent an undeniable talent and *pleasure* for writing. For this purpose, her careful turn of phrase is the result of personal exercise and literary appreciation for the immediate enjoyment of herself and her reader.

A century later, Marie-Thérèse's exchange with Marie Antoinette reaches the other extreme of strict and intimate privacy and secrecy. In her first letter destined for her daughter, following Marie Antoinette's departure from Vienna, dated April 21, 1770, Marie-Thérèse writes: "*Vous pouvez de même m'écrire par la poste, mais sur peu de choses, et que tout le monde peut savoir...Déchirez mes lettres, ce qui me mettra à même de vous écrire plus ouvertement; j'en ferai de même avec les vôtres.*" (42)⁴⁵ There are, in fact, two secret correspondences simultaneously in play for the Empress – one with her daughter and the other with the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau. Marie-Thérèse orders the exchange with her

⁴² By 'patriarchal framework', Farrell refers to a societal expectation of the feminine role as dictated by male superiors.

⁴⁵ For the purpose of all subsequent citations to published letters within a correspondence, it can be assumed that all Sévigné letters are included in Roger Duchêne's *Madame de Sévigné* (1972), unless otherwise indicated. All volumes will be indicated by V.I., V.II., or V.III. Marie-Thérèse's letters are found in Evelyne Lever's *Marie-Antoinette: Correspondance (1770-1793)* (2005). Joséphine Bonaparte's letters are found in *Impératrice Joséphine: Correspondance, 1782-1814* (1996), edited by Bernard Chevalier et al.

daughter to remain in strict confidence in an attempt to preserve Marie Antoinette's reputation in the decidedly suspicious French court and preserve Marie-Thérèse's political interests in France. However, her instructions to her daughter to write only of things "everyone can know" proves a wariness of interception. And, while Marie Antoinette remains unaware of her mother's exchange with Mercy concerning her behavior, Marie-Thérèse frequently shares letters in the mother-daughter exchange with Mercy as a means of discussing her daughter's general lack of motivation and manner of instruction. Finally, as the existence of the published correspondence suggests, the letters were not torn up, as Marie-Thérèse instructs, but preserved.

Joséphine's correspondence with Hortense, as with her correspondence addressed to other recipients, is sealed as a private and intimate exchange, but without the strictness necessitated by Marie-Thérèse. Overall, the question of interception and circulation of Joséphine's letters is perhaps the most complicated. In some cases, Joséphine appears to be particularly wary of interception. Although she does not directly mention her fears in writing, she is aware that her high political status, the regular crossing of borders by numerous mail carriers bearing her letters, France's constant state of warfare, her regular presence alongside Napoléon at the front, and a particularly jealous and skeptical husband all threaten the privacy of her correspondence.

During the Revolution and following her marriage to Napoléon, there are implications that Joséphine chooses her words carefully. For example, in a letter to Hortense on January 14, 1802, Joséphine writes of Napoléon's brother-in-law, Joaquim Murat: "*Murat est très fâché de ne pas recevoir de lettres de sa femme.*" (117)⁴⁸ This short sentence is the only

⁴⁸ To expand on the ambiguity of Joséphine's concern for interception, unrelated to her exchange with

mention of this event and sits at the end of an unrelated account of festivities held for the Emperor in Lyon. Joséphine, who notoriously despised Murat and his wife, Caroline Bonaparte, maintains a calm and brief tone when mentioning Murat's frustration with his wife, who is at Hortense's side in Paris. It is not until after her divorce from Napoleon in 1810, when the threat of interception of her letters no longer carries the potential for seriously damaging repercussions, that Joséphine exposes her sentiments to her daughter: "*Je désire vivement des enfants à l'Empereur. S'il attend du Bonheur de sa famille, il sera bien trompé: il sont tous, j'en excepte le roi d'Espagne [Joseph Bonaparte], haineux, envieux et ambitieux. Je sais que le roi de Westphalie [Jérôme Bonaparte] disait dernièrement encore que tu n'étais pas malade. C'est abominable! Imagine-toi, ma chère Hortense, qu'il ne m'a pas donné signe de vie. Il n'a pas même envoyé savoir de mes nouvelles. C'est ingrat!*" (mid-July 1810, 267) Such a contrast in Joséphine's effusiveness in her retirement signifies a lesser threat of circulation, accompanied by a freedom of expression unprecedented in prior letters. It also suggests that her reservation in letters to Hortense prior to her divorce may also be out of concern for preserving Hortense's relationship with the Bonaparte family. The secret, or perhaps unthreatened, nature of the correspondences of all three women exposes fear of chastisement of male authority or third parties, particularly when the mother senses a threat to the daughter's security – a subject I will investigate in greater depth later in this chapter.

Hortense, exist two contrasting letters written to her lover, Hippolyte Charles, two years after the start of her marriage. The first, dated Feb. 15, 1798, is strictly formal and concludes with "*je vous salue*". (58) The second, dated March 17, 1798, is an effusive love letter in which she writes, "*Ah! ils ont beau me tourmenter, ils ne me détacheront jamais de mon Hippolyte: mon dernier soupir sera pour lui.*" (60) Such evidence suggests that Joséphine is perhaps only precariously concerned with the potential of readership by an uninvited third party, or that the conditions of discovery are related to case-specific, differing external factors.

Ultimately, it can be argued that each of these women is cognizant that the physical presence of the letter establishes the possibility of discovery and takes precaution against public circulation. However, while the women may have written themselves as mothers with the threat of discovery in mind, a consistent emphasis on the ideal mother figure and recurrent traits and thematic criteria in all three exchanges, despite their varying contexts within the public and private spheres, implies that the primary correspondent's intention and personal agenda outweighs the *threat* of interception. The mother maintains a specific "performance" of her role for her *own* purposes – to persuade and implement a personal or political agenda that is reliant on her daughter's acknowledge and reciprocation - not for the purposes of a potential third party.

Janet Gurkin Altman addresses the nature of the letter in terms of time and space, arguing that the letter as a genre suits the more personal connection of woman's state of affairs. "This sense of immediacy, of a present that is precarious, can only exist in a world where the future is unknown. The present of epistolary discourse is vibrant with future-orientation. Interrogatives, imperatives, and future tenses – rarer in other types of narrative – are the vehicles for expression of promises, threats, hopes, apprehensions, anticipation, intention, uncertainty, prediction. Letter writers are bound in a present preoccupied with the future." (124) In this way, the letter is not only appropriate for the "feminine" personality and personal state of mind (the woman faced with the precarious or uncertain future), it is suitable for an expression of the *maternal* influence, where the mother appeals to the daughter's emotion, memory, and sensibility to influence and control her future through a present writerly exchange.

In all three correspondences, each letter addressed from mother to daughter follows a particular structure, at once influenced by a stylistic precedence and particular to the mother-daughter exchange. (See Appendix A for complete examples of letters from each subject for further reference on this point.) The basic components of each letter include: a date line indicating time and place, an occasional salutation, an acknowledgement of a recent letter (if received), a summary of the mother's health (almost always contingent on the receipt of the daughter's letters, her health, or her behavior) and the health of any close friends or family members, a reassurance of the mother's devotion, a lamentation of her physical distance, a chastisement if the daughter has failed to write, news of the court (in Sévigné's case, this is extensive), specific - often repetitive - instruction or advice for the daughter concerning her attitude or behavior, a note concerning any attached letters or gifts, and a closing in which the mother again reminds the daughter of her love and shared bond. This basic format is so strictly adhered to over the course of the entire correspondence, with only occasional differentiation in subject or style, that the mother's letters, when read in succession, can appear redundant or repetitive. While the length of each letter varies, each of these three women adheres to this outline. Within the basic structure of the letter, there are five major themes that habitually recur throughout each correspondence, appearing in almost every letter in various forms.

Domination of Time and the Necessity of Reciprocation

“So oriented toward the future is the epistolary present,” writes Altman, “that deadlines, dreaded days, and hoped-for days assume great importance. Letters, with their date lines, provide a built-in means of marking time between the writer's present and the moment

he anticipates.” (125) Each of the three correspondences at hand is marked by a preoccupation of dictating and comprehending the use of the daughter’s time. The letter itself acts a means of closing the temporal and geographic distance between mother and daughter, simulating the impossible presence of one correspondent before another. As the mother writes the events of her present, her language fluctuates between the present, the immediate future, and the immediate past, “creating the illusion of a narrative present simultaneous with the events narrated”. (*Ibid.* 128) Even if the daughter receives the letter a month after it is written, and the events or expectations dictated therein have come and gone, they appear to transpire as part of the daughter’s present. In this way, the mother is able to actively remind the daughter of her physical presence.

Furthermore, through letters, the mother is able to maintain a certain immediate influence over the daughter’s use of time. Marie-Thérèse, it can be argued, puts the greatest emphasis on the domination of the time spent by Marie Antoinette on various activities throughout her day. Her first letter to Marie Antoinette, from April 21, 1770, is the greatest example of this, in which she dictates her daughter’s activities at Versailles down to the minute. The letter, which the Empress entitles “*Règlement à lire tous les mois*”, begins at the start of Marie Antoinette’s day: “*À votre réveil, vous ferez tout de suite, en vous levant, vos prières du matin, à genoux et une petite lecture spirituelle, ne fût-ce même que d’un seul demi-heure, sans vous être encore occupée d’autre chose ou avoir parlé à personne.*” (41) The specific instructions for the day are extended to weekdays, weekends, holidays, and months. She is instructed how often to write to her mother (“*Tous les commencements de mois, j’expédierai d’ici à Paris un courrier: en attendant, vous pourriez préparer vos lettres pour les faire partir tout de suite à l’arrivée du courrier.*” (43) and to which relatives she’ll

also be expected to correspond. Likewise, Joséphine, while she does not produce one letter of such detail, offers similar insistence: “*J’espère, ma chère amie, que tu seras sensible à ces reproches et que tu m’écriras au moins toutes les semaines.*” (22 Sept. 1797, 51)

The domination of the daughter’s time also lies frequently within the mother’s instruction or encouragement of the daughter’s activities. For example, Madame de Sévigné writes to her daughter in a letter dated January 17, 1680: “*Vous souhaitez être à Grignan. C’est le seul lieu, dites-vous, où vous ne dépensez rien; je comprends qu’un peu de séjour dans votre château ne vous serait pas inutile à cet égard, mais vous n’êtes plus en état de mettre cette considération au premier rang. Votre santé doit aller la première; c’est ce qui doit vous conduire.*” (Vol. III, 796) Sévigné’s use of the present tense – “*Vous souhaitez d’être à Grignan*” – has a persuasive, almost mesmerizing, effect. She is simultaneously urging and advising Madame de Grignan to remain in Paris for the sake of her health, but also reinforcing the assertion of an inherent maternal bond and complete understanding of her daughter, without being physically present.

Decidedly, the most recurrent and forceful instruction of the daughter’s use of time is the mother’s insistence on the reciprocation of her letters. In every correspondence, each mother’s insistence that the daughter respond frequently varies from a docile persuasion, in which the mother seeks to appease and coax without eliciting frustration from the daughter; to an effusive insistence, in which the mother’s health and mood are affected by lack of news; to a bitter chastisement, in which the daughter is scolded and reminded of her responsibilities. In each case, the daughter’s letters appear to wane the most significantly in the first two or three years following her marriage, in which she attains a certain liberty away

from the parental home, becomes the mistress of her own house (or queen), and will soon become a mother herself.

After the courier arrives without a letter from Madame de Grignan, Madame de Sévigné puts the blame on the mail delivery and her own distraught worry: *“Voici la deuxième fois que je n’ai pas un mot de vous. Je crois que ce pourrait être la faute de la poste, ou de votre voyage, mais cela ne laisse pas de déplaire beaucoup. Comme je ne suis point accoutumée à la peine que je souffre dans cette occasion, je la soutiens d’assez mauvaise grâce.”* (3 July 1672, Vol. I, 545) Like Sévigné, who gently persuades her daughter to write, Marie-Thérèse flatters her daughter’s letters and makes allowances for their shortcomings: *“C’est le premier courrier que je vous envoie. Pour moi, l’incommodité ne sera pas. J’ai trop de consolation de recevoir de vos nouvelles, mais si cela vous fatiguait, vous n’avez qu’à me marquer un mot, et je le remettrai au mois. Agissez avec moi non seulement comme votre tendre mère, mais votre intime amie.”* (16 June 1774, 184) In fact, Marie-Thérèse is not lacking for information concerning news of Marie Antoinette, thanks to her exchange with Mercy. However, in order that the mother’s advice and *confiance* be affirmed, it is necessary that the daughter respond regularly to the mother’s letters. Finally, Joséphine, like the other women, appeals to a friendship and devotion to her daughter to encourage Hortense to write: *“Écris-moi souvent; il y a bien longtemps que je n’ai eu de tes nouvelles. Aime ta maman comme elle t’aime; tu l’adoreras.”* (6 March 1797, 49)

When gentle coaxing may fail, each mother puts greater emphasis on a reliance and attachment to the letters. As the letter serves as a physical connection between correspondents, the mother relies upon it for reassurance of the daughter’s own devotion. Madame de Sévigné, however, complicates what is to Marie-Thérèse and Joséphine a

political need for her daughter's response. Madame de Sévigné, who may be the greatest offender of this particular means of soliciting an epistolary response – the outpouring of maternal devotion - writes to her daughter: "*Si j'avais eu la force de ne vous point écrire d'ici, et de faire un sacrifice à Dieu de tout ce que j'y ai senti, cela vaudrait mieux que toutes les pénitences du monde. Mais, au lieu d'en faire un bon usage, j'ai cherché de la consolation à vous en parler. Ah! ma bonne, que cela est faible et misérable!*" (26 March 1671, Vol. I, 200) I would argue that Sévigné's effusive style is not so much directed at her daughter, but stands for the comfort she takes in *writing*. She is not so much seeking to reassure herself through the act of writing her daughter, but through the act of writing. In the context of the correspondence, Sévigné's *personal* commitment is presented as a *maternal* commitment.

Joséphine, as it appears in the letters, places the emphasis on her own need for comfort from her daughter as a source of information and security. Joséphine is not interested in writing, but appears to mimic basic linguistic qualities of Sévigné's expression of maternal devotion. Like Sévigné, Joséphine's emotional outpouring of maternal devotion is intensified by separation: "*J'ai bien besoin que tu m'écrives, surtout à présent que tu n'es plus auprès de moi pour me consoler. Donne-moi de tes nouvelles, parle-moi de ton mari et de tes enfants. Malgré que je reçoive ici plus de monde qu'à Mayence, mon cœur n'en est pas moins seul, et, en m'écrivant, tu me tiendras encore compagnie.*" (3 Feb. 1807, 194) In both cases, each woman emphasizes her maternal devotion and attachment, seeking to provoke an emotional response from the daughter to ensure reciprocation. Marie-Thérèse, on the other hand, is faced with an indefinite separation from her daughter and, therefore, insists that Marie Antoinette's reciprocation is linked with both her own health and that of the state:

“L’intérêt de nos deux États exige que nous nous tenions aussi étroitement liés d’intérêt comme de famille. Votre gloire, votre bien-être m’est autant à cœur que le nôtre.” (18 May 1774, 174)

Finally, when the mother’s appeals are ignored or, depending on external conditions, when she is particularly desperate for confirmation of the daughter’s devotion, she may chastise the daughter in an attempt to regain authority. Madame de Sévigné, though she usually seeks a more emotional response, writes during a moment of particular frustration: *“Vous ne m’avez point écrit le dernier ordinaire; vous deviez m’avertir pour m’y préparer. Je ne vous puis dire quel chagrin cet oubli m’a donné, et de quelle longueur m’a paru cette semaine. C’est la première fois que cela vous est arrivé...”* (1 July 1672, Vol. I, 545) Marie-Thérèse, however, is perhaps the harshest of the three women, frequently accusing Marie Antoinette of laziness and frivolity: *“Votre candeur, votre tendresse auraient diminué le petit manque de parole, mais l’ayant dû apprendre par les gazettes, j’avoue, cela m’est sensible, et jette une ombre pour l’avenir sur votre confiance vis-à-vis de moi. Un tel oubli ne peut servir d’excuse, car plaisir si innocent, moi qui donnerais ma vie pour vous en procurer, si je ne craignais les suites ?”* (31 Dec. 1772, 123) Once again, her daughter’s irresponsibility not only affects her relationship with her mother, but also the future of newly allied France and Austria. In this case, Marie-Thérèse appeals to her biological connection as mother to influence her daughter. Finally, in rare circumstances, Joséphine uses brief, effective phrases to scold Hortense: *“J’apprends à l’instant que mon beau-frère part pour Paris, et l’ai prié de te remettre cette lettre, ma chère Hortense, et de te gronder sur ton silence avec ta maman. Il y a plus de deux mois que je n’ai reçu de lettre de toi, avoue que c’est bien mal de ta part.”* (22 Sept. 1797, 51) While all three mothers scold their children, it is rare that the letter does

not end with an affectionate closing, in which the mother reassures the daughter of her love, despite her frustration, and restores a tone of dedication and devotion.

Excessive Devotion and Separation Anxiety

Outside of, but not unrelated to, the specific request by the mother that her daughter reciprocate the correspondence, there are frequent, adamant, and effusive outpourings of the mother's affection. These exclamations are usually directly related to the physical absence of the daughter, in which the mother's health and very identity is defined by the daughter's own presence and state of mind. When the daughter has left, the mother loses her sense of self and falls ill with grief. When the daughter has received grievous news, the mother shares her grievances. The resulting letters from the mother depict a bond in which the two women are inextricably connected. However, in most cases, the mother suffers from her daughter's distance and grief, but only expects the daughter to merely understand – not to share – the mother's own individual troubles. In a letter to Madame de Grignan dated January 10, 1689, Madame de Sévigné begins a long paragraph related to her joy at her daughter's company and wish to hasten the sorrowful days that mark their separation, concluding: "*Ma chère bonne, ces réflexions ne sont que pour moi; je veux même les finir avec vous, et tâcher de les rendre bien solides pour moi.*" (Vol. III, 465) Hence, she asserts a desperate need to be near her daughter, but then relieves her child of any responsibility in that sadness – a martyr of maternal devotion.

On February 6, 1671, Sévigné writes, in a particularly distraught state: "*Je m'en allait donc à Sainte-Marie, toujours pleurant et toujours mourant. Il me semblait qu'on m'arrachait le cœur et l'âme, et en effet, quelle rude séparation!*" (Vol. I, 149) Here, she

goes to church to seek solace, feeling as if she is dying. In the event of her daughter's absence, her heart and soul (her daughter) have been ripped from her body. Near the end of the letter, she implores her daughter to guard her health, for the sake of her mother's: "*Je vous conjure, ma chère fille, d'avoir soin de votre santé. Conservez-la pour l'amour de moi, et ne vous abandonnez pas à ces cruelles négligences, dont il ne me semble pas qu'on puisse jamais revenir.*" This is followed by a reaffirmation of her love: "*Je vous embrasse avec une tendresse qui ne saurait avoir d'égale, n'en déplaît à toutes les autres.*"

Farrell highlights the presence of this frequent pattern within the Sévigné correspondence: "There is the immediate avowal of the mother's dependence, for her well-being, indeed for her very life, on assurance of her daughter's affection for her. This is followed, appropriately, by a profession of the mother's love for her daughter, in accordance with the need to establish affective reciprocity that will translate later into epistolary reciprocity." (85) However, while Madame de Sévigné is notorious for such excessive displays of maternal devotion and desperation during times of separation, this pattern is not unique to her correspondence, but recurs throughout each epistolary exchange between mother and daughter.

