

**The Comtesse de Ségur:  
Catholicism, Children's Literature, and the 'Culture  
Wars' in Nineteenth Century France**

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I, Sophie Heywood, declare that the thesis is my own composition, and all my own work.  
Edinburgh 15<sup>th</sup> July 2008

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## Abstract

This thesis analyses the comtesse de Ségur (1799-1874), France's best-selling children's author, both as a cultural icon and as a historical subject. Although Ségur became the best-selling author for young children in the twentieth century, and a publishing phenomenon, her work has often been overlooked by Anglophone historians. This is because she is perceived to be a part of a school of didactic authors derided as "governesses", and who are usually characterised as bigoted spinsters, in possession of little in the way of real literary talent. The recent tendency in French academic research has therefore been to play down the comtesse de Ségur's politico-religious agenda, in order to distance her work from that of her colleagues, and to explain her enduring popularity. However, such an approach is based upon a questionable reading of such "governess" authors, and is an indication that Ségur's politics recall a part of their history that many French people would prefer to forget. In contrast, it is the contention of this thesis that the comtesse's work must be understood in the context of the religious antagonisms of Second Empire France. Ségur was closely involved with one of the most influential religious propaganda networks of the Second Empire. The informal nature of their activities meant that Ségur's gender did not prevent her from engaging in the political fray. The thesis examines the immediate production of her work in the context of the Catholic drive to propagate 'good books', and highlights the importance which the religious revival attached to the child and to children's literature; it looks at the myth-making process which generated the comtesse de Ségur as a symbol of ideal Christian womanhood, and the role that this played in the politics of identity in the second half of the nineteenth century; and finally it asks what her legacy has been for feminine culture in France. In restoring the comtesse de Ségur to the intransigent Catholic movement, this thesis brings to light a neglected aspect of the Franco-French culture wars, namely the important contribution made by women authors such as Ségur to the massive surge in religious print culture in the mid-century. It questions the old stereotypes that have long surrounded Catholic women, and shows just how engaged they were in the struggle for the nation's soul that raged in post-revolutionary France.

## Abbreviations

Archives Nationales – AN

Bibliothèque Nationale – BN

Histoire de l'Édition Française – HEF

Institut Catholique, Fonds Veuillot – ICFV

Institut de Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine – IMEC

Nouvelles Acquisitions Françaises – NAF

NB.

All references to correspondence from the comtesse de Ségur to Olga de Pitray are taken from Vicomtesse de Simard de Pitray, née Olga de Ségur, sa fille, (ed) *Lettres de la Comtesse de Ségur née Rostopchine au Vicomte et à la Vicomtesse de Pitray* (Paris, Hachette, 1891)

All other references to letters written by the comtesse de Ségur, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from Marie-José Strich (ed), with a preface by Michel Tournier, *1799-1874 La Comtesse de Ségur. Correspondance* (Paris, Scala, 1990)

## Introduction

Madame la comtesse de Ségur, née Rostopchine (1799-1874) is a French national institution. Generations of children have grown up reading her stories, yet she remains virtually unknown in Anglophone scholarship,<sup>1</sup> and hers is certainly not a name that is familiar to the general public of the English-speaking world. The comtesse de Ségur began writing late in life, when she was a fifty-six-year-old grandmother. Between 1856 and 1869 she produced twenty children's storybooks for the publishing giant Hachette, as the flagship author of their children's collection, the *Bibliothèque Rose*. Her books enjoyed immediate success, and soon she was being hailed as the 'nation's grandmother' by enthusiastic reviewers. Ségur went on to become the bestselling young children's author of the twentieth-century, and her works have been translated into many languages. She is a publishing phenomenon: her books have sold over thirty million copies in France alone, and they are still widely read today.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There are some researchers based in French Studies departments, including Penny Brown at the University of Manchester, Élise Noetinger at Cambridge University, and in the United States, Ruth Carver Carpasso, and Claire Malarte-Feldman at the University of New Hampshire

<sup>2</sup> Guy Schoeller, cover text, comtesse de Ségur, *Oeuvres* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 1990) 3. By way of comparison, worldwide sales of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series are thought to have reached 325 million, according to *The Daily Telegraph*, 6<sup>th</sup> June 2007

Madame de Ségur was part of a wave of authors who wrote in the so-called ‘golden age’ of European children’s literature, c.1850-1870, characterised by their emphasis on the idea of “instruire en amusant.” Ségur had a fertile imagination and an exuberant style. Often the educational progress of her protagonists served mainly as a central anchor for the plot, whilst all around them she created a whirl of comic, burlesque, and villainous characters, who cause mayhem, and are designed to make her moral message more amusing. All of the comtesse’s bestselling works feature rebellious protagonists.<sup>3</sup> Ségur relished detailing children’s misdemeanours, as well as their efforts to mend their ways. The most consistently popular Ségur book over the past 150 years has been the tale of disobedient Sophie, the semi-autobiographical, four-year-old heroine of *Les Malheurs de Sophie* (1858). Sophie is followed by Cadichon, the donkey narrator of *Mémoires d’un Âne* (1860), and then by the misadventures of her mischievous orphan, Charles Mac’Miche in *Un bon petit diable* (1865), the only one of her books to be set in Scotland. Fourth in her bestsellers list are the iconic *Petites Filles modèles* (1858), the portrait of her well-behaved granddaughters. Again however, the real heroine of this work is still Sophie, who is now an orphan. Most of the comtesse’s stories are set in rural Normandy under the Second Empire, and take place in a Château, or its environs, but she also transported her readers to her homeland Russia, in the General Dourakine books, *L’Auberge de l’Ange Gardien* (1863), and *Le Général Dourakine* (1863). Although, (particularly in her later books), Ségur could at times be accused of following a set formula, centred upon the upbringing of young aristocrats in the countryside, as this list above suggests, hers was a rich and varied oeuvre.