Marie-Thérèse both employs a similar pattern and complicates it, as much of her health and attitude is directly related to Marie Antoinette's behavior and the success of the State. In addition, unlike Sévigné and Joséphine, Marie-Thérèse is permanently separated from her daughter, and does not suffer from recurrent bouts of sadness at her departure. However, once she rewards her daughter for successes or chastises her frivolous behavior by reminding her of their effect on the country and her mother's satisfaction, she reaffirms her love for her daughter by recalling her eternal maternal affection. In a letter dated February 3,

1777, she writes: “*Mais, ma chère fille, les gazettes ne confèrent que trop tous ces différents amusements où ma chère reine se trouve sans ses belles-sœurs et le roi, et m’ont cause bien de tristes moments. Vous aimant si tendrement, je vois un peu dans l’avenir et je vous prie d’en faire autant.*” (273) Marie-Thérèse’s knowledge of information in “*les gazettes*” is truly based on her exchange with Mercy, who reports that Marie Antoinette has spent too much time with the ill-reputed Comte d’Artois. Her daughter’s disregard for preserving her as-yet unconsummated marriage is contributing to her poor state of mind. She continues: “*Vous me rassurez sur votre santé. C’est déjà un grand point pour moi, mais je vous conjure, tâchez de conserver cette estime et affection du public que vous aviez si parfaitement, et croyez-moi toujours votre bien tendre mère et amie.*” Here, she does not linger on the political implications of her daughter’s behavior, but expresses that it is her concern for her daughter’s future and health that is affecting her sadness. While Marie-Thérèse is not as effusive as Sévigné and Joséphine, she follows a similar pattern of devotion and reliance, in which she asserts a dependence on her daughter and closes with an affirmation of maternal affection as a means to reaffirm the epistolary exchange.

Joséphine Bonaparte, despite a significantly shorter correspondence, is almost as persistent as Sévigné in lamenting her daughter’s separation and the corresponding agony. On July 15, 1806, she writes to Hortense: “*Depuis ton départ j’ai toujours été souffrante, triste et malheureuse: j’ai même été obligée de garder le lit, ayant eu quelques accès de fièvre. La maladie a tout à fait disparu, mais le chagrin me reste. Comment n’en pas avoir d’être séparée d’une fille comme toi, tendre, douce et aimable, qui faisait le charme de ma vie?*” (178) In this particular instance, Hortense has neglected to write and, without assurance of her health, Joséphine’s own well being is affected. She continues: “*Comment va ton mari?*”

Mes petits-enfants sont-ils bien portants? Mon Dieu! que je suis triste de ne plus les voir quelquefois! Et ta santé, ma chère Hortense, est-elle bonne? Si jamais tu étais malade, fais-le-moi dire: je me rendrais de suite près de ma bien-aimée fille.” Finally, she closes with the final assertion of her eternal love: “*Adieu, ma chère Hortense, ma tendre fille. Pense souvent à ta mère et persuade-toi bien qu’il n’y a pas de fille plus chérie que toi.*” Again, she abstains from placing any significant responsibility on the daughter, but reaffirms her love, their undying bond, and the necessity of the epistolary exchange.

Knibiehler and Fouquet, in their *Histoire des mères*, suggest that in the nineteenth century mothers begin establishing a calmer, more steadfast relationship with their daughter built on a mutual alliance and friendship, perhaps attributed to a significant differentiation between the sexes that occurs during this era. As a result, the mother sees the daughter as a double of herself – a mirror – in which the two women share a bond and understanding dictated by family and gender. (198) While it is possible that the specific notion of the daughter as a “mirror image” of the mother did not arise until the nineteenth century, the epistolary exchange proves that the mother considers the daughter as a special extension of herself, in which she understands her child’s desires and emotions without the need for explanation, centuries beforehand.

As Sévigné writes in a letter dated January 10, 1689: “*Je comprends toutes vos larmes par les miennes.*” (Vol. III, 465) Likewise, in 1775, Marie-Thérèse writes to her daughter: “*Personne ne sera plus content que moi de vous rendre une autre fois la justice due, mon cœur étant toujours d’accord avec vous, et il souffre toujours doublement s’il ne peut se laisser aller.*” (31 Aug. 1775, 225) In both of these instances, the mother shares her daughter’s happiness and sadness – the mother understands her completely. Joséphine, in a

letter written June 9, 1807, illustrates the reinforcement of their connection through the use of the subject pronoun “*nous*”, a device used frequently by all three women that emphasizes the particular importance of language in the execution of the maternal voice through an epistolary exchange to encourage and solidify a union between mother and daughter.

Joséphine writes: “*Pense à nous, ma chère fille; que ce souvenir en calme un autre, légitime et douloureux. Je compte sur ton attachement pour moi, et sur ta raison...Ma santé est un peu meilleure, mais tu sais qu’elle dépend de la tienne.*” (212) Ultimately, the maternal bond emphasized in the correspondence extends to grandchildren, whom the mother regards as a further extension of her daughter. However, as the daughter grows older, there is evidence that the mother preserves the inherent bond presented in the correspondence, but it becomes more complicated.

The Daughter Regarded as Child and Adult

As the mother serves as the primary voice of each correspondence, there is evidence – particularly through her specific use of language in the letters – that, as the daughter ages, a conflict arises in which the mother regards her daughter simultaneously as a child and as an adult. Janet Gurkin Altman addresses this as a common element in general correspondence, as it is almost always initiated by the physical separation of writer and *déstinataire*: “Epistolary language, which is the language of absence, makes present by make-believe. The particular *you* whose constant appearance distinguishes letter discourse from other written discourse (memoir, diary, rhetoric) is an image of the addressee who is elsewhere. Memory or expectation keep the addressee present to the imagination of the writer, whose narrative (*erzählte Zeit*) and narration (*Erzählzeit*), though a frequent oscillation between past and

future, likewise seize the present through illusion.” (141) Ultimately, in the case of the mother-daughter exchange where the maternal voice is dominant; the character of the daughter is imagined in the mind of the mother, which, due to early separation, remains youthful or even child-like. While Madame de Grignan is a bit older (and already married) at the time of the first separation between mother and daughter – aged 23 – Sévigné often recalls moments they shared together while her daughter is still in the house or, more frequently, the memory of her daughter’s childhood that is conjured by having her granddaughter close to her in Paris. Marie-Thérèse and Marie Antoinette are separated when the girl is only fifteen, which prompts Marie-Thérèse to request images of her daughter to “see how she has grown” and seek information from Mercy-Argenteau measuring Marie Antoinette’s presence at court and *enfantile* demeanor. Lastly, Joséphine’s first letter to Hortense appears when her daughter is only six years old – during the Revolution – and mother and child spend very little time together, excluding a period between 1798 and 1802 when Hortense is living at her mother’s home in Paris.

Because the mother serves as the primary correspondent, especially in the absence of the daughter’s response, she speaks for both herself and her child, eclipsing the daughter’s voice and dictating her character. This has an influential effect on the mother, who remembers her daughter as a child, yet must acknowledge her role and responsibilities as an adult; on the daughter, who is subject to her mother’s influence but also seeks to assert her own independence (evident even when her end of the exchange is missing); and on the outside reader, who analyzes each character from three different points of view – the mother’s, the daughter’s, and their own.

While the mother must recognize the daughter's social or political status, specifically after her marriage, she often maintains an assumption of certain behavior on the daughter's part, which results in an overwhelming insistence of instruction or, in some cases, lack of trust in the daughter to make constructive choices. In this way, the mother often reminds the daughter of her hierarchical familial position to support her opinion or instruction. This is particularly true of Marie-Thérèse, who does not see her daughter again after their separation in 1770. In her first letter, from April 21, she writes: "*Ne vous chargez d'aucune recommandation; n'écoutez personne, si vous voulez être tranquille. N'ayez pas de curiosité; c'est un point dont je crains beaucoup à votre égard.*" (43) Then, on May 30, 1776, six years after Marie Antoinette's marriage, she writes: "*Je ne crains pour vous (étant si jeune) que le trop de dissipation. Jamais vous n'avez aimé la lecture ni aucune application. Cela m'a donné souvent des inquiétudes...Je vous ai si souvent tourmentée pour savoir vos lectures, pour cette raison.*" (246) While the Empress is correct in her original fear that Marie Antoinette would succumb to her curiosity and fail to constructively apply herself at court, throughout the course of the correspondence she bases much of this fear on personal memories of her daughter's attitude as a child at the Austrian court that is subsequently substantiated or refuted by Mercy's reports.

In the case where there is not a permanent separation, such as that of Sévigné and Joséphine, there are references to shared childhood memories, but their personal knowledge of their daughter is dictated in more general terms. For example, on June 19, 1802, Joséphine writes to Hortense: "*Je te connais, ma chère Hortense, et je suis sûre qu'en faisant le bonheur de ma vie tu partages toutes mes sollicitudes.*" (123) In this instance, Joséphine is

appealing to her relationship to her daughter as a mother, who has cared for her since birth, and as a friend, preserving an *amitié* and *confiance* in order to stimulate a response.

The conflict of the mother's regard for her daughter as both child and adult is evident, in many instances, in the simplest use of language. Notably, Marie-Thérèse's frequent salutation, "*Madame ma chère fille*", serves as a significant example and can be analyzed in specific detail to reveal the nature of the problem. '*Madame*' recognizes the daughter's age, marriage, womanhood, and social rank, distancing her from childhood. The next word, '*ma*' is a pronoun indicating possession of a feminine object, reminding the daughter that she is, after all, a product of the mother's womb and remains in the care and supervision of her mother (even if only sentimentally). After that, '*chère*' immediately indicates an affectionate tone and familiarity, which presents itself even before the body of the letter – the feminine object possessed is precious to the possessor. Finally, '*fille*' presents a contrasting bookend to the salutation. At odds with the status granted by '*Madame*', '*fille*' identifies the daughter, therefore recognizing the familial hierarchy of mother over daughter, and recalls her youth and girlhood. There is a noticeable shift in Marie-Thérèse's address and instruction of her daughter, but it does not substantially arise until 1776, after Marie Antoinette has reigned as queen for two years, her marriage has finally been consummated, and she truly begins her attempts to become pregnant. However, as her daughter grows older and begins ignoring or challenging the mother's instruction, Marie-Thérèse more carefully chooses the language she uses to instruct or persuade her daughter – when and how to strategically praise/chastise/instruct – which I will discuss in greater detail in the next chapter.

The relationship of mother and daughter can also be analyzed in the use of certain pronouns, particularly the formal "*vous*" and the informal "*tu*". Madame de Sévigné and

Marie-Thérèse use “*vous*” when referring to their daughters and, as Marie Antoinette responds with “*vous*” in turn; it can be assumed that Madame de Grignan does, as well. “*Vous*”, which is largely a product of epistolary formality and Old Régime social expectation, still serves to maintain a distance and formality. It can be argued that “*vous*” represents a physical and emotional distance between mother and daughter, as well as recognition of superiority (daughter to mother) and adulthood accompanied by advanced political or social status (mother to daughter). Joséphine, however, uses the informal “*tu*” when addressing her daughter. While there are no surviving letters from Hortense to Joséphine, there is evidence that she may have used “*vous*” when addressing her mother, as she uses the formal pronoun to address her grandmother, Madame de la Pagerie, in a note attached to a separate letter written by Joséphine in 1802. (12 May, 122) While Joséphine’s use of “*tu*” may be a result of the environment of post-Revolutionary France, which is accompanied by a stronger preoccupation with the intimacy of the maternal bond, the use of this pronoun consistently emphasizes a familiarity and closeness of the mother towards her daughter, even after Hortense becomes Queen of Holland and a mother herself.

The Exchange of Intimate Confessions and Shared Memories

The relationship between mother and daughter is not necessarily based on friendship but a superiority of the mother and dependence of the child. As the child grows older and the mother’s influence is diminished by a physical separation, an emphasis on *amitié* (a mother-daughter bond, in which the daughter is both “*fille*” and “*amie*”) becomes more important for the mother to maintain that influence. This is true whether the mother fabricates the bond or not. While one party (the mother) is driven by ‘*confiance*’, ‘*amitié*’ and sincerity, the other

(the daughter) responds with dissimulation, feint, and the desire to please. (Altman 69) With the conflict of the daughter as both child and adult in the mother's mind, the mother pursues a means to appeal to the adult daughter. Through her knowledge of the girl's childhood based on shared experiences that exist within a context known only to mother and child, the exchange of intimate confessions and shared memories build on a nostalgic familial relationship (however accurately reconstructed) which excludes outside readership and, thus, seeks to establish a *confiance* that propels the correspondence and encourages trust and openness between correspondents.

In a letter from February 18, 1671, Madame de Sévigné exalts Madame de Grignan for having sent several letters, which have given her an inexplicable joy: "*Que vous êtes honnête de vous en être souvenue comme d'un de vos anciennes amies! Hélas! de quoi ne me souviens-je point? Les moindres choses me sont chères; j'ai mille dragons. [sic] Quelle différence! Je ne revenais jamais ici sans impatience et sans plaisir; présentement j'ai beau cherché, je ne vous trouve plus.*" (Vol. I, 162) In this instance, she praises her relationship with her daughter – they are like “old friends” - an exclamation that is immediately followed with a reverie of her home in Paris, which is less enjoyable without her daughter. Madame de Sévigné's reflection on her environment without her daughter is one that lacks specific detail or mention of individual events, but would potentially be familiar to Madame de Grignan, therefore excluding outside readers and appealing to a nostalgic memory of Madame de Grignan's experience at her mother's side. Even if the letter is circulated, third parties cannot actively partake in the reminiscence of Madame de Grignan's youth. In addition to drawing upon her daughter's memory, Madame de Sévigné is confiding in her daughter, divulging

that she has a thousand worries and fears, which serves to develop a present, active friendship and trust.

In some cases, even subtle references have the potential to reiterate the shared experience of mother and daughter. Marie-Thérèse, for example, makes frequent mention of events of the Austrian court. In some cases, these are more related to the health of family members or political circumstances, but, to a daughter that expresses homesickness in a court where she is eternally separated from her family, small mentions of her homeland have the potential to draw nostalgia. In a letter dated May 30, 1774, Marie-Thérèse writes: “*Vous excuserez les pâtes et les corrections dans celle-ci. Je l’ai dû écrire à trois reprises, et le vent l’a jetée deux fois à la terre. Vous connaissez les vents qui règnent dans mes chambres.*” (177) While this can be interpreted as a frivolous reference, Marie Antoinette would be familiar with her mother’s chambers at Schönbrunn castle and her habit of working with open windows. Not only does this paint the maternal image in the reader’s mind of Marie-Thérèse working quietly at her desk, it summons a memory from her daughter that is kept from her childhood. In addition, it can be argued that the strict secrecy of Marie-Thérèse’s exchange with her daughter encourages an even greater effect towards a *confiance* at the utterance of confessions or intimate exchanges, although, based on Marie Antoinette’s responses, may have only a relative effect.⁸⁴

Joséphine’s more informal tone with Hortense accommodates openness and the development of a *confiance*. She often writes of her experiences traveling with Napoléon and confides in her daughter as an intimate friend. In a letter dated July 9, 1807, she writes during

⁸⁴ Evidence in the exchange suggests that Marie Antoinette’s responses are largely an effort to appease her mother, often resulting in a pacification of her misdeeds or even lies to avoid chastisement. This will be discussed in greater detail in the fourth chapter concerning the daughter’s voice.

a voyage to Lille: “*Depuis mon départ de Paris, j’ai été constamment occupée à recevoir des compliments. Tu me connais; tu jugeras d’après cela combien j’ai été ennuyée.*

Heureusement, la société de ces dames me dédommage de la vie bruyante que je mène.

Toutes mes matinées se passent à recevoir, et souvent mes soirées. Il faut encore aller au bal.

Ce dernier article m’aurait fait grand plaisir si j’avais pu le partager avec toi, du moins t’en

voir jour.” (135) Her statement of “you know me” followed by a confession of her boredom asserts a close friendship, concluded with an expression of regret that her daughter and friend was not at her side.

Ultimately, as the relationship between mother and daughter begins at the child’s birth, it has the potential to be constructed and developed as particularly strong – more so than other relationships in the women’s lives – and making it inaccessible to outside readers or other third parties, including husbands and patriarchal figures.

Education and Instruction on Men

The fifth and final theme recurrent consistently throughout each correspondence entails not only the mother’s assertion of her own superiority, but also the conflict of the mother’s influence as it engages with that of other dominant, patriarchal male figures. In each exchange, the mother provides instruction and advice to her daughter concerning careful, thoughtful nurturing of her relationship with superior male figures for her own wellbeing (which is inextricably linked to that of the mother). Urged to remain faithful and patient with her husband, the daughter is, then, torn between the dominating, superior voice of her mother and the masculine voice, which possesses direct control of her welfare.

On November 6, 1675, Madame de Sévigné writes to Madame de Grignan concerning the news that her husband has accepted the position as governor of his province. She instructs her daughter on how to counsel her husband as he deliberates such decisions: “*Il y a de certaines choses, ma bonne, que l’on ne conseille point: on expose le fait. Les amis font leur devoir de ne point commettre les intérêts de ceux qu’ils aiment. Mais quand on a l’âme aussi parfaitement belle et bonne que vous l’avez, on ne consulte que soi et l’on fait précisément comme vous avez fait.*” (Vol. II, 150) Madame de Sévigné begins by docilely offering instruction, and then strategically separates herself from the advice by introducing the hypothetical “*les amis*”, rather than a more direct “*vous*”. Finally, she compliments her daughter and assures her that she need only consult her good soul. In this way, Sévigné manages to still impart her advice without direct coercive language.

However, while she encourages a complicity and appeasement of her daughter towards her husband, M. de Grignan, she is not averse to speaking harshly of him. On May 1, 1680, she writes: “*Au reste, je suis persuadée des complaisances de M. de Grignan. Il a des endroits d’une noblesse, d’une politesse, et même d’une tendresse extrême; il y a d’autres choses, dont les contre-coups sont difficiles à concevoir. Enfin tout est à facettes. Il a des traits inimitables pour la douceur et l’agrément de la société; on l’aime, on le gronde, on l’estime, on le blâme, on l’embrasse, on le bat.*” (Vol. II, 913) Yet, while Marie-Thérèse and Joséphine appear to avoid direct criticism of their daughter’s husband or other male superiors, Madame de Sévigné shares more openly, though her derision is veiled by her careful and creative mélange of compliment and criticism. According to her letter on June 5 of 1680 – just a month later - her simultaneous praise and chastisement of M. de Grignan was shared with him. She writes to her daughter: “*Je suis fort aise que M. de Grignan soit content*

de ma lettre. J'ai dit assez sincèrement ce que je pense; il devrait bien le penser lui-même et renvoyer toutes les fantaisies ruineuses qui servent chez lui par quartier.” (Vol. II, 962)

Because Madame de Grignan's responses no longer exist, Madame de Sévigné dictates the events of this exchange. Therefore, the reader is left to believe that Madame de Sévigné encourages openness and receptiveness, addressing conditions of her daughter's marriage through instruction and direct communication.

Marie-Thérèse's instruction of her daughter is shaped as an encouragement of feminine virtue and attention paid to her husband, but she is principally and *explicitly* interested in her daughter becoming *pregnant*. At the beginning of the exchange, on May 4, 1770, she writes: “*Le seul vrai bonheur dans ce monde est un heureux mariage; j'en peux parler. Tout dépend de la femme, si elle est complaisante, douce et amusante.*” (45) Here, Marie-Thérèse attempts to develop a connection and understanding of her daughter's situation and strengthen her argument based on her own marital experience. Then, she appeals to Marie Antoinette's natural personality, which she deems throughout the correspondence as charming and charismatic. Like the other women, the mother does chastise her son-in-law, particularly when the daughter seems particularly distant or the mother feels frustrated. In November of 1777, after the consummation of the marriage but prior to Marie Antoinette's first pregnancy, the Empress writes to her daughter: “*J'ai le cœur bien léger sur ce point, vous sachant en si bonnes mains. Mais, je vous avoue, je suis bien impatiente de la nonchalance du roi, et si cela continuait encore à Versailles, j'avoue, toutes mes espérances tomberaient tout d'un coup.*” (5 Nov., 302) Marie-Thérèse continues by emphasizing the importance that Marie Antoinette and the king do not sleep separately and that her daughter continue to devote her time and attention to her husband. In this case,

Marie-Thérèse is wary of the king's "nonchalance", but addresses it in an attempt to recognize that her daughter work harder, as her security on the throne is not confirmed until she has given birth to an heir.

Finally, Joséphine is met with the simultaneous task of advising her daughter to maintain a positive relationship with her own husband, Napoléon, and with her son-in-law (and brother-in-law), Louis Bonaparte. Concerning Hortense's husband, Joséphine repeatedly encourages her daughter to remain faithful and attentive. While Hortense's marriage is particularly unhappy, the maternal correspondence provides no specific reference to the unfortunate state of her marriage until after Joséphine's divorce. In June of 1807, after the loss of Hortense's oldest son, Joséphine writes: "*Ces regrets sont trop justes pour que la raison puisse les finir, mais, ma chère Hortense, elle doit les modérer. Tu n'es pas seule au monde. Il te reste un mari, un enfant intéressant et une mère dont tu connais la tendresse. Tu te dois à tout ce qui t'aime encore, et tu es trop sensible pour que tout cela ne te soit plus qu'étranger et indifférent.*" (9 June, 212) In this instance, Joséphine instructs her daughter that she must moderate her despair in order to return to her family. By including herself and her son-in-law in the list of those who support Hortense, she not only asserts her voice next to her son-in-law's, but also allows it to function as an alternative, augmenting this encouragement with a reassertion of her devotion. After Joséphine's divorce in July of 1810, granted the security afforded by her retirement, she writes to Hortense concerning her now-estranged son-in-law: "*Ta lettre, ma chère Hortense, ne m'a point étonnée. Toutes les extravagances les plus fortes sont dignes d'une tête comme celle du roi d'Hollande. La manière dont il s'est toujours conduit avec toi est si horrible qu'on ne pouvait l'excusait qu'en le croyant fou.*" (mid-July 1810, 267)

Like Marie-Thérèse, Joséphine must preserve her daughter's relationship with her husband and, as the case may be, an emperor or king. To a greater extent than Madame de Sévigné, intense political pressure encourages the regent-mother to instruct her daughter to maintain a productive, calm, and happy marriage, appeasing her husband and king, and quickly and effectively resolving domestic issues. In the case of Napoléon, Hortense's relationship with her adoptive stepfather not only ensures her social and political security, but also her mother's. Following Joséphine's divorce, Hortense and her brother serve as Joséphine's only strong link to the imperial court and means to remain in the favor of her ex-husband. In September of 1804, only two months before the coronation, Joséphine writes to her daughter concerning a conflict with Napoléon: "*L'Empereur a lu ta lettre; il m'a paru fâché de ne pas recevoir quelquefois de tes lettres. Il n'accuserait pas ton coeur s'il le connaissait comme moi, qui sais meme deviner tout ce que tu penses; mais les apparences sont contre toi.*" (8 Sept., 148) Joséphine is more concerned with reaffirming Hortense's political loyalty as the mother of Napoléon's heir. She instructs Hortense very specifically on the most effective means by which to resolve the situation, advising that she appeal to her familial connection with the future emperor: "*Dès qu'il peut supposer que tu le négliges, ne perds donc pas un instant pour réparer des torts qui ne sont pas réels: dis-lui que c'est par discrétion que to ne lui as pas écrit plus souvent, que ton cœur souffrait même de la loi que le respect seul t'avait dictée; que, t'ayant toujours témoigné la bonté et la tendresse d'un père, tu trouverais de la douceur à lui offrir l'hommage de ta reconnaissance...*". Finally, she adds, "*Sois sure, ma chère Hortense, que rien ne peut m'empêcher de t'aller soigner; c'est pour toi, et encore plus pour moi.*" The first direct indication by Joséphine that her marriage

and status is dependent on Hortense is significant, as it rests at the heart of the mother's motivations and construction of the maternal identity throughout the correspondence.

CHAPTER III

CONTROL AND THE MATERNAL VOICE

The concluding remarks of Joséphine Bonaparte's letter to her daughter from September 1804 point at the heart of the mother's motivation and commitment to her maternal responsibility: "*Sois sûr, ma chère Hortense, que rien ne peut m'empêcher de t'aller soigner; c'est pour toi, et encore plus pour moi*". (8 Sept., 148) She vows to go to her; promising and comforting through the correspondence to physically close the gap of their separation. In the case of each exchange, the mother demonstrates a strategic balance of maternal devotion and careful instruction generated by her reliance on her child to carry out the mother's specific and circumstantial personal agenda. As the previous chapter has shown, consistent similarities in structure and theme prove that each woman, despite her socio-historical context and individual relationship with her daughter, engages in a careful construction and representation of her own maternal identity as an ideal mother figure. Distraught and tormented by her daughter's absence, her daughter's behavior, her daughter's losses, the mother remains connected to her child as one. The mother knows her daughter better than the closest advisor and friend – even when she has not seen her in years or their relationship is habitually strained. The mother encourages the daughter to remain gentle and faithful to her husband – especially when her husband is a king. The mother encourages the daughter to get pregnant because she wishes for grandchildren – and because her grandchildren will secure her familial right to the aristocratic title or sovereign throne (consolidating a diplomatic political alliance).

Why is the thematic and stylistic construction of the maternal role so necessary? These mothers are not only constructing their maternal identity (or, in other terms, *reconstructing* or manipulating their actual maternal identity), they are “performing” it. This chapter will highlight certain contradictions or strategic choices in letters to their daughters in order to break down the “performance” of the maternal role engaged therein. What are the goals that rest at the heart of each mother’s instruction, informs her use of language, and contributes to defining her maternal identity (whether true or performed)? How does the mother’s “performance” serve as a means of controlling her daughter? Through an analysis of general approaches to speech act theory introduced by J.L. Austin, Sandy Petrey, Shoshana Felman, and Émile Benveniste, I will consider the specific use of language in the maternal correspondence as a means of direction and control to specifically prove the existence of the mother’s “performance” as it exists linguistically.

Upon reading these correspondences a series of essential questions come to mind concerning the mother’s role: What is the mother trying to accomplish? What are her intentions? Why is the exchange with her daughter crucial to accomplishing her goals? Madame de Sévigné’s intentions are two-fold. Sévigné is, perhaps most fundamentally, a widowed mother of mid-level nobility, responsible for the education and social progression of her two children. By the time of her daughter’s marriage in 1669, Madame de Sévigné is faced with a modest estate that is eventually split between both children upon their marriage, leaving only a small sum for Sévigné herself. While her son, Charles, remains unmarried until 1684, his potential for social mobility is far less than her daughter’s, who can be offered to an aristocrat of greater wealth and higher social status. By securing a successful marriage of elevated status for her daughter, Sévigné assures her own financial and social future (as

well as the future of her family). Once that marriage is secured, it remains important that Sévigné's daughter, Françoise-Marguerite de Grignan, maintain a peaceful relationship with her husband and bear children, for the benefit of herself and her mother – who, like her daughter, becomes subject to the caprices and choices of a male of superior social and familial status.

In addition to safeguarding her social and financial security, Madame de Sévigné seeks to develop a purpose as mother-*auteur*. While Sévigné may not have actively sought publication on her own accord, her literary ambitions generate very distinct behaviors that seek social reaction: the act of generating and maintaining the correspondence (particularly when aided by and shared with her circle of friends), waiting anxiously and publicly for her daughter's response, falling ill or depressed at any delay, collecting news and compliments for her daughter, and attracting and soliciting attention and compliments by projecting herself socially as the devoted and afflicted mother. (Farrell 12) In other words, it is the very act and *pleasure* of writing the letters that defines a social identity for Madame de Sévigné.

Essentially, the specific self-construction of her *maternal* identity informs her social identity, just as her intrinsic enjoyment of writing informs her personal identity. Therefore, it is essential that Françoise-Marguerite acknowledge and, more importantly, reciprocate the exchange in order for her mother to continue using the epistolary medium as a means of exploring a creative authorship within a socially acceptable framework and establishing a social necessity and creative contribution at court.

The tone of the exchange between Empress Marie-Thérèse and Marie Antoinette is decidedly different than those of Sévigné and Joséphine. Because both Marie-Thérèse and her daughter know that their separation will be permanent in 1770, there are no desperate

depressions or hysterical fits triggered by frequent separation. Marie-Thérèse is much stricter, using her political power in tandem with her maternal influence – the mother-regent. Marie-Thérèse, who reigns over Austria with a great deal of independence and is one of the most powerful people in the world at the time of her daughter’s marriage, is “far from unversed in the articulation of authority, and she could assume the expressions and techniques of an enlightened mother as well as an enlightened empress.” (Wolff 36) In the case of Marie Antoinette’s marriage, an alliance between Austria and France is only recently established (following France’s involvement in the invasion of Austrian territory during the War of Austrian Succession) and absolutely necessary, as consistent threats to the imperial empire by the King of Prussia make war a likely possibility. In order to ensure the political alliance, it is essential that Marie Antoinette uphold the familial and political alliance made through her marriage to Louis XVI. Larry Wolff, in his article “Hapsburg Letters” discusses the importance that Marie-Thérèse places on Marie Antoinette’s sexual health and relationship with her husband: “The correspondence followed the monthly menstrual cycle, ultimately because sex was an issue of public and political power for both France and Austria, but also because through sexual supervision the empress could express her personal power over her daughter’s private life.” (31) Ultimately, Marie-Thérèse must ensure that her daughter not only bear children, but that she act as confidante and marital companion to the king in order to secure a peaceful marriage, political alliance, and represent the interests of the Austrian court. Due to their permanent separation, Marie-Thérèse relies entirely on the regular exchange of letters with her daughter to acquire information related to her daughter’s menstrual cycle, sexual activity, and state of mind (which is supplemented by the information and counsel of Mercy-Argenteau).

Patterns in the progression of the correspondence point to the Empress's frequent frustration with the generally irresponsible and frivolous Marie Antoinette. (See Appendix B for further reference.) Marie-Thérèse writes between 4 and 8 letters between 1770 and 1776, writing the fewest letters – only 2 – in 1772, two years after the marriage.⁹⁴ In 1773, 1775, and 1776 – years when Marie Antoinette is particularly chastised by her mother due to her social irresponsibility, fading popularity, and an as-yet unconsummated marriage – the Empress only writes between 4 and 6 letters a year, but receives double that number from her daughter, when usually the exchange is relatively balanced. The greatest number of letters is exchanged in 1778, the year of the birth of Marie Antoinette's first child (a daughter). It is also during this time (1777-1778), that Marie-Thérèse again faces invasion and war with Prussia, marking a particularly important period of the exchange. Marie-Thérèse details the progression of the political climate and emphasizes the importance of the alliance with France, confessing her own fears concerning her family's safety and the health of her realm. She writes on June 29, 1777: "*C'est tout ce que j'aurais pu souhaiter, me voilà contente, mais ce qui met le comble, c'est ce que vous me dites de l'amitié et de la confiance mutuelle des deux beaux-frères. Dieu donne que cela soit pour tout leur règne, pour le bien des États et de nos familles, que je regarde depuis longtemps comme la même!*" (289) At the time this was written, Marie Antoinette had consummated her marriage, but was not yet pregnant. By emphasizing her devotion to the safety and prosperity of her family, Marie-Thérèse simultaneously appeals to Marie Antoinette's lacking interest in the political environment, reminds her of the importance of their alliance and their families, and, thus, infers the

⁹⁴ Evelyne Lever notes the absence of possibly several letters in 1770, either lost or destroyed by the Empress. There are three letters that are missing in 1772 from Marie-Thérèse to Marie Antoinette and one other in November of 1775. There is also one letter missing from Marie Antoinette to her mother in 1774. My tally excludes any missing letters exchanged between Mercy and the Empress.

importance that her daughter remain steadfast at her attempt to get pregnant and bear a French heir.

A survivor the Revolution of 1789 and a prominent social figure in the new Republican aristocracy and royalty, Joséphine chooses to preserve her future through her own strategic remarriage and, like Madame de Sévigné, the successful marriage of her daughter. At the height of Napoléon's political success, Joséphine is directly involved in matters of state; although, unlike Marie-Thérèse, she is essentially concerned with safeguarding her own status rather than securing a political alliance. Overall, Joséphine's correspondence details an intricate network of political and social relationships that are frequently defined by scandal and controversy, arguably influencing her own motivations in the correspondence more directly than her daughter's; she is presented as the mother-socialite. A viscountess of mid-level aristocracy before the Revolution and a widow of high society and little fortune after the Revolution, Joséphine relies on patronage and financial support from male friends (particularly Paul Barras) before her marriage to Napoléon. Once Napoléon reaches political success and assumes the imperial French throne, Joséphine becomes responsible for preserving her own turbulent marriage and securing her social and financial future and that of her children. As her inability to bear an heir becomes apparent, and her marriage and political status founder, Joséphine's daughter, Hortense, assumes the crucial link to protecting her connection to the crown. While her son, Eugene's, positive influence was important; Hortense was the wife of Napoléon's brother and mother to the actual heir of the Empire. During Joséphine's marriage, it is essential that the habitually moody and depressive Hortense maintain a peaceful relationship with Napoléon, appealing to their familial relationship in order to foster a positive political connection for both mother

and daughter. Following the divorce, Hortense remains Joséphine's only direct connection to Napoléon, and she thus relies on her daughter to stay in the Emperor's favor when he fails to respond to Joséphine's letters and requests. Again, as in each mother-daughter epistolary exchange, the daughter's cooperation and written reciprocation is essential to benefit the mother's overarching political or social needs and expectations.

With a better understanding of each mother's specific goals in mind, I'd like to turn to turn to the construction of the ideal mother figure and how it serves as a means of persuasion and control of the daughter? How does a "performance" of the maternal role work to the mother's advantage in implementing her own agenda? Initially, the physical separation between mother and daughter presents problems of memory and nostalgia, indicative of the epistolary genre, that assist the mother in reconstructing her identity as the ideal mother. As the women are separated for a period of years, the mother can appeal to the daughter's nostalgia for home – especially during times of personal strife or illness – and augment her own image as the daughter's memory of her mother and childhood may experience lapses or weakening over the course of several years. Distance and time allow the mother to manipulate the daughter's memory and sensibilities through a careful and specific use of epistolary *language*. Altman writes: "The epistolary situation, in which both time lags and absence play such a large role, lends itself to the temporal ambiguity whereby past is taken for present. The only possible present is the most immediate past – be it the last contact or the last letter." (132) Ultimately, whether it has been ten days or ten years between the reunion of mother and daughter, the daughter's consistent receipt of letters from the mother that reassure her devotion and understanding serves to fill the gap of the mother's absence. The letters remind the daughter of her familial role and the subordinate status of the child,

reaffirm the mother's overarching (and, in some cases, political) authority, and serve to change or soften the daughter's memory of the mother-daughter relationship, especially if it is or has been tumultuous. However, after longer periods of time as the daughter's independence grows, that same distance weakens the mother's influence. The correspondence then becomes even more essential.

I highlighted previously in Chapters One and Two the correspondences' role in maintaining the mother's presence as constant through time and distance. In Chapter Two, I addressed the first theme that recurs in each correspondence – the domination of time and the necessity of reciprocation – as a tool with which the mother is able to assert a certain authority of her child and, through her reciprocation, maintain it. Marie-Thérèse's most comprehensive breakdown of Marie Antoinette's schedule occurs in the first letter, in 1770, given at the moment of separation. When the daughter is a child, her mother, who oversees her education and development – or who appoints and oversees tutors - dictates the use of her daughter's time. When the daughter leaves, it is not only natural for the mother to continue this pattern, but the daughter is all the more receptive to this familiar instruction. Sévigné and Joséphine's gentle coaxing functions in a similar way, harkening to the child's reception of the mother's persuasion and flattery in an attempt to avoid conflict.

The necessity of reciprocation is, arguably, the crux of each correspondence: it is the essential urgency that sustains its existence and is the most consistent and fundamental link that ties the three separate exchanges together. The mother's constant appeal for letters – and counting the days and weeks until they come – reaffirms the mother's attachment to her daughter and demonstrates her devotion (both to her daughter and in the mind of potential third party readers). The mother is not complete until she hears from and can hold the

tangible proof of her daughter's continued devotion. Strategically, the mother depends on the daughter confirming that she has received and accepted her mother's instruction. The continuous reaffirmation of the daughter's obligation to respond acts as a means of encouraging her to read and strongly consider her mother's letters, while reassuring the mother that she maintains a strategic influence over her child.

The reliance on the daughter's responses puts the correspondence in a fragile balancing act between mother and daughter. The mother proclaims that it is the daughter who controls the exchange, and whose responses bring her infinite joy and sustain her good health. When the daughter's letters are lacking, the mother is worried, frustrated, and ill. The daughter is solely responsible for maintaining the mother's happiness. Tactically, the mother appeals to her child's adulthood and growing independence by assuring her daughter that she is in control. (And, in fact, the correspondence and the mother's reassurance *do* rely on her daughter's reciprocation.) However, while the daughter's contribution is essential, the maternal voice eclipses that of the daughter – especially in cases where the daughter's responses are missing – and the very receipt of the daughter's letters asserts to the mother that she remains, after all, in charge.

Regarding epistolary control, Larry Wolff writes: "It is always the writer of the epistolary narrative who defines the relation of power between its two persons, reserving the option of assuming either subject or object status." (34) In the case of the mother's exchange, she presents herself as the object, while she is, in reality, the subject. For example, in some letters, Madame de Sévigné affirms that her daughter is writing *too much*. She writes on January 30, 1680: "*Vous m'écrivez trop. Je ne puis plus voir beaucoup de votre écriture sans chagrin; je sais, ma bonne, le mal que cela vous fait et, quoique vous me mandiez les choses*

du monde les plus aimables et les plus tendres, je regrette d'avoir ce plaisir aux dépens de votre poitrine." (Vol. II, 819) In this particular instance, Madame de Grignan is sick and Sévigné urges her not to devote too much time to letter writing at the expense of resting and recovering. While Sévigné is expressing concern for her daughter's health, the exclamation that her daughter writes "too much" demonstrates a certain manipulation of the correspondence by Madame de Sévigné. When her daughter writes too little, Sévigné beckons the letters in, often dramatic, demonstrations of her devotion. When her daughter writes too much, it allows the mother to show concern for her daughter's energies and emphasize (even underhandedly brag of) her child's dedication even in times of sickness.

Excessive devotion and separation anxiety, the second recurrent theme in the correspondence outlined in the previous chapter, serve to reinforce the mother's attachment to her daughter. Why is the display of maternal devotion (especially during times of separation) crucial to the mother's "performance" and what purpose does it serve? Sévigné's forlorn pronouncement near the beginning of the correspondence, on February 6, 1671, seeks to solicit an emotional reaction from both reader and daughter: "*Ma douleur serait bien médiocre si je pouvais vous la dépeindre; je ne l'entreprendrai pas aussi. J'ai beau cherché ma chère fille, je ne la trouve plus, et tous les pas qu'elle fait l'éloignent de moi.*" (Vol. I, 149) The assertion that her pain is caused by the daughter that she "can no longer find" points to a lack of response on the daughter's end. In this way, Sévigné's despair serves three purposes: to appeal to her daughter's guilt and familial devotion in order to solicit a response, to display a portrait of her maternal devotion for her daughter (manipulating her memory of their reunion and separation and covering any personal tension), and to display literary prowess and social image to a potential third party reader.