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<sup>3</sup> On the comtesse de Ségur’s sales figures, see Annie Renonciat, ‘Fortune éditoriale de la comtesse de Ségur (1857-1939), *Cahiers Robinson*, 9 (2001) Special issue *La comtesse de Ségur et ses alentours*, edited by Isabelle Nières-Chevrel, 213-222; Legros, Valérie, *De l’Histoire à l’histoire. Lire la comtesse de Ségur*, thèse de doctorat en sciences de l’éducation, Université de Rennes II, 1996, Unpublished. See annexes in volume two for lists of re-editions

Madame de Ségur's contribution to French culture is often overlooked by historians, who tend to dismiss her as an author of 'improving' books for girls; in other words the sole remnant of a rather tiresome school of writing that has thankfully been laid to rest.

Theodore Zeldin, for example, gave the comtesse de Ségur short shrift, in his epic study *France 1848-1945*. Detailing the literary production of the period he noted the vast expansion of children's books, but singled out Ségur's oeuvre as a prime example of how historians ought to "beware of attributing too much influence to these books."<sup>4</sup> The resultant lack of detailed historical study of the comtesse has led to misinterpretations, particularly when her work is used as source material by historians.<sup>5</sup> By examining the phenomenon of the comtesse and her works, and setting them firmly in the context of Second Empire France, this thesis aims to dispel these confusions surrounding the 'nation's grandmother'. It is structured around several key questions. How did she perceive her juvenile audience and seek to write for them, and what can this tell us about her specifically Catholic vision of childhood? In what ways did she conceptualise her piety, and what role did she play in the mid-century 'culture wars'? And finally, although her readership has never been limited to girls, we cannot separate Ségur and her famous *Petites filles modèles* from questions of gender.

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<sup>4</sup> Volume 4, *Taste and Corruption* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980), p 37; Otherwise, Ségur receives cursory references in textbooks on the history of women or children, James F. McMillan, *France and Women 1789-1914 Gender, Society and Politics* (London, Routledge, 2000) p 157; Colin Heywood, *Growing up in France from the Ancien Regime to the Third Republic*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007) p 48

<sup>5</sup> Gerard Cholvy and Yves-Marie Hilaire for example in *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine 1800/ 1880*, (Paris, Privat, 1985, 2000), p 201, use a quotation from Ségur's character 'Madame d'Embrun', from *On ne prend pas les mouches avec du vinaigre* (1865), and, concluding that this negative character represents the author's own views, suggest "il faut la supposer en partie désaccord avec les trente ans d'apostolat de son fils" which was far from being the case.



The first and last sections of this thesis will consider what a study of the comtesse de Ségur can contribute to the field of women's history.

Although Zeldin felt the comtesse's books to be of little import, many in France would have disagreed with this view. Devotees of the comtesse have included General de Gaulle, and such literary luminaries as Marcel Proust, Simone de Beauvoir, François Mauriac, Robert de Montesquiou, and Jacques Laurent.<sup>6</sup> In conversation, de Gaulle liked to explain how he considered the penultimate chapter of the comtesse's book *Les Vacances* (1859) to contain the most melancholy line in all of French literature, and would recite it, word perfect: "les vacances étaient près de leur fin; les enfants s'aimaient tous de plus en plus."<sup>7</sup> Mauriac described debating with his brothers the relative merits of the comtesse de Ségur and her rival Zenaïde Fleuriot, foreshadowing their later discussions about Racine and Corneille.<sup>8</sup> José Cabanis declared "je serais un autre si je n'avais pas tant aimé la comtesse de Ségur."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, when a French author recalls the books they read as a child, mentioning the comtesse de Ségur appears to be almost obligatory. Her books provide a reference to childhood that is instantly recognisable to all. While there are exceptions to this rule – particularly if the author in question is from a working-class or left wing background – nevertheless, it still provides a strong indicator of the extent to which Ségur's books have marked French culture.

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<sup>6</sup> For discussion of Ségur's many enthusiasts, see Laura Kreyder, *L'Enfance des saints et des autres. Essai sur la comtesse de Ségur*, (Milan, Schéna-Nizet, 1987) pp 215-223; Isabelle Nières-Chevrel, 'Au miroir des écrivains français', *Europe*, 914/915 (2005) 22-38

<sup>7</sup> Claude Dulong, *La vie quotidienne à l'Élysée au temps de Charles de Gaulle*, (Paris, Hachette, 1974) p 50. This line opens chapter 13 of *Les Vacances*

<sup>8</sup> François Mauriac, *Mémoires intérieurs* (Paris, Flammarion, 1959) p 335

<sup>9</sup> José Cabanis, *Le Bonheur du Jour* (Paris, Gallimard, [1960], Folio 1972) p 11. On the influence of Ségur on Cabanis, see the article by his friend and colleague, Alain Lanavère, 'José Cabanis débiteur de Mme de Ségur', *Cahiers Séguriens*, 6 (2006) 106-111

Her creations have become firmly embedded in the collective consciousness. For example, in his satire of the Vichy regime, Marc Beigbeder eluded the censor by disguising Marshal Pétain as ‘Cadichon’, the comtesse’s famous donkey savant.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps more significantly, the phrase ‘petite fille modèle’, taken from the title of one of her best-known works, has entered French vocabulary to designate a well-behaved and well-to-do young girl. Moreover, although her books had relatively little success in Britain, she was not simply a French phenomenon. The comtesse was listed as one of the most translated French authors in 1955.<sup>11</sup> In Vienna, Freud noted that his patients often mentioned Ségur, and how her books stimulated their autoerotic fantasies.<sup>12</sup> For Vladimir Nabokov, re-reading *Les Malheurs de Sophie* apparently had the same effect as eating madeleines did for Proust; transporting him back to his childhood in Russia.<sup>13</sup> Several of these examples have a slightly sinister undertone, which points to her unique and rather contradictory place in French culture and beyond.