There is evidence that the demonstration of maternal devotion and angst at separation is linked to the mother's general frustration and the development of exterior factors. In the period around 1776, Marie Antoinette's marriage had not yet been consummated and she was increasingly irresponsible. Following a series of four chastising letters in 1775, Marie-Thérèse's correspondence becomes shorter and more direct, including neither excessive tactics of persuasion aimed at appealing to her familial devotion nor a grand chastisement. The Empress writes to Mercy on May 31, 1776: "*Peut-être, en éprouvant le désagrément de quelque faux pas, à moins que ce ne soit pour des objets de trop grande conséquence, deviendra-t-elle plus circonspecte et attentive à vos conseils.*" (247) It is clear that Marie-Thérèse has temporarily given up trying to appeal to her daughter through the correspondence, hoping that Marie Antoinette will learn from her mistakes. She also sends her son, Emperor Joseph II, to France to counsel his sister during this time. The resurgence of Marie-Thérèse's pointed instruction and tender devotion reappears again in 1777, when Marie Antoinette finally consummates her marriage. This pattern points to a direct and strategic manipulation of the correspondence by Marie-Thérèse, who employs her role as "mother" to carry out her needs as "Empress".

While Madame de Sévigné's pleasure in writing and refiguring the traditional style of epistolary writing informs much of her effusive language to her daughter, Marie-Thérèse's affection is dispersed carefully and strategically. For Joséphine Bonaparte, the tiring repetition of her effusive affection for her daughter is not reminiscent of Sévigné's love of writing or Marie-Thérèse's careful calculation, but demonstrates an *obligation* to evoke a particular maternal image that has been established by social conventions and post-Revolutionary conservative political policy (as I argued in greater detail in the first chapter).

Joséphine's affection is clichéd and seems to be, to a certain extent, forced. Joséphine writes more frequently than the other two mothers of her own sorrow and sickness ("*Ma santé est assez bonne en ce moment, mais j'ai toujours le cœur triste.*" (7 March 1807, 199)). In 1806, she writes "*Depuis ton départ j'ai toujours été souffrante, triste et malheureuse; j'ai même été obligée de garder le lit, ayant eu quelques accès de fièvre. La maladie a tout à fait disparu, mais le chagrin me reste. Comment n'en pas avoir d'être séparée d'une fille comme toi, tendre, douce et aimable, qui faisait le charme de ma vie?*" (15 July, 178) Joséphine, always suffering, chooses to implement an outpouring of maternal devotion to, essentially, appeal to her daughter's *guilt* to acquire information and maintain the politically and socially important correspondence that contributes to the security of her position. Rather than explicitly cite her specific needs or agenda, Joséphine justifies her depression and angst as being connected to her daughter's physical (and linguistic) absence.

In the third recurrent theme that I highlighted in the previous chapter, the mother addresses the daughter as both child and adult. The redefinition of the child as adult potentially aids *and* damages the mother's intentions. Evidence established in the correspondence suggests that the daughter exists as both child and adult simultaneously in the mother's mind. On the one hand, the mother remembers her daughter as a child, and her understanding of her daughter's character as an adult is fragmented due to long separations, making this theme a genuine consequence of the separation. On the other hand, the mother is aware of this distinction and uses it to her advantage.

By recognizing the duration of the separation and mutual aging, mother and daughter often bridge the gap with the exchange of gifts or tokens of their affection. In one letter, Marie Antoinette asks her mother for a lock of her hair for a necklace. Likewise, in a letter

dated June 19, 1777, Marie-Thérèse writes: “*Je voudrais avoir votre figure et habillement de cour, si le visage même ne sera pas si ressemblant. Pour ne vous trop incommoder, il me suffit que j’aie la figure et le maintien, que je ne connais pas et dont tout le monde est si content. Ayant perdu ma chère fille bien petite et enfant, ce désir de la connaître comme elle s’est formée doit excuser mon importunité, venant d’un fond de tendresse maternelle bien vive.*” (289) In this case, Marie-Thérèse recognizes her daughter’s growth and new status at the French court (acknowledging and appealing to her independence), flatters her beauty, mourns her loss, and reaffirms her maternal love. She is not portraying herself as an Empress, but as a mother. However, this cannot occur without being subversively linked to the royal status of both mother and daughter, as Marie-Thérèse refers to “*tout le monde*” (i.e. the court at Versailles) – a flattery that is aimed at encouraging Marie Antoinette’s comfort and influence at court. In addition, never forgetting her own motives, the mother does not request the portrait merely as a token of her daughter’s affection and indication of her growth, but as a means of surveying her nature, stance, and the extravagance of court as represented by the royal portrait.

The mother’s confusion (whether intentional or unintentional) of her daughter’s status – child versus independent adult and monarch - triggers a subsequent confusion of the daughter’s own memory of her role in the family home, with her current position as wife, mother, and queen. By addressing her daughter as an adult, the mother recognizes the daughter’s authority in her own household (in the case of Madame de Grignan) or as Queen and wife to the monarch, and capability to implement the mother’s instructions. At the same time, the mother appeals to sentimentalities developed during the daughter’s childhood and subsequent nostalgia, suggesting that the very adherence to the mother’s instruction (though

also mark of her independence) places the daughter in a subordinate familial role. The daughter, therefore, is subject to the confusion of switching between child and adult, a state that is dictated by the mother through the correspondence.

In many cases, the results of the mother's manipulation of the daughter's role as child and adult are physical or tangible. The daughter may respond to this confusion through the active adherence or passivity towards the mother's direct instruction. For example, the mother may or may not receive letters or requested gifts. However, the mother is also able to mentally manipulate the daughter's role through the exchange of intimate confessions and shared memories. Aware that the physical distance and periods of separation can weaken her authority as the daughter grows older, the mother uses the correspondence to build on the resulting nostalgia and gaps in the daughter's memory to emphasize a connection between mother and daughter solidified (whether true or manipulated) during childhood. Recalling details, memories, or events that occurred during the daughter's childhood mentally places the daughter back in a childish state, in which the mother's authority is supreme, altruistic, and – to a young child – flawless. Likewise, the sharing of intimate confessions by the mother indicates a respect for the daughter as an adult, meant to strengthen an *amitié*, in which the daughter has grown beyond the confines of the family home and can be understood by her mother as a woman and friend. Ultimately, the mother is able to force the daughter to mentally assume three states of being at once: her childhood self as remembered by her mother, her adult self as dictated by her mother, and her actual self (the combined whole of her true experience). Confusion of her role and familial obligation serve in the mother's favor, as the daughter does, ultimately, reciprocate the correspondence. However, this also

creates dissention that will be explored in the following chapter when I explore the growing independence of the daughter's voice.

But in end, the careful balance of the mother's familial and political superiority creates an interference with the dominance of male superiors in both the mother and daughter's lives. In the case of each correspondence, it is essential that the daughter preserve a positive and peaceful relationship with male superiors (her husband, father, stepfather, brother) for the benefit of herself, her mother, and her children. It is within this framework that many of the clearest and, perhaps, most significant contradictions between the mother's meaning and the mother's words within the maternal correspondence present themselves – contributing the specific evidence and nature of the mother's "performance".

In the case of Madame de Sévigné, from June 1670 until her daughter's departure in February 1671, she maintains a regular correspondence with her new son-in-law, Monsieur de Grignan. Pre-dating her daughter's departure, her role as "mother-in-law" is established even before the epistolary construction of her role as "mother". On August 6, 1670 (a little over a year after her daughter's marriage), Sévigné writes to M. de Grignan: "*Elle se plaint encore tous les jours de ce qu'on l'a retenue ici, et dit tout sérieusement que cela est bien cruel de l'avoir séparée de vous. Il semble que ce soit par plaisir que nous vous ayons mis à deux cents lieues d'elles. Je vous prie sur cela de calmer son esprit, et de lui témoigner la joie que vous avez d'espérer qu'elle accouchera heureusement ici.*" (Vol. I, 129) In this instance, Sévigné not only tells Grignan of her daughter's condition but speaks for her, eclipsing her daughter's voice and simultaneously insisting on the significance of the husband's influence and assuring him that she, the mother, is taking best care of her daughter. Then, she encourages him to write his wife, urging him that having Madame de

Grignan in her mother's care is best. She is masterfully flattering her new son-in-law, sculpting her daughter's character in her husband's eyes in the early stages of their marriage, asserting her maternal influence, at the same time that she is defending her interests. After her daughter's departure, Sévigné only rarely addresses a letter to her son-in-law and both praises and chastises him (directly and indirectly) throughout the rest of her correspondence with her daughter.

Major conflicts and contradictions in Marie-Thérèse's correspondence with Marie Antoinette are illuminated by the Empress's exchange with Mercy-Argenteau, with whom she shares certain letters in the mother-daughter exchange and expresses the true nature of her frustration with her daughter. In the case of Marie-Thérèse, the *je* that writes to Marie Antoinette and the *je* that writes to Mercy are defined differently – they are the constructions of two different maternal identities: the mother and the stateswoman. Altman addresses this common issue with epistolary discourse: “Those works that we perceive as being the ‘epistolary,’ as cultivating the letter form most fully, are those in which the *I-you* relationship shapes the language used, and in which *I* becomes defined relative to the *you* whom he addresses.” (118)

On March 3, 1773, Marie-Thérèse writes Mercy: “*Vous en serez convaincu en examinant la teneur de cette lettre, dont le ton est plus sec encore que celui de ses lettres précédentes. Comment saurais-je donc compter sur les assertions qu'elle vous fait de sa tendresse pour moi, sans les voir constatées par des faits? Ne dois-je pas craindre qu'elle ne cherche des subterfuges dans la vue de tenir au plan qu'elle s'est une fois fixé?*” (136) In this instance, Marie-Thérèse expresses doubts in the tone and sincerity of Marie Antoinette's affections, both in letter and in the assurances relayed by Mercy. In this case, the *je* that

Marie Antoinette assumes and exerts is seeking *knowledge*.⁹⁵ She is not interested in Marie Antoinette's affections as a concerned mother, but as an Empress that seeks confirmation of her daughter's diligent acknowledgment of her mother's letters (so that her instruction is not ignored) and the condition of her present state of mind. It is clear that the Empress is frustrated and suspects Marie Antoinette of negligence. She continues: "*Vous ne relèverez pas. Je suis curieuse si elle s'en apercevra ou si elle est si enfant ou distraite de n'en faire cas.*" Once again, the conflict of Marie Antoinette's maturity into adulthood is evident. After three years of marriage, her daughter's inability to consummate her marriage and disregard for building her reputation at court (and, therefore, with her husband) rest at the center of Marie-Thérèse's chastisement. Ultimately, while Marie-Thérèse's maternal influence engages with that of male superiors (the King) and chosen advisors (Mercy), neither maternal nor masculine instruction seems to have any effect on Marie Antoinette.

However, in the letter to Marie Antoinette written the same day and sent by the same courier, she writes:

"Votre course à Paris a fait le meilleur effet dans le public. Ce que vous me marquez sur le mariage du comte d'Artois m'étonne: deux soeurs de la même maison! On parlait d'une princesse de Saxe. J'avoue, ce grand empressement de marier encore le troisième fait faire bien des réflexions, pas du tout agréables. La partie devient forte. Vous aurez d'autant plus à vous garder et ne rien négliger qui puisse donner prise contre vous. Ce que vous me dites de la façon comme vous êtes avec le roi me rassure et me fait plaisir, point essentiel pour vous." (3 March 1777, 137)

While the letter is generally straightforward, Marie-Thérèse is very positive. She inquires of her daughter's health, discusses the Emperor's health and renovations to the castle at Schönbrunn, comments on the marriage of the Comte d'Artois, discusses her own health

⁹⁵ I will go further into detail regarding language as a means of *truth* and *persuasion* according to ideas introduced by J.L. Austin and expanded by Shoshana Felman, as well as Benveniste's writing of subjectivity and linguistics in terms more specific to the mother and daughter later in this chapter.

(which is good) and closes by encouraging Marie Antoinette to write as soon as possible. She makes the conscious choice to avoid scolding and, instead, compliments and encourages her daughter in a pleasant letter. The clear contrast in the tone of both of these letters indicates two different states of mind for the Empress. To Mercy, she is frustrated, chastising, and adamant. To Marie Antoinette, she is casual, pleasant, and friendly. She even gossips about the marriage of the Comte d'Artois with only fleeting mention of the scandal that surrounds him and the threat of an heir being born to the French throne before Marie Antoinette and the Dauphin have produced their own – a problem that takes principle focus in other letters. Such a contradiction in tone points to a carefully chosen tone and language, a “performance” of her maternal role meant to negotiate certain behaviors in her daughter, especially in regards to preserving her marriage and reputation.

Such examples can also be found in clever, brief amalgamations of Marie-Thérèse's constructed maternal devotion and political ambition. In a letter dated May 8, 1771, she writes: “*Il n'y a rien de perdu, vous êtes tous deux si jeunes: au contraire, pour vos santés ce n'est que mieux, vous vous fortifiez encore tous deux; mais il est naturel à nous autres, vieux parents, de souhaiter l'accomplissement, ne pouvant plus nous flatter de voir de petits et arrière-petits-fils.*” (75) In this case, Marie-Thérèse both concedes that Marie Antoinette and her husband are still young (aged fifteen and sixteen) and yet appeals to her role as aging mother and grandmother. However, she is careful to specifically indicate that she wishes to live to see her grandsons. It is clear that the Empress discriminates the sex of her hypothetical grandchildren because it is a *son* that will secure Marie Antoinette's place on the throne and the Franco-Austrian alliance.

While Sévigné, Marie-Thérèse, and Joséphine are all widowed by the start of the maternal correspondence, Joséphine is the only one who seeks remarriage and whose social status is *dependent* on her husband, the Emperor. As a result, Napoléon's dominant presence outside of the correspondence plays a uniquely important role in Joséphine's construction of her maternal identity *within* the correspondence, as she relies on perpetuating an image of herself as dutiful wife and mother for her husband as well as for her daughter. Arguably, the greatest conflict in Joséphine Bonaparte's correspondence with her daughter occurs when Hortense loses her oldest child – and the designated heir – to the croup on May 5, 1807 in The Hague. There are four letters from Joséphine devoted to the subject, including a reunion of mother and daughter at Joséphine's chateau at Laeken in Belgium, and a handful of very brief references in subsequent letters. It is during this time that separation from Hortense is especially difficult and emotional. Joséphine mourns the loss of the child as a grandmother, as an extension of her own daughter, and for herself as a collective unit with her daughter – in which the mother bears the burden of the daughter's pain. In a letter dated May 27, 1807, following their reunion in Laeken, Joséphine writes: "*J'ai beaucoup pleuré depuis ton départ, ma chère Hortense. Cette séparation m'a été bien pénible, et pour m'en donner le courage il ne fallait pas moins que la certitude du bien que te feront les voyages.*" (208)

Here, she expresses the pain she shares with her daughter and adds that her only consolation is that Hortense has traveled safely - news she received from Mlle Cochelet, her reader and Hortense's friend. She continues after relating news of Hortense's children who remain at Laeken: "*L'Empereur m'a encore écrit; il partage bien vivement notre douleur, et M. Maret me mande que l'Empereur est bien triste. J'avais besoin de cette consolation, car je n'en ai plus depuis ton départ. Toujours seule avec moi-même, chaque instant me rappelle le sujet de*

notre douleur, et mes pleurs ne cessent de couler.” In this instance, she assures Hortense that the Emperor shares the sadness that mother and daughter experience together (*notre douleur*) and includes a third party, M. Maret, whom she asserts has witnessed the Emperor’s mood – a point that she states gives her much comfort.

However, based on Napoléon’s surviving correspondence to Joséphine, he said nothing of the kind. On May 24, three days before her aforementioned letter to Hortense, Joséphine received the following letter from Napoléon: “*Je reçois ta lettre de Laeken. Je vois avec peine que ta douleur est encore entière et qu’Hortense n’est pas encore arrivée; elle n’est pas raisonnable et ne mérite pas qu’on l’aime puisqu’elle n’aimait que ses enfants. Tâche de te calmer et ne me fais point de peine. A tout mal sans remède il faut trouver des consolations.*” (Plon, 24 May 1807, Vol. XIV, 262) Napoléon blatantly rejects Joséphine’s sadness, and even argues that Hortense does not deserve their love, as clearly she cares only for her children. It is clear that Napoléon is not concerned with the loss of the heir, as Hortense has (or will soon have) two other male children to fill his place. It also affirms that Joséphine must have expressed her sadness in a now-missing letter to Napoléon, involving him as a third party in her display of maternal devotion and *douleur*.

In addition, on June 2, 1807, Napoléon writes to Hortense directly:

“Ma fille, vous ne m’avez pas écrit un mot, dans votre juste et grande douleur. Vous avez tout oublié, comme si vous n’aviez pas encore des pertes à faire. L’on dit que vous n’aimez plus rien, que vous êtes indifférente à tout; je m’en aperçois à votre silence. Cela n’est pas bien, Hortense ! ce n’est pas ce que vous vous promettiez. Votre fils était tout pour vous. Votre mère et moi ne sommes donc rien ! Si j’avais été à la Malmaison, j’aurais partagé votre peine, mais j’aurais voulu aussi que vous vous rendissiez à vos meilleurs amis. Adieu, ma fille; soyez gaie : il faut se résigner. Portez-vous bien, pour remplir tous vos devoirs. Ma femme est toute triste de votre état; ne lui faites plus de chagrin.” (Ibid., Vol. XV, 305)

While it may be his way of helping Hortense with the loss, Napoléon's roughness of tone chastises her for ignoring her responsibilities as a stepdaughter. Closing the letter, he acknowledges that Joséphine's attitude is significantly affected by Hortense's despair (involving him in any recurrent theme of the unity of mother and daughter enacted by Joséphine) and asks her to refrain from causing Joséphine any additional pain.

Still, Joséphine again denies any harshness of Napoléon's reaction in a letter dated two days later, June 4, when she writes: "*L'Empereur a été vivement affecté. Dans toutes ses lettres, il cherche à me donner du courage, mais je sais que ce malheureux événement lui a été très sensible. Le maréchal Berthier me mande qu'il l'a vu pleurer.*" (4 June 1807, 211) Again, Joséphine asserts her position that Napoléon is affected by the death by including a third party as proof.⁹⁶ She continues: "*Toutes les lettres que j'ai reçues de lui depuis ton départ sont remplies de son attachement pour toi. Ton cœur est trop sensible pour n'en être pas touché.*" Based on the letter written directly to Hortense by the Emperor himself, which maintains a harsh and strict tone at her continued depression after the loss of her child, such evidence forces the question: Why is Joséphine lying?⁹⁷

At this point in the correspondence, two and a half years before her divorce, such evidence suggests that Joséphine is desperate to secure her position as wife and Empress. After several treatments at Plombières for infertility, infidelity by both parties, and a tumultuous relationship with the Emperor, Joséphine must maintain her reputation and function as devoted mother, and wife to Napoléon, and grandmother to his royal heirs. In

⁹⁶ There are no existing letters in the correspondence that prove that Joséphine has received news from Maret or Berthier.

⁹⁷ I will argue later that I hesitate to deem the mother's manipulation of the language to fulfill a specific purpose an outright, calculated lie. I would venture here that, because at no point does Napoléon claim to share in the loss of his grandson and heir, Joséphine is, more simply, denying this fact in the maternal correspondence – she is lying.

order to accomplish this, it is essential that Hortense protect her own reputation (as stepdaughter, sister-in-law, and mother of the heir) as well as Joséphine's. Therefore, in times of dissention and grief such as the loss of Hortense's son, Joséphine must act as intermediary between Napoléon and Hortense. Judging by Napoléon's strictness regarding the incident in the face of Hortense's grief, this requires that Joséphine carefully balance her understanding and sadness with a manipulation and denial of Napoléon's harsh words to maintain a positive relationship between both parties. Based on the evidence in Napoléon's letter that Hortense has not written, there is the suggestion that Hortense was grieving and, possibly, angry with the Emperor. In this event, Joséphine relies on a "performance" of her role when writing to Hortense about Napoléon's reactions, in order to preserve their relationship and, therefore, her security, despite what she may or may not truthfully think of his letters.

Ultimately, the mother engages in a "performance" of the maternal role because she already assumes a particular power over the daughter (granted by familial responsibilities developed in childhood and, in some cases, political pressure) and in order to establish and maintain that power in periods of absence and as the daughter ages. In his essay on the power dynamics inscribed in Marie Thérèse's 10-year correspondence with her daughter, Wolff identifies how the Empress establishes that authority at the very onset in her first letter to Marie Antoinette: "Stripped of the personal salutation that signals a letter as a letter, this self-styled 'regulation' revealed that all the more clearly the very nature of the epistolary writing as a narrative of power – that is, the literary articulation of the relation of power existing between two subjects." (27) In order to more closely examine the dynamics of power, and the daughter's response, in the correspondence, the basic concepts introduced by John Austin's

speech act theory can be particularly useful. While speech act theory is specifically targeted at *speech*, Austin's definition and identification of words and phrases that function as a means of saying and doing are conducive to a discussion of literary exchanges, as well Sandy Petrey investigates in his work *Speech Acts & Literary Theory*. I suggest that Austin's interest in the form and associated *function* of speech acts (*parole*) makes his argument particularly conducive to an analysis of epistolary discourse which often functions like dialogue and is replete with embedded speech, either direct or cited. Furthermore, the maternal correspondent in these three sets of letters specifically relies on language and the careful choice of words to persuade, coerce, or exhibit power over the other (the daughter) and thus to establish a maternal identity through linguistic performance.

Austin preliminarily develops the foundation of his argument in *How to do Things with Words* through the distinction between the constative and performative utterance. The constative is an utterance that is proven as either true or false – “the cat is on the mat”. Whether the respondent seeks referential proof and looks to see if the cat is truly on the mat or takes the locutor at his word, the cat either is or is not on the mat. The performative is an utterance that *does* or *performs* a particular action as it articulates it – “I now pronounce you man and wife”, “I christen this ship”, “I divorce you”. By *saying*, a performative utterance *does*. It is an expression “whose function is not to inform or to describe, but to carry out a ‘performance,’ to accomplish an *act* through the very process of the enunciation.” (Felman 15)

As a means of investigating the “act” as a whole, Austin considers first the locution, or any utterance. To borrow Sandy Petrey's example, let us consider the locution “The window is open”. By stating that the window is open, I may be warning you to close the

window, reminding you that the window was left open, or offering it as an explanation of why you are feeling chilly. This is the act's illocution – hidden within the language itself, the illocution is the implied action within the locution that suggests, explains, coerces, threatens, insists, or performs any number of actions simply by stating. However, whether or not these actions are carried out depends entirely on context and has little to no effect without being issued by an accepted authority. As Petrey states: “Locutionary form is complete and whole within the linguistic utterance; illocutionary force is a combination of language and social practice.” (13) Its success, happiness, or felicity, to use Austin's vocabulary, is dependent on collectively agreed upon social conventions. At my utterance that the window is open, you may choose to close the window, jump out of it, ignore me and leave the room, or any number of subsequent actions. This is the perlocution – the effect of what I've said. It is clear that there is no direct link between the illocution and perlocution, as they are dependent on two totally separate entities. You may not have understood my illocution (When I say “The window is open” I *mean* “Go close the window”) and choose to ignore me – in which case my illocution is not carried out. On the other hand, you may have understood my illocution very clearly but independently decide you want to leave the window open.

Just as the performative statement “I now pronounce you man and wife” has no effect without a justice of the peace, two unmarried consenting parties, and a legal document, the outcome of an illocutionary utterance – the perlocution – is affected by who utters it to whom, under what conditions, and with what authority. Petrey writes: “The collectivity can be as small as two people, but performative speech can never be the unilateral act of a single individual”. (5) In other words, speech that *does* something requires at least two people. The difference between the collective and the personal that is critical to all speech acts is that an

utterance has first been heard and then been understood by another party. (*Ibid.* 6) If I announce that “I miss you” alone in an empty room, who am I talking to? There is no performance because there is no recipient, no effect, and no outcome. What if a mother says it to her daughter? What if she writes it in a letter?

Ultimately, it is the next stage of Austin’s argument that makes the study of speech acts appropriate to an analysis of a “performance” of the maternal role as expressed *within* the language of epistolarity. Essentially, what happens when a constative *becomes* a performative, or vice versa? The example of “the window is open” is a constative – either the window is open or it is not. However, if by stating that the window is open I am issuing an illocution – ordering you to close the window – it is no longer true nor false, but, as Austin says, felicitous or infelicitous. My words are no longer just stating, but *doing* something. Will you or won’t you close the window?

I argue that the distinction between the constative and performative can be difficult to decipher in the mother’s correspondence because of the “performance” of her maternal role. A constative, such as “*je vous embrasse*”, in the maternal correspondence does not merely serve to pleasantly conclude a letter, but also to function as an assertive illocution, evoking an emotional reaction in the daughter that reaffirms the mother’s devotion, softens potential chastisement accompanied in the body of the letter and, ultimately, persuades the daughter to return her affection and adhere to her instruction. In this way, the constative (which merely says) *becomes* a performative (which does). On the other hand, what if the mother issues a performative statement, such as “I apologize”, but she doesn’t really mean it? According to Austin, if the performative is uttered in conjunction with other statements that are known to be factual, those statements will support “I apologize” as also factual. However, if the

respondent (the daughter) knows that her mother does not really mean it, the performative will only invoke the effect of the constative. Sandy Petrey writes that: “The same words with the same meaning – the same locutions – have different conventional powers, and one of the most important principles of speech act theory is that such difference of powers is at least as important in analyzing language as lexical and semantic identity.” (12) In short, the relationship between the mother’s understandings of “I apologize” as she utters it and the daughter’s understanding of the mother’s *performative* utterance is imperative to interpreting the dynamic and success of the speech act.

The juxtaposition of the constative and the performative – by *saying* the mother is *doing* – is what makes the epistolary form ideal for the mother to construct or manipulate her maternal role through the use of language. Traditional epistolary conventions such as the salutation “*Madame ma chère fille*” or the conclusion “*Je vous embrasse*”, though they may truly be written *only* as convention and devoid of deeply felt meaning, establish a positive and receptive framework for other utterances within the body of the letter that support the mother’s superfluous effusion of devotion as more appropriate and less perfunctory. An appropriately situated display of affection allows the mother a certain agency and purpose – she is completing the task at hand of writing her daughter – and legitimizes the additional content of her letter.

The language of the maternal correspondence in each set of letters is comprised of a series of statements that are meant to persuade, coerce, demand, and inform the daughter - to *perform* a certain action or carry out a particular illocution. I suggest that the ultimate function of statements that recur throughout the course of each correspondence proves that the mother is more interested in her use of language to perform her maternal identity than the

immediate effect or reaction of her daughter. This is not to say that the daughter's adherence to the mother's instruction is not significant – it is crucial – but the mother is aware of the limited capabilities of her power, particularly during periods of separation, and intentionally relies on the epistolary medium to make her *language* as powerful and effective as possible.⁹⁸

For example, statements meant to persuade or encourage the daughter of the mother's affection or allegiance, such as “*je vous assure*” are performative – saying equals doing. By writing “*je vous assure*” the mother is carrying out the act of persuasion or encouragement by offering her assurance. As primary correspondent, this also puts the mother in a dominant position in the correspondence. It doesn't matter (initially) if the mother doesn't mean it or if her assurance is only half-hearted. Because the women are separated by time and distance, the mother can *say* it with potential success, but she doesn't have to *mean* it. Even if the utterance is infelicitous, unsuccessful, or epistolary convention and the daughter chooses not to acknowledge it, “*je vous assure*” has a performative impact on the mother's expression of self and her maternal role that enriches her overall message and, also, informs the perception of a third party reader (however uninvited).

The letter serves as a means to fill the gap between mother and daughter in times of absence, insisting on the mother's emphasis on language to recall – and reconstruct – the memory of her physical presence. What the mother cannot accomplish in person, she must accomplish through language. In the case of statements such as “*je vous embrasse*”, the mother is able to actively use traditional epistolary devices meant to establish an amiable conclusion as a means of filling the gap of her physical presence. Her utterance “*je vous*

⁹⁸ Austin expresses an awareness of the threat that all utterances could become performative. I would not argue that is the case for each utterance of the maternal correspondence, but that it is not always clear when the mother is being truthful or when she is performing – or when she is doing both simultaneously (strategically using her true devotion to support or build the “performance”).

embrasse” is a performative that recalls a direct, physical action that cannot possibly be carried out. The mother *says* it, but she cannot *do* or adequately *mean* it. The performative is doomed to fail, whether the mother wishes to embrace her daughter or not. And yet, “*je vous embrasse*” serves an effective, practical purpose. Its conventional stylistic function successfully closes the letter in a loving, amiable tone and supports other expressions of devotion within the content of the letter. Also, it recalls the physical presence of the mother *as the final note* of the letter. By concluding with “*je vous embrasse*”, even as a stylistic convention, it recalls the physical embrace. To go a step further, after reading, the daughter may reread, close, or set aside the letter itself – additional tangible proof of the mother’s presence. To reiterate, the mother is immediately concerned with choosing and implementing the *language*, as simply by writing “*je vous assure*” or “*je vous embrasse*”, it performs a particular act and serves a function as part of a greater objective.

In cases where the mother is putting greater emphasis on the necessity of the daughter’s response, the illocution – the *force* of the statement – becomes more important. The most common example that involves a direct address of the mother’s goal – the object of the illocution – occurs in the request for the daughter’s letters. This comes as a performative statement (“*j’attends une petite lettre*”) or chastisement (“*il y a deux mois que je n’ai reçu de lettre de toi*”). While the mother may be coaxing or chastising, her request is clear – the daughter must write. In other cases, the meaning behind the mother’s statement – the object of the illocution implicit within the language itself - is not always so clear.

Consider Madame de Sévigné’s example from Chapter Two: “*Vous souhaitez être à Grignan. C’est le seul lieu, dites-vous, où vous ne dépensez rien; je comprends qu’un peu de séjour dans votre château ne vous serait pas inutile à cet égard, mais vous n’êtes plus en état*

de mettre cette considération au premier rang. Votre santé doit aller la première; c'est ce qui doit vous conduire." (17 Jan. 1680, Vol. III, 796) Sévigné begins with what could serve as a constative statement: "*Vous souhaitez être à Grignan. C'est le seul lieu, dites-vous, où vous ne dépensez rien.*" Does Madame de Grignan wish to be at her home in Grignan? To a third party reader that does not possess additional information, they can assume that Sévigné is quoting a previous exchange with her daughter and it is true. Sévigné continues: "*je comprends qu'un peu de séjour dans votre château ne vous serait pas inutile à cet égard, mais vous n'êtes plus en état de mettre cette considération au premier rang.*" Sévigné's "*je comprends*" understands, considers, and validates her daughter's wish, but the dependant clause that follows "*mais*" does just the opposite. At the time this letter was written, Madame de Grignan is pregnant. Sévigné states that, at the risk of her health, she is no longer in a position to take such a voyage. It becomes clear that Sévigné's constative "*Vous souhaitez être à Grignan*" is, in fact, a performative that reminds Madame de Grignan of a desire Sévigné wishes to convince her is unwise. Sévigné carefully and skillfully constructs an argument that appears focused on the consideration of Madame de Grignan's wishes and persuades her to consider her health, when, in fact, Sévigné is urging her daughter to stay near her side in Paris. Never does Sévigné explicitly state, "I would like you to stay in Paris". By omitting the "*je*" and focusing on the "*vous*" in the latter part of the citation, she distances herself from the argument and refers to a more general discussion of the daughter's health, urging her to consider for herself the risks of traveling to Grignan.

I am claiming, the distance between what the mother *says* and what she *means* – her "performance" – is focused on the careful construction of her maternal identity through the specific use of language. I strongly contend that there exists a significant connection between

the mother's performative use of language to coerce, persuade, and appeal to her daughter in the letters and that of a seducer's manipulation of language to acquire or appease the object of his seduction. Shoshana Felman's work, *The Literary Speech Act: Don Juan with J.L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages*, addresses issues of seduction and promising in Molière's *Don Juan* through an application of Austin's theory of speech acts. Felman first establishes that it is necessary to distinguish between explicit and implicit performances, as I expressed above in the example of maternal discourse by Madame de Sévigné. However, as Felman addresses, once we determine the existence of implicit performatives it is difficult to find a sentence that would not act as such. (17) Statements such as "I declare" or "I affirm" are neither true nor false, but act as any other piece of advice, warnings, verdicts, and so on. (*Ibid.* 18)

With this in mind, Felman addresses two opposing views of language. In the first, according to the cognitive view, language is an instrument for transmitting *truth*. "Truth is the relation of perfect congruence between an utterance and its referent, and, in a general way, between language and the reality it represents." (27) In this view, the function of language is strictly *constative*, in which the utterance must correspond to its real referent to determine its truth – or its falsity. (*Ibid.*) In the second view, saying is not tantamount to knowing, but to *doing* - "acting on the interlocutor, modifying the situation and the interplay of forces within it". (*Ibid.*) According to this perspective, language is *performative*, not informative. It cannot be qualified as true or false, but rather as felicitous or infelicitous, successful or unsuccessful. (*Ibid.*) To Don Juan, language is about *doing* ("I promise"). To his pursuers, it is about *truth* ("We need to know the truth"):

"Don Juan and the others is thus a dialogue between two orders that, in reality, do not communicate: the order of the act and the order of meaning, the

register of pleasure and the register of knowledge. When he replies ‘I promise’ to ‘we have to know the truth,’ the seducer’s strategy is paradoxically to create, in a linguistic space that he himself controls, a *dialogue of the deaf*. For, by committing speech acts, Don Juan literally escapes the hold of truth. Although he has no intention whatsoever of keeping his promises, the seducer, strictly speaking, does not lie, since he is doing no more than playing on the self-referential property of these performative utterances, and is effectively accomplishing the speech acts that he is naming. The trap of seduction thus consists in producing a *referential illusion* through an utterance that is by its very nature *self-referential*: the illusion of a real or extralinguistic act of commitment created by an utterance that refers only to itself.” (*Ibid.*)

Just as the mother’s performative utterance “*Je vous assure*” is successful by its pronouncement alone, Don Juan’s “I promise” is successfully performed. His pursuers, who perceive language as an instrument of truth, assume or demand a perfect congruence between referent and utterance. “For the promise of love, believers in this order of language insist on an absolute correspondence between words and ‘feeling’.” (Fletcher 32) They are, therefore, victims in Don Juan’s “trap of seduction”. For Don Juan, for whom language is about *doing*, he is able to manipulate the language for his own purposes. When Don Juan says “I love you”, he knows that by *saying* it, he is potentially eliciting a response in his pursuer that is based on their referent of “love”, even though his notion of love is different or, more accurately in this case, he doesn’t *mean* it. Don Juan abuses the speech act through a performative manipulation of language in which he ignores sincerity and constructs a reality in the mind of his pursuer that is different from his own, but meant to fulfill his own agenda, desires, or needs. He is performing. (He is *lying*.)

I argue that the mother is intentionally manipulating the language to fulfill a specific purpose, but I hesitate to label it a deliberate or calculated (one could say DonJuanian) *lie* because the mother’s language is, as I will address, rooted in truth. There is a distance

between the mother's *reality* and the mother's *language*, which is constructed to insist on a particular truth that the mother has created. The truth of her actual reality and the truth she imparts in her letters are not necessarily the same thing. When Marie-Thérèse writes to Marie Antoinette and applauds her for good behavior and the acknowledgement of her instruction when, in fact, Marie-Thérèse is well aware that Marie Antoinette has ignored her, she carries out her "performance" by creating two different realities – her *actual* reality where she is frustrated with her child – and the reality she constructs in the letter where she praises her in an effort to encourage her (a reality that she would like her daughter to achieve/perform). Like the seducer, the mother's use of language is about *doing*, while, like the seduced, the daughter depends on a referent that fosters knowledge and determines truth. If that referent is manufactured – the truth manipulated through language – the mother, like the seducer, issues performatives that are still successful and assumes a position of power.⁹⁹

I would argue that, in the maternal correspondence, the mother's choice of language is built upon a reality that she has *constructed* – that she is performing – in her letters, but that is, ultimately, rooted in the mother's *actual* reality. To recall a very simple example, if the mother writes to her daughter the constative utterance that her cat is on the mat (her performed reality), when her cat is really sitting in the windowsill (her actual reality), she writes it because she *needs* it to be true (or, more specifically, she needs her daughter to *believe* it to be true). The mother's "performance" in the correspondence is generated by a personal or political agenda that originates from events in her actual reality that require the

⁹⁹ Emile Benveniste puts greater emphasis on the criterion rather than choice of words when determining the success of a *performative*. If the statement is not issued by an appropriate figure of authority (in the first person singular), it is not longer a *performative*. In the mother's correspondence, she creates an environment where her authority is paramount. However, the daughter's age and status will complicate her success. This will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

absent daughter's involvement and for which purpose the mother must rely on the force of language (speech and speech acts) to appeal, persuade and coerce her child. However, unlike the seducer, who is certainly seeking to fulfill his or her own agenda through a construction of language, the "referential illusion" that is produced by the "trap of seduction" is particularly complicated for mother and daughter.

When Don Juan says, "I love you", his pursuer may recognize and accept what she understands as "love", but Don Juan is not *expected* to love her. In fact, it is this insecurity that prompts much of the women's desperate uncertainty (or, in this case, its correlation with a promise of marriage). Whereas the love of a lover is produced and generated, the love of mother and child is considered inherent. Therefore, when a mother says "I love you", she is drawing on the conventional social belief that the mother loves her child, and the daughter can more readily accept this constative utterance as true, because she is not solely reliant on the context of her own relationship with her mother, but is able to draw on social convention to corroborate the mother's statement.¹⁰⁰ As I established in Chapter One, by the turn of the nineteenth century the mother's devotion is the social *expectation* (hence why it functions successfully in a "performance" of maternal identity). In addition, the mother's position of linguistic dominance is further supported by her familial (and political) position of power during the daughter's childhood. Like Don Juan, the mother's "*je vous assure*" or "I promise" is empty – an extralinguistic act of commitment that refers only to itself. When the mother issues a performative that is meant to impart knowledge, convention dictates that the

¹⁰⁰ Sandy Petrey argues that: "Illocutionary force inevitably – constitutively – derives from collective protocols; by definition, a collectivity cannot be reduce to one of its members. Every speech act is an institutional fact; none requires the brute fact of a particular person's presence in a particular place." Therefore, the mother is able to rely on the convention of the social and linguistic conventions surrounding maternal love and enacts it to represent her presence and voice. (79)

daughter is naturally inclined (particularly in the early years of the correspondence) to accept it. Just as a lover may take Don Juan at his word, the daughter is doubly inclined to adhere to her mother's instruction.

In the early years of the correspondence, especially, social precedence that complicates the mother's role serves to strengthen her "performance" and, therefore, the success of her *performative*. However, like a romantic seduction, winning the object of one's desire is a gradual process. The mother's correspondence is repetitive and extensive. As I argued in Chapter Two, she repeats general instructions, flatteries, requests, persuasions, and chastisements over and over again in almost every letter for at least a decade. The nature of persuasive language is that it must be executed and instilled through repetition. In Felman's example, Don Juan may use "I" in his *performatives*, but the utterance is directed at the object of his desire. She writes: "Just as seductive discourse exploits the capacity of language to reflect itself, by means of the self-referentiality of performative verbs, it also exploits the parallel fashion the self-referentiality of the interlocutor's narcissistic desire, and his (or her) capacity to produce in turn a reflexive, specular illusion: the seducer holds out to women the narcissistic mirror of their own desire to themselves. Thus Don Juan says to Charlotte: 'You are not *obliged* to me for what I say, you owe it entirely to your own beauty... Your beauty is your *security*'." (31)

In the case of the mother's correspondence and the reality she constructs in the letters, her daughter's security rests in the fact that she is loved and protected by the mother. The mother offers the daughter "the narcissistic mirror" of her own desire, in which she exalts her charm, beauty, and tender quality, and then reflects it *back* upon herself. If the mother sees the daughter as an extension of her herself in the correspondence (as I argue in Chapter Two

proves that she does), she not only appeals to the daughter's (childhood) need for acceptance of her good qualities, but also fills the void of the lost or absent mother through linguistic support and praise. The daughter is protected by the mother's love even though the mother is not there.