Despite her iconic status, Ségur’s persistent success has posed a problem to critics and pedagogues alike. An aristocrat and devout Catholic, she was closely affiliated to the intransigent religious right. She is notorious for writing works with such off-putting titles as *Petites Filles modèles*, or *Les bons enfants* (1863), in which young children from the upper-classes learn to be obedient, and pious, and to administer charity to the ever-grateful peasantry. Her books preach anti-Republican values and traditional gender roles, but they continue to sell

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<sup>10</sup> Marc Beigbeder, ‘Supplément aux *Mémoires d’un âne*, conte à l’usage des enfants de ce siècle, d’après la comtesse de Ségur’, *Esprit*, July 1941, 647-651

<sup>11</sup> Kreyder, *L’Enfance des saints et des autres*, p 242

<sup>12</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘A Child is Being Beaten’ (1919)

<sup>13</sup> Kreyder, ‘*Les Malheurs de Sophie* lus par Nabokov’, *Cahiers Séguriens*, 3 (2002) 110-113

despite the advent of democracy, feminism and secularism. During the course of the century and a half of her reign over French childhood, the comtesse de Ségur has been vilified by feminists, by republicans, and criticized by a whole series of reformers, psychologists, and pedagogues. In 1908 one journalist even called for the workingmen of Paris to take to the streets in protest against the new statue of her in the Luxemburg gardens.<sup>14</sup> Her books were excised from the secular school reading curriculum under the Third Republic,<sup>15</sup> and from the 1950's onwards there have been regular calls for parents to stop giving her books to their children.

While her popularity ensured the comtesse pride of place in the bestsellers lists, her entry into the canon of classic French literature has been less certain. Madame de Ségur's works have occupied a hinterland for much of the twentieth century. This was, to a certain extent, determined by the genre within which she wrote. Children's literature was considered a lower form of writing until it was rescued by pioneers such as Paul Hazard in the interwar years and Marc Soriano after World War Two.<sup>16</sup> Also, the concept of the 'canon' has been deeply gendered (as well as racially segregated and elitist). Ségur wrote in a 'minor' genre, that of morally improving literature, which was easily labelled as feminine and therefore unworthy of serious consideration. Still, this can only go so far in explaining the strange critical fortune of the comtesse. It has also been coloured by politico-religious divisions in French culture.

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<sup>14</sup> J. Ernest-Charles, 'La ridicule statue de la Comtesse de Ségur', *La Grande Revue* 10<sup>th</sup> May 1908, 168-177

<sup>15</sup> Yves Pincet, 'La comtesse à l'école', *Cahiers Robinson*, 9 (2001) 201-212

<sup>16</sup> See Jean Perrot's prefatory essay in *Mythes, traductions et création. La littérature de jeunesse en Europe* (Paris, Bibliothèque Publique d'Information, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1996); Jean-Yves Mollier's preface to Michèle Piquard, *L'édition pour la jeunesse en France de 1945 à 1980*, (Paris, enssib, 2004)

Until quite recently, Ségur's critical reception was starkly divided between admirers who characterised her as a saint, and numerous detractors for whom she was a dangerous sadist.

From the outset, the comtesse was embraced by Catholic commentators as one of a whole raft of authors concerned to produce 'good' books for children, to try to counter the nefarious effects of books written with less exalted aims in mind. *Bibliographie Catholique*, the leading Jesuit review founded in 1841 dedicated to promoting the cause of 'good books',<sup>17</sup> regularly recommended her storybooks to mothers and religious institutions, praising her as "infatigable dans son dévouement à la jeunesse et à la religion".<sup>18</sup> Journalist Louis Veillot championed her work in his influential newspaper *L'Univers*,<sup>19</sup> while respected author Mathilde Bourdon endorsed the comtesse in the *Journal des Demoiselles*.<sup>20</sup> The moral universe of her books was portrayed as an antidote to the iniquities of the modern world, and to a large degree set the tone for later Catholic interpretations of the comtesse. The next phase in her reception was responsible for bringing the comtesse de Ségur's life stories to wider public attention. It centred upon the commemorative statue project in the Luxemburg gardens, Paris (June 19<sup>th</sup> 1910). Several among the group of writers and journalists who led

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<sup>17</sup> Both Jean Glénisson, 'Le livre pour la jeunesse', Henri-Jean Martin, Roger Chartier, and Jean-Pierre Vivet, (eds) *Histoire de l'édition française*, Vol 3, *Le temps des éditeurs, Du Romantisme à la Belle Époque* (Promodis, Paris, 1985) (henceforth *HEF*) 417-441 and Claude Savart, *Les catholiques en France au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le témoignage du livre religieux*, (Paris, Beauchesne, 1985), pp 408-411, agree that this publication played a crucial role in ensuring the reputation of books

<sup>18</sup> Review of *Actes des Apôtres*, *Bibliographie Catholique*, 37, January-June, 1867

<sup>19</sup> Louis Veillot, 'Les contes de Madame de Ségur', 31<sup>st</sup> December 1859, *L'Univers*, reproduced in Veillot, *Mélanges*, 8, 422-426. On the role played *L'Univers* in this period, see Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser (eds) *Culture Wars Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth Century Europe*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003); Austin Gough, *Paris and Rome the Gallican Church and the Ultramontane Campaign 1848-1853*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986)

<sup>20</sup> Review of *Les Malheurs de Sophie*, *Les Vacances*, *Les Petites filles modèles*, and *Nouveaux contes de fées*, by Mathilde Bourdon, *Journal des Demoiselles*, 28, May 1860, 134-5

the publicity campaign for the monument between 1907 and 1910 were also involved in the Social Catholic movement, and were deeply concerned by the ‘woman question’. Writing during the Belle Époque, they saw Madame de Ségur’s world as a lost golden age in comparison with their panicked perceptions of modern gender relations. Prominent among these writers was the successful novelist Marcel Prévost, who had written several works on the worrying trend towards unconventional sexuality among fashionable young women, whom he called *demi-vierges*. In his view the passion of girls for reading novels played a large part in creating this phenomenon, and so he was an enthusiastic advocate of the comtesse de Ségur.<sup>21</sup> This idea would persist. In 1931 Chanoine Cordonnier’s biography of the comtesse lambasted the “filles-garçons” of his age, and felt the future of society would only be saved if they would listen to the comtesse’s wise words rather than neglecting their feminine duties.<sup>22</sup> Similar sentiments can be found in Marthe de Hédouville’s study from 1953.<sup>23</sup> Thus, despite her immense and varied readership over the twentieth century, the comtesse’s reputation has been distorted somewhat by Catholic reception that increasingly saw her ‘petites filles modèles’ as part of the solution to modern feminism.

All the while however, we find dissenting voices, for whom the comtesse’s association with the moral order hid a darker side to her works. Ségur was an ambiguous figure. She was daughter of the redoubtable Russian General Rostopchine, who had ordered the burning of Moscow in 1812 to avoid it falling into Napoleon’s hands. Family legend held that the

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<sup>21</sup> McMillan, *France and Women*, pp 142, 157

<sup>22</sup> Chanoine Charles Cordonnier, *Silhouettes familiales. La Comtesse de Ségur L’Idéale Grand’mère* (Paris, Librairie J-M Peignes, 1931), p 97

<sup>23</sup> Marthe de Hédouville, *La comtesse de Ségur et les siens*, (Paris, Éditions du Conquistador, 1953); see also her article, ‘La comtesse de Ségur et les enfants d’aujourd’hui’, *L’enseignement chrétien*, 9/10 (1956) 451-460

Rostopchines were directly descended from Genghis Khan. Even after she settled in France, and married into an ancient French family, the comtesse never managed to escape the taint of barbarity associated with her father and homeland. The tales of violence and beatings contained within her storybooks often fell foul of the censor, as well as giving rise to comments in reviews,<sup>24</sup> and in the twentieth century led to accusations of perversion and sadism. The image of Ségur as a supremely perverse Genghis Khan in crinolines, obsessed with beating little girls and boys, has enjoyed enduring popularity. Jean de la Varende for example included her as a character in one of his novels, presenting her as a mad Russian eccentric, with a violent temper and a predilection for the knout.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the fact that her eldest son, Mgr de Ségur, felt obliged in his biography of his mother to deny that she had ever hit a child suggests that such accusations predate la Varende's works.<sup>26</sup> That la Varende drew upon local gossip for much of his portrait, again suggests that her violent reputation was longstanding. In 1949 it was given a new Freudian twist by Jacques Laurent.<sup>27</sup> The novelist selected some of the most disturbing scenes of punishment inflicted on young children and women from Madame de Ségur's oeuvre. He argues that her obsessive return in each of her books to the motifs of shame, torture, and punishment reveal the comtesse's underlying sadomasochistic tendencies. He goes on to attack Ségur's notion that 'commoners' should submit with humility to abuse from their masters, in a form of Catholic saintly suffering. The article concludes that Ségur's books may seem innocuous, but in fact

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<sup>24</sup> For example Mathilde Bourdon's review of Ségur's early works, *Journal des Demoiselles*, 28, May 1860, 134-5. Although overall highly favourable, Bourdon warned parents that *Les Vacances* contained a scene of "brutalité conjugale" that marred the books' moral universe

<sup>25</sup> Jean de la Varende, *La Centaure de Dieu* (Paris, Grasset, 1938) pp 203-206 as well as his *Les châteaux de Normandie* (Rouen, Editions Henri Defontaine, 1937), pp 70-71

<sup>26</sup> Mgr de Ségur, *Ma Mère. Souvenir de sa vie et de sa sainte mort*, (Paris, Tolra, 1875)

<sup>27</sup> Jacques Laurent, 'Étrennes Noires', *La Table Ronde*, (1949) 157-167

the “bibliothèque dite rose” is responsible for an insidious indoctrination of young girls of all classes.

Laurent’s article spawned a whole school dedicated to laying Ségur and her books on the analyst’s couch.<sup>28</sup> Certainly, as mentioned above, Freud’s essay ‘A Child is being Beaten’ (1919) noted that the excessive corporal punishment in her books served to stimulate patients’ beating fantasies. However, it was not this fascinating observation that formed the basis of objections to Ségur. Her most impassioned detractors’ concern was political. The question of the nation’s reading matter had become acute after the Second World War. Accompanying the purges of the Liberation era was a suspicion of right wing culture. Moreover, the Marshall Plan and the cultural impositions of the Cold War led to fears that to attract the youth away from the seductions of Mickey Mouse, French culture needed a new dynamism that children’s books dating from the nineteenth century were not equipped to provide. Marxist politician and child psychologist Henri Wallon led the movement, developing a far-reaching education programme with this goal in mind. Two of Wallon’s associates, Marc Soriano and Alfred Brauner, waged campaigns to encourage parents to think carefully about the type of books they gave their children.<sup>29</sup> Soriano therefore oversaw the revision of Jules Verne’s works to make them suitable for ‘modern’ children.<sup>30</sup> The

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<sup>28</sup> Dossiers de Presse, comtesse de Ségur, Hachette archive, IMEC; Francis Marcoin, *La comtesse de Ségur ou le bonheur immobile*, (Arras, Artois Presses Université, 1999) has a useful bibliography, see also his chapter ‘Lectures Barbares’, pp 297-313

<sup>29</sup> Alfred Brauner, *Nos livres d’enfants ont menti! Une base de discussion* (Paris, SABRI, 1951) preface by Henri Wallon; Marc Soriano, *Guide de littérature pour la jeunesse: courants, problèmes, choix*, (Paris, Flammarion, 1959, revised edition 1975); Soriano wrote the children’s literature reviews for Wallon’s journal *Enfance. Psychologie, Pédagogie, Neuro-Psychiatrie, Sociologie*