Madame de Sévigné affirms her love for her daughter as superior to all others: "*Vous me baisiez et vous m'embrassez si tendrement! Pensez-vous que je ne reçoive point vos caresses à bras ouverts? Pensez-vous que je ne baise point aussi de tout mon cœur vos belles joues et votre belle gorge? Pensez-vous que je puisse vous embrasser sans une tendresse infinie? Pensez-vous que l'amitié puisse jamais aller plus loin que celle que j'ai pour vous?*" (9 Apr. 1671, Vol. I, 215) In this letter, Sévigné is literally attempting to fill the gap of physical absence. To do so, she praises the daughter's beautiful – and physical - qualities (*vos belles joues et votre belle gorge*) and puts emphasis on receiving the daughter. And yet, the imagery she creates is that of the waiting *mother* – comforting, protective - whose love for the daughter is unmatched. In this way, the force of Sévigné's language is *seductive*.

For Marie-Thérèse and Joséphine Bonaparte, their daughters' behavior is a direct reflection of their own status (which manifests as a reflection of the mother's health and happiness in the correspondence). Marie-Thérèse, perhaps the most directly forceful (that is to say, her intentions are more explicit) of the three maternal figures of this study, writes to Marie Antoinette: "*Je n'ai pu me taire sur ce point important dont votre bonheur et encore plus votre gloire dépend. Croyez à une mère, à une amie qui a bien expérimenté le monde et les hommes et qui n'est occupée que du bonheur et bien-être de ses enfants.*" (30 Aug. 1777, 293) In this letter, related to the young queen's marriage, Marie-Thérèse appeals to Marie Antoinette to exploit her good qualities and dedicate herself to the preservation of her

marriage (and the birth of children). While Marie-Thérèse is focused on Marie Antoinette, her daughter's *bonheur* and *gloire* are, inextricably, her own (as the Empress's personal agenda, implicit linguistic force, and explicit insistence on the health of the Franco-Austrian alliance has proven). In which case, the *je* and *vous* are linked.

Émile Benveniste, in his article "Subjectivity in Language", which addresses issues in J.L. Austin's theory of speech acts, applies a psychoanalytical analysis to a study of the nature of subjectivity as it manifests in linguistics. He writes: "Language is possible only because each speaker sets himself up as a *subject* by referring to himself as *I* in his discourse. Because of this, *I* posits another person, the one who, being, as he is, completely exterior to 'me,' becomes my echo to whom I say *you* and who says *you* to me...neither of the terms can be conceived of without the other; they are complementary, although according to an 'interior/exterior' opposition, and, at the same time, they are reversible." (225) Benveniste's conclusion of the *I* as a partner to the *you* is particularly suitable to the symbiosis of the mother-daughter relationship in the maternal correspondence. Benveniste argues that the *I* can be used and assumed by any individual wishing to define his or her own subjective dialogue. The person who assumes the *I* controls the dialogue. However, he argues: "verbs like "suppose, presume, and conclude, put in the first person, do not behave the way, for example, reason and reflect do, which seem, however, to be very close." (228) Basically, "I reason" or "I reflect" describe the personal process of reasoning or reflecting based on a specific, personal experience. Whereas, "I conclude", "I suppose" or "I presume" are based in given fact.

In the case of the maternal correspondence, the mother asserts her own person through her use of *I*, but she also shares it with her daughter. By coaxing, persuading, or

advising her child, she offers an *I* that is accessible to the daughter's *you*. By writing, "I reason", she appeals to the personal relationship and shared *convention* of their private correspondence, in which the daughter *knows* the mother and can assume the same position (Joséphine's "*tu me connais*"¹⁰¹). Similarly, if she writes "I conclude", the daughter is able to draw from her knowledge of her mother's temperament and reasoning *as well as* a social convention based on fact and reason. The ability to manipulate and control the use of *I* is the key to the mother's power in the correspondence. When Sévigné separates herself from *je* as a means of convincing her daughter to stay in Paris, she appeals to the daughter's understanding of basic fact and reason, when in fact Sévigné is really persuading and implementing her own agenda.

While Sévigné accounts for and even relies on her daughter's understanding of her language, and Marie-Thérèse explicitly states her agenda (establishing a shared convention), Joséphine's correspondence is arguably the most self-referential of the three and allows very little space in the letters for a definition of Hortense's character. In this case, the *je* largely overshadows the *tu*. In the months before the coronation, it seems that Hortense has neglected to write the Emperor at regular intervals and, perhaps, has written a letter that has displeased him. Joséphine writes: "*L'Empereur a lu ta lettre; il m'a paru fâché de ne pas recevoir quelquefois de tes lettres. Il n'accuserait pas ton cœur s'il le connaissait comme moi, qui sais même deviner tout ce que tu penses; mais les apparences sont contre toi...Je ne puis penser à l'idée d'être loin de toi à ce moment. Sois sûre, ma chère Hortense, que rien ne peut m'empêcher de t'aller soigner; c'est pour toi, et encore plus pour moi.*" (8 Sept. 1804,

¹⁰¹ Where I would otherwise refer to the more formal *vous*, in French, Joséphine refers to her daughter most frequently in the informal *tu* (as I addressed in Chapter Two). In both cases, I am ultimately referring to Benveniste's linguistic definition and analysis of the English *you* in its relation to the *I*.

148) Throughout the letter, her advice to Hortense aimed at repairing her reputation with the Emperor is issued in imperatives (“*Dis-lui*”, “*Ne perds donc pas un instant*”). In this way, Joséphine exerts her authority *and* appeals to Hortense’s reasoning. That being said, Joséphine (the *je*) is never at any moment excluded from the discourse. Benveniste argues that, by referring to Napoléon in the third person, Joséphine separates him from the subjective *je-tu* and he becomes a “non-person”. The third person “does *not* refer to a person because it refers to an object located outside direct address. But it exists and is characterized only by its opposition to the person *I* of the speaker who, in uttering it, situates it as a ‘non-person’.” (229) Whereas “I am angry” is a threat or a performative exclamation, “he is angry” is simply a description that lacks the same force. Napoléon is not writing it or saying it – he is not present – he is a “non-person”.

Because Joséphine controls the correspondence, her choice to implement the *je* is strategic and places her in a position of power. If the *je* and the *tu* define one another – there is no *je* without the *tu* – then the exclusion of Napoléon (and *all* other third parties) strengthens the private and personal nature of the correspondence between mother and daughter and, likewise, the mother’s insistence on the daughter’s importance. The mother explicitly defines her identity (her “performance”) as being dependent on the daughter, which is strengthened by the relationship of the *je* and the *vous*¹⁰². Therefore, what happens when the daughter rejects the mother and ignores her? How does the mother produce the daughter’s *vous* when she hasn’t heard from her in two months?

Based on how constative statements can be performative and thus act upon the recipient of the letter, several questions arise when considering the daughter’s reception and

¹⁰² Again, I include all three maternal correspondences by using the French *vous*.

reaction to the mother's correspondence. What does the daughter accept as true or untrue? Does the daughter accept the mother's authority at all? How does the daughter receive and understand the mother's words and what informs how she reacts or acts upon those words? The next chapter will seek to investigate the reaction of the daughter based on speech act theory and evidence of the daughter's adherence, appeasement, rebellion, and independence as she grows into womanhood and, eventually, becomes a mother herself.

CHAPTER IV

LIBERATION OF THE DAUGHTER'S VOICE

Madame de Sévigné, Marie-Thérèse, and Joséphine Bonaparte each initiate the maternal correspondence at the beginning of the physical separation with her daughter, who reciprocates the exchange even after she becomes a mother herself. While this study may be centered on the letters of three specific women, there are truly six *mothers* participating in the discourse and only *four* existing correspondences. This chapter will investigate the character and voice of the daughter as it seeks to assert itself independently of the mother. Even in cases where the daughter's responses have long ago disappeared, clues and indications of her reactions make her voice present even in absence. Because of the disappearance of Madame de Grignan and Hortense de Beauharnais's writing, Marie Antoinette's existing letters to her mother provide a valuable resource for analysis and comparison, enriching a reading of her mother's letters and, in turn, provides an echo of the other "absent" daughters.

This chapter will investigate the development of the daughter's character considering her observance of epistolary formalities and the expectation of her reciprocation. I seek to prove that, based on linguistic evidence in Marie Antoinette's letters, circumstances in the daughter's life that may affect their responses, and intertextual clues in the mother's correspondence, each daughter participates in a "performance" of her own. Through the construction of this "performance", she acknowledges her mother's instruction through a reciprocal epistolary exchange, but demonstrates evidence of resistance or rebellion against the mother's influence. Incorporating concepts introduced by J.L. Austin's speech act theory, I will investigate *how* the daughter's voice presents itself within the correspondence, with

particular attention to the daughter's acceptance (and complication) of the mother's authority. How can the reader determine through the arc of the correspondence whether or not the mother's illocutions have been successful? Indeed, how do the daughter's voice and tone manifest and evolve over the course of the correspondence? I suggest that there are four stages of the daughter's response: (1) Adherence, in which the daughter abides by her mother's instruction; (2) Appeasement, in which the daughter begins to settle into her independence; (3) Rebellion, in which the daughter becomes queen or mother and asserts her own agenda that may conflict with her own mother's, and; (4) Liberation, in which the daughter respects her own agenda with (it can be argued) respectful consideration of her mother's wishes.

Before beginning an analysis of the structure and content of the letters that is supported most generally by Marie Antoinette's existing correspondence, it is necessary to outline certain problems presented by the absence of Madame de Grignan and Hortense de Beauharnais's letters. Their unfortunate absence forces a reliance on Marie Antoinette's letters and a certain amount of speculation towards the daughter's behavior and, perhaps more importantly, the language of her response. It can be argued that the *actual* absence of the daughter's letters strengthens Madame de Sévigné and Joséphine Bonaparte's maternal voice and, therefore, puts them in a more secure position of linguistic dominance. I would strongly suggest that, while this may appear to be the case, consistent patterns in the maternal correspondences that I have proven in the last three chapters provide a means of establishing a similar consistency in the daughter's responses. It is true that the reader is forced to fill in the gaps – and a detailed analysis of the *nuance* of the daughters' voices is difficult if not impossible – but this study will show that it is possible to consider the evidence of trends in

the daughters' letters, clues in the mother's letters as to the daughter's responses, and the events of the daughter's personal life that may have an impact on how she receives the mother's illocution.

In the second chapter of this study related to the construction of the maternal voice, I analyzed the basic stylistic structure of the letter that originated from each mother, including the salutation, recurrent thematic qualities of the letter, and the closing remarks. Each letter penned from mother to daughter is focused on the reassertion of the mother's devotion and necessity for reciprocation, at the forefront, regardless of historical era or personal circumstance. When considering the structure and thematic content of the daughter's letter, it is necessary to recall the claim, introduced by Altman, that while one party (the mother) is driven by '*confiance*', '*amitié*' and sincerity, the other (the daughter) responds with dissimulation, feint, and the desire to please. (69) Thanks to the preservation of Marie Antoinette's letters, it is possible to draw more detailed conclusions of the structure and tone of the other daughters' letters.

Marie Antoinette begins each letter with the salutation "*Madame ma très chère mère*". (Consult Appendix C for further reference.) While Marie-Thérèse often neglects to include the salutation, Marie Antoinette never omits it, preemptively indicating an observance to epistolary formality, but also an awareness of the Empress's keen and critical eye and social stature. Unlike the mother's conflicting "*Madame ma chère fille*", which confuses signals both of the daughter's social superiority and her familial inferiority, the daughter's salutation is straightforward and respectful. In a standard letter from Marie Antoinette, she begins with a confirmation of the courier's arrival and remarks on details of her mother's last letter. This is followed by news of the French court and, specifically, details

of her reputation (always positive) and marital situation. After the initial stages of her arrival at Versailles, and her mother's letters become more punishing in tone, the young dauphine, now more comfortable in her position at court, uses much of the body of the letter to defend her most recent actions or undertakings, responding directly to her mother's accusations. Each letter concludes with compliments and a reiteration of the daughter's loyalty and devotion to the mother, although it is very rarely effusive. By 1774, Marie Antoinette cordially requests her mother's embrace in almost every letter. She writes: "*J'espère qu'elle [the Empress] est bonne, mais j'aimerais bien à être rassurée sur la chose du monde qui m'est la plus chère. Permet-elle que je l'embrasse de tout mon cœur?*" (7 Sept., 195)¹⁰⁴

Epistolary formalities such as "*je vous embrasse*" (as investigated in the second chapter) are as useful to the daughter as they are to the mother – providing a means by which to formally close the letter and frame the content of the letter as a whole. I argue in the second and third chapters that the mother's "*je vous embrasse*" is an assertive illocution – a *performative* – that is used to reaffirm her devotion, remind the daughter of her maternal bond as a tactic of persuasion, and, in some cases, positively bookend a particularly chastising letter. As each daughter would have adhered to a tradition of basic epistolary structure, each daughter would employ similar salutations and conclusions – "*je vous embrasse*" – as Marie Antoinette, who uses the affectionate and formal conclusion as a means of politely exiting the dialogue, reaffirming her loyalty, appeasing the mother, and reassuring her doubts. To go a step further, this provides the first, most basic source of analysis for the daughter's *je*.

¹⁰⁴ It is significant that Marie Antoinette refers to her mother in the third person, as I established at the end of the third chapter in my discussion of Benveniste's theories of subjectivity. I will address its presence in the daughter's letters in greater detail later on.

Where the daughter's *je* is not available directly (Grignan, Beauharnais), it is necessary to refer to the mother's correspondence. However, this can be misleading as the *je* and the *vous* in the mother's letters are linked (as I discussed in the previous chapter) in such a way that the mother's definition of the daughter's character is an active part of her "performance". This presents the question: How can a reader discern the real nature of the daughter's character in the mother's *vous*?

It is possible to look at Madame de Sévigné's example from Chapter Three, "*Vous souhaitez être à Grignan*", to address the pertinent issue of searching for the daughter in the mother's voice. Sévigné herself controls the *vous* in her letters – she has chosen it, written it, it is informed by the mother's *je* and it is dependent on her choice of language and expression. However, in this particular example, Sévigné puts herself in a position of understanding and counsel: "*C'est le seul lieu, dites-vous, où vous ne dépensez rien; je comprends qu'un peu de séjour dans votre château ne vous serait pas inutile à cet égard, mais vous n'êtes plus en état de mettre cette considération au premier rang. Votre santé doit aller la première; c'est ce qui doit vous conduire.*" (17 Jan. 1680, Vol. III, 796) Sévigné wishes for her pregnant daughter to stay in Paris, rather than traveling to Grignan. However, in order to *persuade* her, she constructs an argument that avoids forceful illocutions – opting instead for "*je comprends*" and a focus on the *vous*. For Sévigné's illocution to be successful – for her to convince her daughter that it is wise to *change her mind* and remain in Paris – the mother's locution must be based in *reality*. Specifically, it must be based in a reality that is referential to both mother and daughter. Therefore, the daughter must be able to recognize herself in this *vous* (and, consequently, in the mother's "*je comprends*").

Joséphine, it can be argued, presents the most complicated definition of her daughter's *tu*, which is largely due to her brief and repetitive writing style. Joséphine regurgitates manufactured expressions of maternal devotion that are dependent on an outpouring of the mother's emotion and primarily focused on the *je*. For example, to return to another example from Chapter Three, she writes: "*L'Empereur a lu ta lettre; il m'a paru fâché de ne pas recevoir quelquefois de tes lettres. Il n'accuserait pas ton cœur s'il le connaissait comme moi, qui sais même deviner tout ce que tu penses; mais les apparences sont contre toi.*" (8 Sept. 1804, 148) Throughout the letter, Joséphine advises Hortense on the appropriate means of rectifying Napoléon's dissatisfaction. However, her qualifying argument for understanding and justifying Hortense's actions – that she knows her so well she can "guess", "perceive" or "infer" what Hortense is thinking – cannot be proven and is not based in a concrete reality that is accessible or identifiable to Hortense. There is no explicit evidence that Joséphine understands Hortense's absence and no common referential. While the reader cannot know the true nature of their unique relationship (which, by all accounts, is close but not to such an extent that Joséphine could interpret her behavior – especially in times of separation), Joséphine's claim is unrealistic and contradictory, as Hortense's *actions* appear to be against to Joséphine's immediate needs. I would go so far as to say that Joséphine has not carefully thought about this justification of understanding Hortense's behavior (as Madame de Sévigné does), but regurgitates an expression of maternal devotion that is meant to persuade her daughter. Joséphine's conviction lacks a concrete basis and, as a result, the reader is forced to read between the lines to determine

Hortense's true voice. In this case, it's not what Joséphine says, but what she *doesn't* say, that informs the reader of Hortense's character and identifies her voice.¹⁰⁷

In the third chapter, I argued that the mother, as the dominating voice of the correspondence, forces the daughter to mentally assume three states of being at once: her childhood self as remembered by her mother, her adult self as dictated by her mother, and her actual self that is known fully only to herself (the combined whole of her true experience). How, then, does the daughter manage to dictate her true self in the face of her mother's dominating influence? Or, more specifically, what is the evidence that the mother's illocutionary act is successful or unsuccessful? In what ways does the daughter assert her own identity outside the context of her mother's letters?

As the daughter ages into adulthood outside of the family home – to which she cannot return in the same capacity, if ever - she accumulates experiences and opinions that independently shape her character and, eventually, clash with the expectations established by her parents during childhood. Despite the literary illustration of the daughter as an extension of the mother (often represented by the mother in the correspondence as discussed in the second and third chapters), the daughter acquires knowledge and experience that is unavailable and unknown to the mother. In this way, the daughter is no longer an extension or mirror of the mother, but an independent entity that is shaped and educated by early experiences under her mother's supervision. Long periods of separation between mother and child create a breach; the mother is unable to adjust, understand, or – in some cases – acknowledge the variations of her daughter's character as an adult as they conflict with the

¹⁰⁷ Based on Duchêne's research, there is not another separation between Madame de Sévigné and Madame de Grignan until September 12, 1684 (four years after this letter was issued). It can be assumed that Sévigné's illocution, in that case, was carried out. There is no evidence of a letter from Hortense to Napoléon related to this one after September 1804, based on my findings.

mother's memory of the daughter as a child. Mother and daughter are caught in a conflict in which the mother appeals to and expects the daughter's cooperation, while the daughter wishes to appease (whether for personal or political reasons) but may not wish to cooperate.

If mother and daughter are separated for extended periods of time, during which time the daughter marries, ages, and acquires independent status, why does the mother assume she has control over her child? Inherent maternal authority is established within the family home, solidified by the mother's physical presence and familial status. Outside of accepted mandates of the mother's jurisdiction over the daughter's affairs, royal figures, specifically Marie-Thérèse and Joséphine Bonaparte, are granted political and social authority because God and the people ordain them.¹⁰⁸ Madame de Sévigné, though not a monarch, possesses an aristocratic title and strategic popularity at court that grants her a certain amount of authority. However, daughters, who may respect their mother's political or social status, possess a familial proximity and *amitié* (encouraged by the mother) that complicates the mother's authority. In addition, long periods of physical separation and the loss of the mother's direct authority after the daughter's marriage weaken the mother's influence, making the correspondence and *language* more essential as the daughter ages.