<sup>30</sup> On this episode, see *L’Arc*, 29 (1966), Jules Verne issue. The comtesse’s books were not re-edited in this manner – as Soriano noted, the offending message in many of her books underpinned the whole plot and so could not be easily removed

comtesse de Ségur was a particular *bête noire* for both Soriano and Brauner, as she clearly belonged to the bad old days. Brauner employed psychoanalytical techniques to denounce her books as the ravings of a sick old woman, while his colleague asked “comment s’en débarrasser?” As Jean-Yves Mollier notes, in the wake of this movement, the 1960’s proved a “long purgatory” for the comtesse de Ségur.<sup>31</sup> Her sales figures were unaffected by all the fuss however. Hachette simply repackaged the old favourites in bright colours reminiscent of Disney, and made handsome profits from the baby boom generation.<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile, Jacques Laurent, whose lurid article had provided her critics with much inspiration, looked on in amusement. He elaborated in his memoirs, “il se trouve que je fus, dans *La Table Ronde* le premier à souligner le sadisme ségurien, mais depuis, tant de docteurs solennels ont galvaudé ma trouvaille gourmande que je suis peu tenté d’insister.”<sup>33</sup>

Apparently the objections to her social ideas that Laurent raised in his article were in fact those of his father, who had tried to confiscate the comtesse’s books from his son. An ex-Vichy minister, Laurent was primarily concerned with contesting what he saw as Jean-Paul Sartre and the Left’s moral hijacking of intellectual thought in post-war France.<sup>34</sup> The review in which his article was published, *La Table Ronde*, had been founded by François Mauriac (as we know, a great Ségur enthusiast) with this same intention.<sup>35</sup> It is likely then that the article in question was in part conceived as a pastiche of Sartre’s technique of placing literature ‘on

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<sup>31</sup> Jean-Yves Mollier, ‘Éditer la Comtesse de Segur ou les ruses de la raison policière’, *Cahiers Robinson*, 9 (2001) p 14

<sup>32</sup> Marc Bauland, *Les collections de romans pour la jeunesse de la Librairie Hachette (1945-1980)*, D.E.A. d’histoire, directed by Jean-Yves Mollier (Université de Versailles-Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, octobre 1997, unpublished)

<sup>33</sup> Jacques Laurent, *Histoire égoïste*, (Paris, La Table Ronde, 1976) p 22, fn

<sup>34</sup> Nicholas Hewitt, *Literature and the Right in Postwar France. The Story of the Hussards*, (Berg, Oxford, 1996), chapter 6

<sup>35</sup> Patrick Louis, *La Table Ronde, une aventure singulière*, (Paris, La Table Ronde, 1992) pp 87-89



trial'.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Laurent's profanation of Ségur's oeuvre was also a subtle exercise in revealing the sophistication of her work. It closes with the arresting image of a savage's hand whipping out of the bushes to grasp at a little boy's ankle, taken from Ségur's *Vacances*. Much later, he would write, "pour les inquiéter, Edgar Poe suffit aux adultes. Edgar Poe ne suffirait pas aux enfants," and spoke of wanting to be a child once more, to receive her "coup de soleil dans l'oeil et son caresse lunaire."

These last few phrases are taken from Jacques Laurent's prefatory essay to the Laffont edition of Ségur's collected works, *Oeuvres*, published in 1990.<sup>37</sup> His collaboration on this project, which really sealed the comtesse's tardy entry into the canon of classic French authors, demonstrates that Laurent was one of the first critics to work towards rediscovering Ségur, moving study beyond the clichéd vision of didactic stories about little girls playing in châteaux. In the past twenty years or so, the comtesse has been enjoying something of a critical renaissance in French academic circles. Alongside the publication of her collected works, there has been a series of pioneering monographs,<sup>38</sup> and in 2000 the *Cabiers Séguriens* journal was launched. This body of research is invaluable. In particular, researchers such as Laura Kreyder, Francis Marcoin, and Isabelle Nières-Chevrel have brought to light the complexity of the writings of the comtesse de Ségur, as well as many of the fascinating issues surrounding her life and work.

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<sup>36</sup> I would like to thank Professor Hewitt for his advice on this point

<sup>37</sup> Comtesse de Ségur, *Oeuvres*, 3 Volumes, edited and annotated by Claudine Beaussant, preface by Jacques Laurent, (Paris, Robert Laffont, 1990)

<sup>38</sup> Laura Kreyder, *L'enfance des saints et des autres*, (1987) Marie-France Doray, *La comtesse de Ségur: une étrange paroissienne*, (Lyon, Rivages, 1990) and Francis Marcoin, *La comtesse de Ségur ou le bonheur immobile* (1999)

The bulk of French scholarly interest in the comtesse de Ségur has been from literary experts and historians of publishing. They have generally been keen to underplay Ségur's religious agenda.<sup>39</sup> The notion of *laïcité* (secularism) in public life, and especially in education, is a central part of the French national identity, and remains a fundamental principle to this day.<sup>40</sup> That one of the country's best-loved children's authors was a deeply militant Catholic does not sit well. Further, the current desire to make light of the moral and political messages of her works is probably a reaction against the weight of criticism that held her to be unsuitable for modern children. It has become fashionable to argue that the remarkable longevity of Ségur's oeuvre is in itself testimony to her subversiveness: "si Ségur est encore lue, c'est peut-être que ce qu'elle écrit est moins pieux et moins conformiste que ce qu'écrivirent ses consoeurs et confrères aujourd'hui oubliés."<sup>41</sup> Such a contention is problematic however, mainly because it refuses to take into account her contemporary reception; indeed this aspect has hitherto been more or less ignored by researchers.<sup>42</sup> There is little evidence, apart from reading between the lines of her books, to suggest that Ségur was indeed "une étrange paroissienne".<sup>43</sup> Granted, there are differences that can be traced

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<sup>39</sup> See for instance Doray, *La comtesse de Ségur*; Nières-Chevrel, 'Au miroir des écrivains français'; Claudine Beaussant, *La Comtesse de Ségur ou l'enfance de l'art* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 1988), and the historian Jean-Yves Mollier, whose work on Louis Hachette has led him to write about Ségur. Jean Glénisson's view is typical of modern thought on Ségur, arguing that her Russian 'soul' triumphed over any pious intentions she might have had, 'Le livre pour la jeunesse'. Laura Kreyder's research is a notable exception

<sup>40</sup> James F McMillan 'Priest hits girl': on the front line in the 'war of the two Frances', Clark and Kaiser, *Culture Wars*, 77-101, especially pp 100-1

<sup>41</sup> Nières-Chevrel, 'Au miroir des écrivains français', p 27

<sup>42</sup> Marie-José Strich, 'Lewis Carroll et la comtesse de Ségur' deux écrivains révélés par la littérature d'enfance', *Mythes, traductions, et créations*, 57-78, p 71 states that there are "peu d'échos sur la réception". Laura Kreyder in *Europe*, 914/915 (2005), p 50, also suggests that there was very little in the way of contemporary reception, apart from a few children's reviews, and Louis Veuillot's support, which she is not interested in as these are simply "celebratory" rather than literary.

<sup>43</sup> Title of Marie-France Doray's monograph on the comtesse

between her ideas and those of her milieu, notably in her portrayal of the body,<sup>44</sup> and her ideas on corporal punishment.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, the fervent support which she received from the *Bibliographie Catholique*, as well as from her eldest son, who was a leading prelate, and above all from the ‘intransigent’ Catholic journalist Louis Veuillot, would suggest that these differences were perhaps not as important as modern scholars argue them to be. In addition, if the new school of Ségur researchers is keen to underline her talents as an author in her own right [“à part entière”], it seems rather contradictory to suggest that the author ‘failed’ in her desire to write pious books. Would we do the same when considering a male writer like Chateaubriand? If his views were new and exciting in some way then he receives credit for being influential. We can retain the idea of his being a ‘proper’ author and a Catholic author at the same time with little difficulty. The same rule should surely apply to the comtesse.

The resurrection of the comtesse de Ségur has come at the expense of an important part of Ségur’s life, namely her relationship with her family and close circle. Her circle was made up of the controversial figures of her friend and hero Louis Veuillot,<sup>46</sup> and her sons Mgr Gaston

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<sup>44</sup> Doray argues that Ségur’s fascination with healthy bodies contrasted with the dolourism that characterised much of ultramontane discourse, and would of course dominate the Lourdes phenomenon, *La comtesse de Ségur: une étrange paroissienne*, chapters three and four. See also chapter two of this thesis, section one

<sup>45</sup> See chapter one, section one

<sup>46</sup> For an idea of the man and his influence, see Austin Gough, *Paris and Rome: the Gallican Church and the Ultramontane Campaign 1848-1853*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986) chapter 5; on his life see Eugène and François Veuillot’s four volume *Louis Veuillot* (Paris, Victor Retaux, 1899-1913) while obviously partisan it is a mine of information; also Pierre Pierrard’s excellent biography, *Louis Veuillot* (Paris, Beauchesne, 1998); and the most recent research by James F. McMillan, ‘Rediscovering Louis Veuillot: The Politics of Religious Identity in Nineteenth-Century France’, Nigel Harkness, Paul Rowe, Tim Unwin & Jennifer Yee (eds), *Visions/ Revisions, Essays on Nineteenth-Century French Culture* (Bern, Peter Lang AG, 2003) pp 305-322; McMillan, ‘Louis Veuillot, *L’Univers* and the ultramontane network in nineteenth-

de Ségur,<sup>47</sup> and the Marquis Anatole de Ségur. The former two in particular were hugely influential at the time, and devoted their lives to propagating a rather virulent form of Catholicism. Known at the time as ‘intransigent’ Catholics, they would no doubt be labelled ‘fundamentalists’ today. The comtesse’s close ties with this group have proved far too unsavoury for many scholars. This is not to argue that the ongoing popularity of the comtesse’s books indicates that their religious message still strikes a chord with her public. Such a question immediately opens a Pandora’s box of theoretical difficulties concerning how children read their books – which is why we ought to remain suspicious of scholars’ claims that Ségur’s oeuvre has not been received as it was intended to be. Rather, Ségur is interesting precisely because of her chequered critical fortune, and the recent insistence on her unorthodoxy, as both suggest that certain aspects of the comtesse’s life and works recall a part of their history that many French people would prefer to forget. She has become a ‘realm of memory’,<sup>48</sup> wherein conflicts over education and the place of religion in society have continued to be played out.

In contrast, this study lays great emphasis on her family and close circle, for this was the context which we must understand if we are to read her writings as a historical source. It is

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century France’, David Bates and Véronique Gazeau, (eds) *Liens personnels, réseaux, solidarités en France et dans les îles Britanniques (XI<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles)* (Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2006)

<sup>47</sup> On Mgr de Ségur, see the excellent, if partisan, biography by Marthe de Hédouville *Mgr de Ségur, sa vie – son action 1820-1881*, (Paris, Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1957). Further essential reading is the two-volume biography by his brother, Anatole de Ségur, *Mgr de Ségur. Souvenirs et récit d’un frère*, (Paris, Bray et Retaux, 1882); also useful are Charles Baille, *Souvenirs sur Mgr de Ségur* (La Chapelle-Montligeon, Imprimerie de Notre Dame de Montligeon, 1901); Henri Chaumont, *Monseigneur de Ségur Directeur des âmes* (Paris, René Haton, 1884). More recently, see the essays on the prelate and his family by Emile Poulat, in the volume he edited with Jean-Pierre Laurant, *L’antimaçonnisme catholique*, (Paris, Berg International, 1994)