While the letter serves as a tangible reminder of the mother's physical presence and influence, Austin asserts that perlocutionary effects can be (and, I would add, are more likely to be) achieved non-verbally. He underlines the difference between "I ordered him and he obeyed" and "I got him to obey" by stating: "The general implication of the latter is that other additional means were employed to produce this consequence as ascribable to me, inducements, personal presence, and influence which may amount to duress; there is even

¹⁰⁸ There is also the important stipulation that Joséphine Bonaparte's political power is mandated and controlled - "ordained" - by Napoléon.

very often an illocutionary act distinct from merely ordering, as when I say ‘I got him to do it by stating *x*’.” (118) In the end, the implementation of the mother’s effect may be dependent on more than simply language. An overarching masculine authority (the Emperor, the king, the husband), the daughter’s growing independence, and the inability to be personally present or *force* the daughter to adhere to her instruction complicate the mother’s last word. Once the daughter has grown into her role as wife, mother and queen (separate from her mother), the mother’s illocutionary utterances begin to be interpreted as, what Austin has dubbed, misapplications. In order for certain illocutions to be carried out, certain conditions must be met, including the acceptance of the issuing party’s authority. When that authority is misplaced or unaccepted, it is a misapplication. (28)

With this in mind, how does the daughter prove *linguistically* that the mother’s authority is being compromised? How does the daughter assert her own agency? Returning to a discussion of the daughter’s “*je vous embrasse*”, the very presence of the daughter’s *je* in her own correspondence asserts an independent dominance. Benveniste asserts that the capacity of the speaker to posit himself as ‘subject’ “is defined not by the feeling which everyone experiences of being himself (this feeling, to the degree that it can be taken note of, is only a reflection) but as the psychic unity that transcends the totality of the actual experiences it assembles and that makes the permanence of the consciousness”. (224) By declaring herself as ‘subject’, the daughter’s *je* is still dependent on, informed by, and interacts with the mother’s *vous*, but she also inherits the linguistic power of the *je* in written form. In this way, as the daughter acquires her own sense of independence, she exerts more agency in her own letters.

In consideration of thematic details that point towards the linguistic power behind a particular “performance” of the daughter’s role, Marie Antoinette’s letters are key. To illustrate, the most direct outpouring of devotion from Marie Antoinette occurs when her brother, Joseph II, departs France after his visit in 1777. She writes to her mother: “*Ma séparation de mon frère m’a donné une cruelle secousse. J’ai souffert tout ce qui est possible, et je ne puis me consoler qu’en pensant qu’il a partagé ma peine...Pour moi, je serais bien injuste si ma douleur et le vide que j’éprouve ne me laissaient que des regrets.*” (June 16, 288) In this letter, Marie Antoinette expresses that she is cognizant of her brother’s best intentions, for which she respects him as a king and sibling. This particular letter arrives during a time when, as discussed in the previous chapter, the Empress had distanced herself from Marie Antoinette and sent the Emperor to counsel her. In this instance, Marie Antoinette seeks to convince her mother of her dedication to the Emperor, strengthening her commitment through an emphasis on their familial connection, and, in her nostalgia for home, she reaffirms her loyalty to her mother and the Austrian monarchy. Despite her insistence that she understands and will adhere to her brother’s counsel in this letter, Marie Antoinette’s irresponsible behavior experiences no significant changes and she does not become pregnant for another year after this encounter.

In this case, Marie Antoinette’s performative “*j’ai souffert*” belies the reality that Joseph’s visit has had little effect, and she is seeking simply to placate her mother – and, perhaps more directly, to subside eventual chastisement. In this way, Marie Antoinette, like her mother, constructs a reality of her own that exists within her own correspondence. Though it fulfills a different purpose – one that is largely defensive – the daughter invents a portrait of herself which conflicts with her *actual* reality or intentions. In this way, the

daughter's "*je vous promis*" or "*je vous assure*" function similarly to the mother's, in that they are performatives and are, ultimately, only self-referential. Just because the daughter *says* it, doesn't prove that she *means* it, even if it appears that way.

However, the conundrum of the daughter's correspondence, as is demonstrated by Marie Antoinette's letters, is the daughter's balance between a constructed identity that appeals to her mother's instruction, and the desire to *assert* her independence and intentionally expose her true self. While this specific example may not be suitable for Mme de Grignan and Hortense – for whom specific examples cannot be proven - it remains not only possible, but highly likely, that they employed some of the same techniques to construct a "performance" of their filial role as Marie Antoinette, including the excessive insistence on attachment to family to convince the mother of their loyalty and the involvement of third parties to assert their commitment to and acknowledgement of the maternal instruction.

In 1775, before Marie Antoinette's marriage has been consummated, she responds to a particularly scathing letter from her mother: "*Ma chère maman en juge autrement, c'est à moi à baisser la tête et à espérer que, dans d'autres circonstances, elle me jugera plus favorablement et, j'ose dire, comme je le mérite.*" (12 Aug., 225) Marie Antoinette, essentially, takes full possession of the *je* and assumes her own position of authority. That being said, to what extent is "*j'ose dire*" a part of Marie Antoinette's "performance", versus an assertion of her independence? I suggest that it is both. The daughter *insists* that she is worthy of greater esteem from her mother than to be compared to Pompadour or Du Barry, as Marie-Thérèse does in her previous letter. (*Ibid.* 224)¹¹⁴ Her tone suggests that her *performative* is explicit – she deserves respect. Likewise, she refers to her mother *in the third*

¹¹⁴ "*Etre comparée aux Pompadour, aux Du Barry, couverte des epithets les plus affreuses, ne va pas à votre fille.*"

person. There are only two mentions of *vous* as possessive pronouns, accompanied by exclusively third person references to the mother as a subject in the letter. By omitting *vous*, Marie Antoinette adds greater emphasis on the *je* and, in Benveniste's terms, the mother becomes a "non-person" in the letter. Through the emphasis of *je*, daughter takes full authority over the dialogue. And yet, the mother is still *present* in the letter – an illusive *vous* – maintaining the daughter's *je* and substantiating her *performatives* (which, according to Austin, requires two people).

To go a step further, I argued in Chapter Three that the mother's "*je vous embrasse*" is a performative that recalls a direct, physical action that cannot possibly be carried out, but that it still serves a practical purpose of closing the letter and reminding the daughter of the mother's physical presence. With this in mind, I find Marie Antoinette's repetitive question: "*Permet-elle* [the Empress] *que je l'embrasse de tout mon cœur?*" to be significant if considered along the lines of Benveniste's theories regarding subjectivity. By referring to her mother in the third-person, it can be assumed that Marie Antoinette is acknowledging her mother's hierarchical status, and in so doing she seeks to respect and appease her. However, by using the third person, the daughter creates a distance between herself and the mother that, in a certain sense, returns the mother's "*je vous embrasse*" while simultaneously negating it. By creating a distance between herself and her mother (the *je* and the *vous*), Marie Antoinette recognizes that the physical embrace cannot possibly be accomplished. In addition, she poses it as a *question*. As an interrogative, the performative utterance takes on a different significance. When said in person, an action that is *requested* cannot be fulfilled with the same success until the request has been answered. When mother and daughter are separated, the impossibility of the embrace is made more impossible still as a question.

It can be argued that Marie-Thérèse makes the greatest effort to supersede the threat of *misapplication* (complications to her authority) by upholding a regular correspondence, sending the Austrian Emperor as an overwhelming masculine presence supportive of the Empress's agenda, promoting an amicable alliance with France, and augmenting her own voice, instruction, and surveillance through the physical presence of Mercy and the Abbé Vermond (her daughter's confidant in the early stages of the correspondence). However, like Mme de Grignan and Hortense, Marie Antoinette's independence, personality, and environment – which all affected the context of the Empresses' injunction, admonition, cajoling and orders - proved to influence and circumvent her mother's control.

This demands the question: When *is* the mother's authority accepted? The daughter's most faithful phase of acknowledgment of the mother's instruction (in which the mother's illocutions are most often carried out) exists in the early stages of the correspondence, when the daughter is the youngest and most recently separated from her mother – the period of adherence. Directly following the *jour de départ*, mother and daughter are most closely linked and accustomed to traditions of authority and compliance established within the family home – they inhabit the same conventions. It is in the daughter's natural rhythm to follow the mother's instruction and report of her activities. In Marie-Thérèse's first letter to her daughter, she commands Marie Antoinette's actions throughout the day in the future tense, prematurely anticipating her strict obedience. She writes: “*Vous vous recueillerez pendant le jour le plus souvent que vous pourrez, surtout à la sainte messe. J'espère que vous l'entendrez avec édification tous les jours, et même deux les dimanches et les jours de fête, si c'est coutume à votre cour.*” (21 Apr. 1770, 41) In her first letter of response, dated three months later, Marie Antoinette devotedly replies: “*Je me confesserai à cinq heures à l'abbé*

Maudoux, Mercy et l'abbé m'ayant conseillé de le prendre. Je n'ai point douté que vous en serez contente, et le roi était aussi content." (9 July 1770, 49) At this point in the correspondence, Marie Antoinette is not manipulating her responses or carefully choosing her words, but faithfully addressing her mother's requests and reporting on the state of her affairs at the French court.

In addition, as the exchange between Marie-Thérèse and her daughter is centered on the daughter's menstrual cycle and sexual relationship with her new husband, this period of the correspondence also involves the most direct information by Marie Antoinette concerning her marital situation. She writes in July of 1770: "*Pour la générale [menstrual period], c'est le quatrième mois qu'elle ne vient point, sans avoir de bonne raison.*" (12 July, 50) As the correspondence progresses, Marie Antoinette becomes less specific about *la générale* and embellishes her attachment to her husband. She does not embellish or attempt to impart a particular message – she is simply reporting the constative. *La générale* did not come. It is at this point that the mother's reaction to the daughter's information begins to affect the nature of the exchange, especially as the daughter grows into her adulthood. In the case of Marie-Thérèse, information from Marie Antoinette and Mercy during the early stages already inspires worry that her daughter is not doing what she should to become pregnant. Marie Antoinette's constative utterance *has an effect*. It is in this regard that Marie Antoinette receives a significant amount of reprimand, for a situation that is most likely not directly her fault.

Madame de Sévigné presents, perhaps, the most complex correspondence in which to decipher the daughter's responses. It is clear from Sévigné's letter when her daughter has written or neglected her letters, and, in some cases, when the women have quarreled.

However, as addressed in previous chapters, Sévigné closes every letter to her daughter with a reaffirmation of her devotion and most often praises (even exalts) her daughter's character. Also, Madame de Grignan is older at the time of her marriage (23 years of age), versus Marie Antoinette (15) and Hortense de Beauharnais (19), signifying that she lived in the family home at her mother's side into the early years of her adulthood. As a result, she exhibits signs of frustration and independence or rebellion much earlier in the mother's correspondence than the other two daughters. This is not to say that their dialogue appears consistently strained; there is evidence of a peaceful exchange. In Sévigné's first letter after her daughter's departure, she writes: "*J'écris dans le milieu du jardin comme vous l'avez imaginé, et les rossignols et les petits oiseaux ont reçu avec un grand plaisir, mais sans beaucoup de respect, ce que je leur ai dit de votre part; ils sont situés d'une manière qui leur ôte toute sorte d'humilité.*" (1 June 1669, Vol. I, 112) In this instance, it appears that Mme de Grignan, either in a preliminary letter or before her departure, has foreseen and encouraged her mother to write to her – a portrait that Madame de Sévigné happily writes herself within.

Hortense de Beauharnais's adherence to her mother's instruction is much more direct, like Marie Antoinette, although during the early stages of the maternal correspondence, Hortense is still at school and unmarried. Hortense lives outside of the family home, but is still dependent on her mother and childlike. In one of Joséphine's first letters presented in the correspondence, written to her father in 1787 (before her imprisonment), she closes her letter: "*Ma fille m'appelle.*" Hortense's character, at four years old, is already depicted in her role within the family home, needing her mother. By 1794, Hortense is eleven years old and living at Madame Campan's school. Through a series of letters during this period, Hortense appears to be the major means by which Joséphine is passing information to family and

caregivers. In one example, Joséphine instructs her to cancel an appointment she asked Hortense to secure in a previous letter: “*Je ne puis, ma chère Hortense, recevoir M. Trutat le jour de la décade, étant obligée d’aller à Paris ce jour-là; écris-lui pour lui en témoigner mes regrets. Je t’emmènerai à Monceau le 9 pour diner.*” (Nov 1794, 22) Her direct and specific instructions imply that she is relying on Hortense to pass on the information and, more importantly, that Hortense *will* follow her orders. Evidence of Hortense’s regular correspondence is provided in the next few lines: “*Je suis bien étonnée de ce que tu me dis au sujet de ma tante. Je n’ai pas reçu de réponse à la lettre que je lui avais écrite.*” Joséphine’s statement “*Je suis étonnée*” again calls attention to the mother’s reaction to the daughter’s information/locution – most likely expressed as a constative – common in the early stages of the correspondence and the girl’s childhood. She closes the letter: “*Propose un autre jour à M. Trutat pour lui donner à diner, prends tout autre jour excepté le 2, c’est-à-dire le 22.*” Joséphine (referencing the post-revolutionary calendar) orders her daughter to politely, promptly and efficiently organize a new day for her mother’s meeting with M. Trutat, indicating that Hortense – only eleven and away at school – is particularly diligent at this point in the exchange.

After the daughter’s marriage, as she grows a bit older, she begins to settle into her new role and, perhaps, realizes the adamant nature of her mother’s ambitions. At this point, she enters the second phase of her correspondence – appeasement. It is here that the daughter, particularly Marie Antoinette, begins to evade questions and details or persuade the mother of her acknowledgement of the instruction to appease her and to avoid chastisement. By 1772, Marie Antoinette still regularly reports on the occurrence of her menstrual cycle¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Concerning the pregnancy of her sister, Marie-Caroline of Naples, she writes: “*Je ne puis dire, ma*

and makes note of the books she reads¹²¹, per her mother's request. However, a shift begins to occur by December, when the first distinct instance of Marie Antoinette's frustration appears. She writes: "*Je soupçonne qu'on vous en aura dit sur mes cavalcades plus qu'il n'y en a. Je vais, ma chère maman, vous dire la vérité tout entière.*" (15 Dec. 1772, 121) At this point in the correspondence, there have been several letters from Mercy on the dauphine's coldness towards Louis XV's mistress, Madame du Barry, with whom she competes for social influence at court. She has also been warned several times to refrain from riding on horseback (assumed to be detrimental to women trying to become pregnant) – the subject of this letter. It is important to note here the rising significance of Marie Antoinette's *performative*: "*Je vais vous dire la vérité*". Arguing for her own innocence and defending her actions, claiming she rode under the supervision and acceptance of her husband and the king, Marie Antoinette is actively seeking to persuade her mother that she is following her instruction. However, the *truth* has left the childlike realm of being either *true* or *false*, and becomes more complicated. Letters in this stage represent the first major instances of the daughter's illocution ("I didn't do it"), meant to elicit the mother's perlocution (appeasement, love, acceptance).

It can be argued that Madame de Grignan seems less concerned with eliciting a specific reaction from her mother, perhaps because Sévigné's style is consistently effusive and admiring. For example, in the second letter of the correspondence between mother and daughter, Madame de Sévigné writes: "*Puisque vous voulez absolument qu'on vous rende votre petite boîte, la voilà. Je vous conjure de conserver et de recevoir, aussi tendrement que*

chère maman, combien je suis affligée de l'infante...Malgré tout cela, je saisirai avec empressement toute occasion de diminuer la mauvaise impression que cela peut faire ici." (13 June 1772, 108)

¹²¹ She writes: "*J'ai commencé à lire les Anecdotes de la cour de Philippe-Auguste par Mlle de Lussan.*" (14 Oct 1772, 118)

je vous le donne, un petit present qu'il y a longtemps que je vous destine." (2 Feb. 1671, Vol. I, 149) Sévigné's note to Mme de Grignan is uncharacteristically short and unattached to any longer letters. Her forceful use of language ("*Puisque vous voulez absolument qu'on vous rende votre petite boîte, la voilà*") implies that Mme de Grignan has specifically requested it, perhaps in exasperation, as her mother asserts it is a "small gift" that had been destined for her daughter for quite some time. Based on Sévigné's account, it is as if the box is precious, like her child, and she does not want to release the reminder of her daughter's presence. It can be implied here that Sévigné has taken a request from her daughter (perhaps even an argument) and developed a literary metaphor. However, in a letter written only a week later, Sévigné writes: "*Vous m'aimez, ma chère enfant, et vous me le dites d'une manière que je ne puis soutenir sans des pleurs en abondance...*" (9 Feb. 1671, Vol. I, 151) While Madame de Sévigné may exaggerate (calling particular attention to the daughter and shaping her character), it can be inferred that Mme de Grignan does, regardless of disagreements, seek to please (and, therefore, appease) her mother by returning the correspondence and issuing news and pleasantries that will satisfy her mother's future letters.

In Joséphine's letters, the first signs of a transition in Hortense's tone appears in 1796, just after her marriage to Napoléon. She writes: "*Je n'ai donc, ma chère Hortense, que le temps de t'embrasser, de t'assurer de la tendresse la plus tendre de ta mère, et d'une mère qui chérit le plus sa chère Hortense.*" (13 July, 41) This is the first instance of unusually effusive language on Joséphine's part. In earlier letters she is affectionate, but brief and direct. It is from this letter onward that Joséphine's language becomes more effusive, favoring clichéd expressions and *performative* verbs (*embrasser, assurer, promettre, adorer*), and focusing on the affirmation of maternal devotion. This transition insinuates that Hortense

is not only separated from her mother (who is traveling on the Italian front) but that Joséphine's need for such insistence has become more necessary as the mother's influence has weakened by her marriage and by Hortense's physical distance and growing independence.

The third stage of the daughter's correspondence is marked by rebellion, in which the daughter simultaneously engages the mother in a "performance" of her respect and adherence to the maternal instruction and, also, blatantly denies it. This introduces the question: What happens when the daughter recognizes that the mother is manipulating her affections for her own needs?

By 1775, Marie Antoinette has settled into her role as queen, expelled Madame du Barry, and is frequently guilty of insincerity and diversion relating to her mother's instruction. She opens her letter: "*Depuis votre chère lettre du 17 mai, je n'ai point eu d'occasion pour répondre.*" (22 June, 214) At this point, Marie Antoinette has not written in two months. She continues with her response to news of the Austrian court and her health. She does not neglect the inclusion of news of her marriage, but it very rarely includes specifics of any efforts to get pregnant and almost never directly mentions *la générale*. Instead, she speaks highly of her attachment to the king and attention paid to her marriage: "*Il est bien sûr qu'en voyant des gens qui, dans le Malheur, nous traitent aussi bien, nous sommes encore plus obligés de travailler à leur bonheur. Le roi m'a paru pénétré de cette vérité. Pour moi, je sais bien que je n'oublierai de ma vie (dût-elle durer cent ans) la journée de sacre. Ma chère maman, qui est si bonne, aurait bien partagé notre bonheur.*" In this instance, Marie Antoinette exalts her attention paid to the people of France alongside her husband, whom she represents as equally devoted to God, country, and family. The queen's

insistence on her attention to the health of her country and her marriage reflects the Empress's concern surrounding the future of their political alliance and Marie Antoinette's unconsummated marriage. Her last sentence skillfully includes her mother in the happiness shared by her and her husband, whose expression of their unity is solidified by use of the pronoun "*nous*", emphasizing a shared political agenda.

Finally, after one condemnation of the "lying" gazettes, she closes the letter: "*Je reviens à ces misérables gazettes, dont les mensonges me font tant de peine, ne désirant rien tant que de conserver et mériter les bontés et la tendresse de ma chère maman.*" Marie Antoinette, who still does not recognize the involvement of the ambassador Mercy in Marie-Thérèse's assessment of her daughter's behavior, insists that their account of her activity is false and slanderous, responsible for causing harm to her relationship with her mother, whom she flatters and (in a post-script) "dares" to send tokens of her affection. As Marie-Thérèse (and the third party reader of the collected correspondence) is aware, Marie Antoinette's behavior has not been excessively exaggerated. In this way, Marie Antoinette herself is exaggerating her efforts and success at implementing her mother's instruction, engaging in a careful "performance", in which the expression of her situation at court conflicts with the reality and she is, ultimately, lying to secure her mother's approval. By ignoring her mother's instruction or request for information on the status of her sexual health, Marie Antoinette is attempting to construct and *dictate* her own character through the letters, putting her own voice and character simultaneously at odds with the character her mother has invented for her, and yet is strategically destined to appease her.

Because of the absence of their letters, Madame de Grignan and Hortense de Beauharnais's rebellion are both the most evident in the long gaps between responses of their

mothers' letters. Silence, it seems, proves to be their greatest weapon. For Madame de Sévigné, the urgency for reciprocation is largely based on the necessity to maintain her greatest passion – writing. As she has chosen the epistolary medium as the means through which she expresses herself, Sévigné relies on an exchange that occurs often between mother and daughter. By denying a regular response, Mme de Grignan and Hortense are able to actively enforce their commitments and responsibilities outside of the maternal correspondence and decrease the interruption of the mother's voice that results from the constant receipt of letters. I would argue that if, as Benveniste claims, the *je* is defined and substantiated by the *vous*, if the daughter fails to respond for an extended period of time, the mother has more difficulty creating and developing her daughter's presence in the letters. By “disappearing” for weeks or months – absent in word and deed – she essentially rejects the mother's *vous* and, in turn, weakens the mother's *je*. If the daughter chooses *not* to participate in the exchange, there *is no productive exchange*.

In her letter from July of 1806, Joséphine demands letters of her daughter, who will frequently disappear for months at a time during the course of the correspondence. Joséphine writes: “*Comment va ton mari? Mes petits-enfants sont-ils bien portants? Mon Dieu! que je suis triste de ne plus les voir quelquefois! Et ta santé, ma chère Hortense, est-elle bonne? Si jamais tu étais malade, fais-le-moi dire: je me rendrais de suite près de ma bien-aimée fille.*” (15 July, 178) In this letter, Josephine simultaneously chastises Hortense and offers her questions to answer in a response. However, based on a subsequent letter Joséphine writes thanking her for her response, Hortense does not respond until September or October (at least two months later). The next letter from Joséphine does not reappear until February of the next year, when Joséphine again asserts that she has not heard from Hortense and asks

questions of her health and family. She writes: “*J’ai bien besoin que tu m’écrives, surtout à présent que tu n’es plus auprès de moi pour me consoler. Donne-moi de tes nouvelles, parle-moi de ton mari et de tes enfants.*” (3 Feb 1807, 194) While there is evidence in the letter that Hortense may have visited during that particular absence, her letters are consistently missing for weeks or months on end. However, unlike Madame de Sévigné, Joséphine tends to write less during those periods, with only two or three letters imploring her daughter to write, except in specific circumstances (when she wishes to impart news or when Hortense is obligated to write more quickly for her mother’s political and social benefit).

The fourth and final stage of the daughter’s correspondence involves a passive appeasement, in which the daughter respects her own agenda with (generally) some consideration of the mother’s needs or requests. This stage usually develops near the end of the mother’s life (and correspondence), when the daughter has settled into and asserted herself in an independent adulthood. It is in this phase of the correspondence that mother and daughter appear to reach an understanding, however strenuous, after a correspondence that has spanned the course of at least a decade or more. In 1690, before her final voyage to Grignan, Madame de Sévigné writes her daughter: “*Du reste, ma chère enfant, je ne vous dis point que vous êtes mon but, ma perspective; vous le savez bien, et que vous êtes d’une manière dans mon cœur, que je craindrais fort que M. Nicole ne trouvât beaucoup à y circoncire, mais enfin telle est ma disposition.*” (15 Jan, Vol. III, 809) In this case, Sévigné is much less effusive, yet still affectionate and devoted. Her daughter is not her *whole* heart, but resides in a part of it. She continues: “*Vous me dites la plus tendre chose du monde, en souhaitant de ne point voir la fin des heureuses années que vous me souhaitez.*” Sévigné provides evidence here that Mme de Grignan has extended a kind wish that her mother be

content in the final years of her life. It can be inferred that Mme de Grignan seeks to appease her mother, but the tone of Madame de Sévigné's letter indicates a note of comfort and affection, less forceful or pointed as in letters past.

Following the birth of Marie Antoinette's first child in 1778, there is a noticeable shift in the exchange between mother and daughter. For example, there is a distinct increase in Marie-Thérèse's use of the pronoun "nous" to emphasize unity and alliance between mother and daughter. In one particular example, only two months after the birth, Marie-Thérèse uses the pronoun fifteen times in a single paragraph related to the significance and benefits of the strategic alliance between France and Austria. (1 June 1778, 329) It can be argued, now that Marie Antoinette's position on the throne is more secure, that Marie-Thérèse's intense emphasis on the Franco-Austrian alliance is meant to remind the queen of the importance of continuing to cement her success (thereby, bearing more children). By December of 1779, a year before her mother's death, Marie Antoinette – her throne assured - returns to an amicable communication with her mother. Even more significantly, she *specifically* mentions her menstrual cycle (referred to here as *les règles*) for the first time in years. She writes: "*Je suis désolée de ne pouvoir donner à ma chère maman la bonne nouvelle que sa tendresse désire tant. La manière dont je vis avec le roi soutient mes espérances, mais jusqu'ici je ne puis compter sur rien. C'est là une triste répétition: mes règles m'ont repris avant-hier.*" (15 Dec. 1779, 369) Unlike previous letters, Marie Antoinette is confiding in her mother in order to appease her, but her tone lacks the forcefulness of obligation that appears in earlier stages of the correspondence, perhaps because Marie Antoinette is more certain that she can and will become pregnant and bear a male heir. The tone of Marie-Thérèse's own letters softens significantly in the last two years of the correspondence, although that is not to argue that her

concerns over the future of the monarchy have subsided. Once Marie Antoinette has successfully born a child, she becomes her mother's equal.

In the case of Joséphine and Hortense, following Joséphine's divorce from Napoléon, she relies on Hortense's connection to the Emperor (as sister-in-law, Queen of Holland, and mother of the future heir) to communicate messages to her ex-husband. In 1810, she writes:

“Je viens de recevoir, ma chère Hortense, la lettre de l'Empereur avec la tienne. Si je n'avais suivi que mon désir, je me serais empressée de le remercier, mais je crains d'être importune et je compte sur ton amitié pour lui dire de ma part combien je suis touchée de sa réponse et de la grâce qu'il a mise à la faire aussi prompte qu'aimable.” (21 Nov., 282) As in

Hortense's childhood, when she was asked to communicate Joséphine's appointments, it can be inferred that Hortense passes on the messages (at least somewhat effectively) to the

Emperor on her mother's behalf. However, Joséphine's tone is accommodating and polite –

“je compte sur ton amitié pour lui dire de ma part...” This shift in tone – from forceful

instruction of a child to a polite request of an adult daughter and friend - indicates a greater

acknowledgement and respect of Hortense's independence and adulthood, and indicates

Joséphine's recognition of her now-subservient social position to both Napoléon and her

daughter. Furthermore, there is evidence that, particularly in the years surrounding her

permanent separation from her husband, Hortense confides in Joséphine. In 1813, just before

Joséphine's death, she writes to her daughter: *“Mais ta lettre m'inquiète infiniment parce que*

je te vois tourmentée. Du courage, ma chère Hortense! Une âme pure comme la tienne

triomphe toujours des méchants.” (13 Nov., 358) Unfortunately, the last years of Joséphine's

correspondence indicate a *douleur* on the part of both mother and daughter. However, in this

particular instance, Joséphine provides support and encouragement to Hortense without

dwelling on the subsequent pain that extends to her own spirit in the face of her daughter's misery. Perhaps it can be argued that, even in the face of over a decade of a strategic "performance" of both the maternal and filial role, mother and daughter end their exchange, at least to some degree, with an *amitié*.

APPENDIX A

LETTERS FROM MOTHER TO DAUGHTER

Madame de Sévigné to Françoise-Marguerite de Grignan (Vol. I, 232)

À Paris, ce vendredi 24 avril [1671]

Voilà le plus beau temps du monde. Il commença dès hier après des pluies épouvantables. C'est le bonheur du Roi, il y a longtemps que nous l'avons observé, et c'est pour cette fois, aussi le bonheur de Monsieur le Prince, qui a pris ses mesures à Chantilly pour l'été et pour le printemps; la pluie d'avant-hier aurait rendu toutes ces dépenses ridicules. Sa Majesté y arriva hier au soir ; elle y est aujourd'hui. D'Hacqueville y est allé ; il vous fera une relation à son retour. Pour moi, j'en attends une petite ce soir, que je vous enverrai avec cette lettre, que j'écris le matin avant que d'aller en Bavardin ; je ferai mon paquet au faubourg. Si l'on dit, ma bonne, que nous parlons dans nos lettres de la pluie et du beau temps, on aura raison ; j'en ai fait d'abord un assez grand chapitre.

Vous ne me parlez point assez de vous ; j'en suis avide, comme vous l'êtes de folies. Je vous souhaite toutes celles que j'entends. Pour celles que je dis, elles ne valent plus rien depuis que vous ne m'aidez plus ; vous m'en inspirez, et quelquefois aussi je vous en inspire. C'est une longue tristesse, et qui se renouvelle souvent, que d'être loin d'une personne comme vous. J'ai dit des adieux depuis quelques jours ; on trouve bien de la constance. Ce qui est plaisant, c'est que je sentirai que je n'en aurai point pour vous dire adieu d'ici en partant pour la Bretagne. Vous serez mon adieu sensible, dont je pourrais, si j'étais une friponne, faire un grand honneur à mes amies, mais on voit clair au travers de mes paroles, et je ne veux pas même en mettre aucune au-devant des sentiments que j'ai pour vous. Je serai donc touchée de voir que ce n'est pas assez d'être à deux cents lieues de vous ; il faut que je sois à trois cents, et tous les pas que je ferai, ce sera sur cette troisième centaine. C'est trop ; cela me serre le cœur.

[Omitted three paragraphs concerning news at court and anecdotes concerning her acquaintances, the Abbé Têtu and Mme Richelieu, among others.]

Votre enfant est aimable. Elle a une nourrice parfaite ; elle devient fort bien fontaine : fontaine de lait, ce n'est pas fontaine de cristal.

M. de Salins a chassé un portier. Je ne sais ce qu'on dit. On parle de manteau gris, de quatre heures du matin, de coups de plats d'épée, et l'on se tait du reste. On parle d'un certain apôtre qui en fait d'autres. Enfin, je ne dis rien ; on ne m'accusera pas de parler. Pour moi, je sais me taire, Dieu merci ! Si cette fin vous paraît un peu galimatias, vous ne l'en aimerez que mieux. Adieu, ma très chère aimable et très chère mignonne, je vous aime au delà de ce qu'on peut imaginer. Tantôt je vous manderai des nouvelles en fermant mon paquet.

Empress Marie-Thérèse to Marie Antoinette (75)

Schönbrunn, 8 mai 1771

J'ai reçu vos deux lettres, l'une par le courrier du 16 et l'autre par l'abbé de Vanwolden. J'écris actuellement devant la masse, qui me représente ma très chère fille, mais je ne lui trouve pas cet air de jeunesse qu'elle avait il y a onze mois, et malheureusement le changement d'état n'en est pas la cause. J'attends cette nouvelle avec grand empressement, et je me flatte que le mariage qui doit se faire en peu de jours accélérera mes vœux, mais je ne aurais assez vous répéter : point d'humeur là-dessus : caresses, cajolis, mais trop d'empressement gênerait le tout. La douceur, la patience sont les uniques moyens dont vous devez vous servir. Il n'y a rien de perdu, vous êtes tous deux si jeunes : au contraire, pour vos santés ce n'est que mieux, vous vous fortifiez encore tous deux ; mais il est naturel à nous autres, vieux parents, de souhaiter l'accomplissement, ne pouvant plus nous flatter de voir de petits et arrière-petits-fils.

[Portion omitted concerning Marie-Thérèse's counsel to foster a relationship with her new sister-in-law.]

Le monde est méchant. On tâchera de gagner en flattant votre amour-propre et en le piquant. Conservez soigneusement et tâcher de gagner tous les jours de plus la confiance que vous me dites que le dauphin vous marque, et, par votre respect et attachement, tâchez de rencontrer en tout l'approbation du roi. Je voudrais bien que vous le vissiez plus souvent chez vous. C'est un point essentiel. Il a vu tous les jours votre belle-mère chez elle, et à mon grand étonnement je dois apprendre qu'il ne vient jamais chez vous que les jours de cérémonie. Il est de coutume, cela décide pour ou contre vous dans le public. Tâchez donc de gagner à l'avenir ce point. J'en touche quelque chose à Mercy, c'est de la plus grande conséquence.

[Omitted three extensive paragraphs on the importance of seeking and adhering to the counsel of the Ambassador, the Comte Mercy-Argenteau.]

Les confusions qui sont actuellement chez vous me font bien de la peine pour le roi et pour vous. Mercy m'assure que vous vous conduisez à vous attirer l'estime de tout le monde, et augmenter même par une conduite mesurée, bonne et chrétienne l'estime qu'on a de vous. Suivez donc les conseils de Mercy, qui n'est occupé que de vous, et ne vous mêlez d'aucun parti ; si vous pouvez même ignorer tout, ce ne serait que mieux. C'est dans ce moment que je préfère les promenades à cheval, en calèche, les bals, spectacles et tout ce qui est plaisir, fussent même des enfantillages, pour couper court aux occasions, qu'on n'en parle. Vous serez étonnée que nous sommes [sic] seuls dehors sans l'empereur. Vous connaissez son affection pour la ville, j'ai cru devoir lui proposer d'y rester, ce qu'il a accepté avec plaisir, venant tous les jours dîner avec nous ici.

Joséphine Bonaparte to Hortense de Beauharnais (49)

Mantoue, 6 mars 1797

Je me porte bien, ma chère Hortense: depuis six jours, je n'ai plus de fièvre. J'ai été un peu malade à Bologne, c'est un pays malsain ; d'ailleurs, je m'ennuie beaucoup en Italie malgré toutes les fêtes que l'on me donne et l'accueil flatteur des habitants de tout ce beau pays. Je ne puis m'accoutumer à être éloignée aussi longtemps de mes chers enfants ; j'ai besoin de les serrer contre mon sein. J'ai cependant tout lieu d'espérer que ce moment n'est pas très éloigné et cela contribue beaucoup à me remettre de l'indisposition que j'ai eue.

À la première bonne occasion, je t'enverrai un collier charmant d'après l'antique, les boucles d'oreilles pareilles et les bracelets. On trouve de bien jolies choses dans ce pays-ci.

Applique-toi, je t'en prie, au dessin ; je t'en apporterai de bien beaux, et de fameux maîtres. Envoie-moi de temps en temps de tes ouvrages. J'espère que Madame Campan est bien contente de toi ; regarde-la comme une seconde mère et fais bien attention à tout ce qu'elle te dira. Embrasse-la bien pour moi, ma chère Hortense.

Écris-moi souvent ; il y a bien longtemps que je n'ai eu de tes nouvelles. Aime ta maman comme elle t'aime ; tu l'adoreras. Adieu, ma bonne petite Hortense ; ta maman t'embrasse et t'aime de tout son cœur.

[P.S.] J'embrasse Émilie. Aime-la toujours bien.

APPENDIX B

FREQUENCY OF MARIE-THÉRÈSE CORRESPONDENCE (1770-1780)

1770

MT -> MA	4
MA -> MT	2
MT -> Mercy	2
Mercy -> MT	7

1771

MT -> MA	8
MA -> MT	6
MT -> Mercy	3
Mercy -> MT	10

1772

MT -> MA	2
MA -> MT	5
MT -> Mercy	2
Mercy -> MT	7

1773

MT -> MA	5
MA -> MT	10
MT -> Mercy	3
Mercy -> MT	10

1774

MT -> MA	7
MA -> MT	8
MT -> Mercy	6
Mercy -> MT	12

1775

MT -> MA	4
MA -> MT	10
MT -> Mercy	4
Mercy -> MT	10

1776

MT -> MA	6
MA -> MT	12
MT -> Mercy	3
Mercy -> MT	3

1777

MT -> MA	8
MA -> MT	11
MT -> Mercy	1
Mercy -> MT	11

1778

MT -> MA	15
MA -> MT	14
MT -> Mercy	1
Mercy -> MT	8

1779

MT -> MA	7
MA -> MT	7
MT -> Mercy	2
Mercy -> MT	4

1780

MT -> MA	7
MA -> MT	10
MT -> Mercy	0
Mercy -> MT	5

TOTAL

MT-> MA = 73

MA-> MT = 95

MT -> Mercy = 27

Mercy -> MT = 87

APPENDIX C

LETTER FROM MARIE ANTOINETTE TO MARIE-THÉRÈSE

Marie Antoinette to Marie-Thérèse (154)

[Versailles] 14 septembre 1773

Madame ma très chère mère,

Je suis tout à fait ravie que vous vous soyez déterminée à aller à Esterhazy. Il serait bien à désirer que vous preniez plus souvent de ces petites distractions.

J'ai suivi le conseil de Mercy, j'ai parlé à Mme de Marsan pour le coadjuteur. Elle est bien affligée de la conduite de son parent. Elle a eu depuis une explication avec Mercy, qui vous mandera ce dont ils sont convenus. Du reste, Mme de Marsan paraît contente de la manière dont je lui ai parlé, quoique je ne sois entrée en aucun détail.

Quoique cela soit bien raisonnable à la reine [Marie-Caroline of Naples], je regarde comme un vrai bonheur l'enchantement dont elle est de sa petite Louise.

Il est vrai que le courrier m'a vue à cheval, mais ce n'était point à la chasse, où je n'ai été qu'une fois à cheval, encore était-ce à une chasse à vue, qui a fait faire moins de chemin que les autres.

Pour la jeune du Barry, je suis bien fâchée que ma chère maman ne soit pas contente de moi. Si elle pouvait voir tout ce qui se passe ici, elle jugerait que la bonne mine du roi était sincère, et qu'il ne désire jamais qu'on ait des attentions pour eux que dans le moment où toute cette cabale le tourmente. Pour ma sœur de Provence, je n'ai jamais blâmé sa conduite, mais ma chère maman me permettre de lui dire avec confiance quelque différence d'elle à moi : 1^{ère} : le caractère italien lui donne des ressources que je n'ai pas ; 2^{ème} : lorsqu'elle est arrivée ici, le comte de Provence était mêlé dans les intrigues et désirait la tournure que sa femme a prise. Pour moi, au contraire, je suis bien sûre que M. le dauphin l'aurait trouvé mauvais. Pour ma tante, sa conduite ne peut pas me régler, mais il n'est pas vrai qu'elle ait changé, et il n'y a que les intrigues de Mme de Narbonne qui ont donné lieu aux mauvais propos.

En revenant de Compiègne j'avais grand désir de retourner à Paris. J'avais bien raison, car nous avons été parfaitement bien reçus. Je compte y retourner pour voir les tableaux. J'ai prêté celui de ma chère maman, qu'on voit avec beaucoup d'empressement.

La réconciliation de Parme est entièrement faite. C'est un grand bonheur si elle peut être durable. Je suis bien fâchée que ma sœur ne le sente pas assez pour vous en avoir écrit tout de suite. Cela ne peut venir que de la honte et de l'embarras de ses torts. Neny n'est pas encore arrivé. Il me tarde bien de le voir. Ce sera sûrement le plus que je pourrai. Comme c'est un bon serviteur de ma chère maman, il partagera bien la joie que j'ai en parlant de la plus tendre et respectable mère.

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