<sup>48</sup> I use this term according to the ideas set out in Pierre Nora, (ed) *Realms of memory. Rethinking the French Past* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1996-98); see also Robert Gildea, *The Past in French History* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1994)

this emphasis that differentiates this thesis from previous research on Ségur. To facilitate the close reading of her works, it uses the correspondence, family papers, memoirs, biographies, and published writings of the comtesse, her associates and family.<sup>49</sup> Many of these sources have already been mined by several of the more adventurous literary researchers,<sup>50</sup> however, their interest is above all aesthetic: they rarely critically evaluate this material, and tend to discard the documents that interest the historian most. The most obvious example is the comtesse's reception, which offers little in the way of in-depth analysis of her works, but speaks volumes to those seeking to understand how her books were interpreted by contemporaries. Similarly, the family biographies provide a precious insight into the religious imagination of this highly influential groupuscule. Furthermore, the nineteenth century religious experience has been the object of a great deal of excellent study in the past twenty years. Researchers have revised our understanding of the period, notably by laying a new emphasis on this as a century of religious revival as much as of secularisation.<sup>51</sup> This casts Ségur's work in a different light, by showing that she was involved in a movement of great spiritual renewal and that her works were not an awkward remnant of an old order. This thesis therefore re-evaluates much of the source material on the comtesse by drawing upon this new body of research.

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<sup>49</sup> For exact details on source material, see the introductions and relevant footnotes to each chapter

<sup>50</sup> Kreyder, *L'enfance des saints et des autres*, 'Pour une bibliographie Ségurienne', pp 225-249 provides an invaluable guide

<sup>51</sup> For example, Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism 1789-1914*, (London, Routledge, 1989) is excellent; as is Cholvy and Hilaire's *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine*; and for a recent synthesis, see James F McMillan, 'Catholic Christianity in France from the Restoration to the Separation of Church and State, 1815-1905', Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley (eds), *World Christianities c. 1815-1914* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006) 217-232; for a good overview of research on Europe, see Clark and Kaiser, (eds), *Culture Wars*, which also has useful bibliographies for each country

With this aim in mind, we must locate the comtesse de Ségur's work at the juncture of religion, commerce, and education in Second Empire France, for this was the crucible of her work. Religion and education were the twin concerns of her milieu, and polarised political debates for much of the latter half of the nineteenth century. What made Ségur so dangerous in the eyes of subsequent critics like Soriano was her close link to a militant Catholic movement that sought to ensure religion was restored to what they felt was its rightful place at the centre of public life.<sup>52</sup> Through her family and close friends, the comtesse was linked to a network of writers and propagandists. Missionary work targeted children in particular, and the Ségur family produced some of the best-selling religious education material for French youth in this period. Her milieu were therefore keenly interested in their mother's evident talent for enthraling the nation's youth. In other words, the comtesse de Ségur was on the frontline of the so-called 'war of the two Frances'.

The phrase 'war of the two Frances' designates the divide in post-revolutionary France, which the comte de Montalembert famously characterised as the struggle between the "fils des croisés" and the "fils de Voltaire"; between those who remained loyal to throne and altar, and those who embraced the revolution. While this is clearly a simplification of French political positions, for intransigents like Veuillot and Mgr de Ségur it was all too real. Mgr de Ségur argued that you chose either Jesus, or the Revolution: Catholics could not be reconciled to the principles of republicanism.<sup>53</sup> The place of religion in society and the role it was to play in public life was a crucial factor in the divide. Church lands and personnel had

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<sup>52</sup> Soriano, *Guide de littérature pour la jeunesse*, pp 473-485

<sup>53</sup> See the excellent chapter by Geoffrey Cubitt, 'God, Man and Satan: Strands in Counter-Revolutionary Thought among Nineteenth-Century French Catholics', Nicholas Atkin and Frank Tallet, *Catholicism in Britain and France since 1789*, (The Hambledon Press, London, 1996) 135-150

been attacked by the revolutionaries of 1789, which undermined Church power. It had taken time to repair dislocations, and the nineteenth century was to prove one of great religious revival. The comtesse, her family, and close friends were passionately engaged in this movement to regenerate the faith in France. On the other side, republican ideas were gaining strength. The importance of the *idée laïque*, that is, the relegation of religion to the private sphere, was made very clear to republicans under the Second Empire, owing to what they saw as the shameful collusion of Church and State in Napoleon III's *coup d'état*. The episode was to form the basis of the 'Black Legend' created by the Third Republic, which provided justification for their secularising legislation. Their laic laws formed the culmination of this ideological conflict that had played out over the course of the nineteenth century. However, judging by Madame de Ségur's ongoing absence from the republican school curriculum, and the violence of the Wallon movement's denunciation of her work in the 1950's, the old enmities were still very much alive, well into the twentieth century. Why else would Marc Beigbeder select Ségur's donkey for his satire of Marshal Pétain?<sup>54</sup>

The third factor which must be added to this configuration of religion and education is money. Ségur's career has to be set against the backdrop of rapidly industrialising France, where the expanding bourgeoisie were enjoying a new prosperity. They and their offspring formed a new reading public, keen to acquire the 'right' values through cultural consumption. Developments in printing technology meant that the book trade was achieving

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<sup>54</sup> It was perhaps no coincidence that *Esprit* was at this time campaigning to prevent the Vichy government reintroducing religion into the school curriculum. Michel Winock, *Histoire politique de la revue Esprit (1930-1950)*, (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1975) p 232. The association persisted. For similar comments on the comtesse's donkey, accompanied by the consideration that it is the clerical authorities, not schoolchildren, who ought to be wearing the donkey's ears, see Gaston Bonheur, *Qui a cassé le vase de Soissons? L'album de famille de tous les Français* (Paris, Robert Laffont, 1963), pp 271-76

impressive economies of scale by the 1840's. In the heady atmosphere of growing consumerism in Second Empire France, there were fortunes to be made: Louis Hachette built up a huge publishing empire, a process to which Ségur's stories for children made no small contribution. Money was interlinked with morality, particularly in the 1850's when she started out her career. Ségur and Hachette performed a balancing act between satisfying the sense of morality of the time, whilst also appealing to the consumer, with fancy packaging, attractive pictures, and enjoyable stories. It was a time of great social dislocations, and the spectre of revolution loomed large. As already stated, Catholics were concerned to respond to changes in society (often by castigating this new order; industrialists were "les nouveaux Marquis de Carabas" according to the comtesse<sup>55</sup>), claiming a return to religion was the only way. Catholic writers produced reams of devotional literature, religious books, pamphlets, and journals designed to edify children and the working classes. With production costs lowered, and the Church providing a great distribution network, business flourished. By the 1850's several Catholic publishing houses had emerged as goliaths of the industry.<sup>56</sup> The trade in morals furnished Ségur and her sons with good incomes.

The irony was not lost on the comtesse. Recognising her position, she portrayed herself as presiding over this confluence of money and morality, "je prie mes petits lecteurs de consolider mon trône au moyen du suffrage universel dont j'invoque les bénéfices et dont ils partageront les profits."<sup>57</sup> This was Ségur's preface to a book she intended to be her tribute

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<sup>55</sup> Her tale 'Ourson', in the chapter tellingly entitled, 'la ferme, le château, l'usine', attacks the avidity of modern factory owners, *Oeuvres* 1:105

<sup>56</sup> Loïc Artiaga, 'Les catholiques et la littérature "industrielle" au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle', Jacques Migozzi and Philippe Le Guern (eds) *Production(s) du populaire*, (Limoges, Presses Universitaires de Limoges, 2004), pp 221-233

<sup>57</sup> Letter to Olga de Pitray, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1861



to Louis Veuillot. She makes it clear that the wage that she earned from her writings translated into influence, with which she intended to do good. Certainly her healthy book sales gave the comtesse authority in dealings with her editor. But there was more to it than just business. In an age of growing capitalism, money equalled power. The word ‘suffrage’ could mean the act of buying her books, but by using the phrase ‘universal suffrage’ Ségur’s reference is unmistakably to democracy. Her readers’ support had given the comtesse a ‘throne’ – a position of command. She made money from children reading her books, but they benefited too, indeed all stood to win from the education of children in the right way. The right way was Veuillot’s way, which placed religion back where it belonged at the centre of society. This preface never materialised into print, which is hardly surprising, as its confident boast of her political influence over the little readers of France was highly inappropriate. Ségur could not lay claim to universal suffrage, even in the indirect way of suggesting her book sales indicated votes for the education she provided. Moreover, not only were women barred from standing for election, but also children could not vote. And yet both women and children were caught in the eye of a storm that was only too political, and closely linked to questions of capturing the hearts and minds of the populace. Judging from her preface, the comtesse knew it.

By focusing on these three interlocking themes of commerce, culture wars and children’s education, this thesis argues that the comtesse de Ségur provides an important corrective to our understanding of nineteenth century Catholic women’s experience. Clearly, the comtesse and her little readers fit with the notion of a ‘feminized’ religion in nineteenth century France. The disproportionate involvement of women in Catholicism has been well

documented.<sup>58</sup> So has the notorious republican caricature that decried priestly manipulation of French women, warning men that their wives and sisters were being schooled to reject the modern world and work as the tools of republican destruction. Until recently, this tended to colour historians' perceptions of women.<sup>59</sup> While the comtesse was indeed counter-revolutionary in her outlook, it is inaccurate to see her as alienated from the supposedly 'masculine' modern world. Quite the contrary: as the brief sketch above illustrates, she saw herself as working within its systems. Ségur knew that she wielded her power through the fledging consumer society of Second Empire France. Like Louis Veillot, the comtesse de Ségur was a bitter enemy of modern society as it stood, but like him she was also very much a product of it, and involved in the shaping of its contours.<sup>60</sup>

Carol E Harrison recently expressed concern that Catholic women are still deprived of a voice in historiography.<sup>61</sup> Women's role in the shaping of nineteenth century Catholicism has

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<sup>58</sup> The classic text is Claude Langlois, *Le catholicisme au féminin. Les congrégations françaises à supérieure générale au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 1984); Hazel Mills, 'Negotiating the Divide: Women, Philanthropy and the 'Public Sphere' in Nineteenth-Century France', Nicholas Atkin and Frank Tallet, (eds) *Religion, Society and Politics in France since 1789*, (Hambledon Press, London, 1991), 29-54; Sylvie Fayet-Scribe, *Associations féminines et catholicisme. De la charité à l'action sociale XIX<sup>e</sup> – XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, Les Éditions Ouvrières, 1990); Ruth Harris, *Lourdes. Body and Spirit in a Secular Age* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1999); Caroline Ford, *Divided Houses. Religion and Gender in Modern France* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005)

<sup>59</sup> Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism 1789-1914*, (London, Routledge, 1989) especially chapter six; Bonnie G Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoises of Northern France in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981) For a critique of some of their conclusions, see James F. McMillan, 'Religion and Gender in Modern France', Atkin and Tallet, *Religion, Society and Politics in France*, 55-66

<sup>60</sup> On Veillot and modernity, see McMillan, 'Rediscovering Louis Veillot'; Clark 'The New Catholicism', Clark and Kaiser, (eds) *Culture Wars*

<sup>61</sup> Carol E Harrison, review of Caroline Ford, *Divided Houses*, *H-France Review*, 94 (2006) Harrison reiterates this concern in her article 'Zouave Stories. Gender, Catholic Spirituality, and French Responses to the Roman Question' *The Journal of Modern History*, 79 (2007) 274–305

been interpreted using a bottom-up paradigm, which therefore concludes that their influence was drawn primarily from numerical strength. However, in this schema there lingers an uneasy sense of masculine manipulation of the silent masses of women believers. With a few notable exceptions, they often appear to be pawns in the great antagonisms that rocked the male polity.<sup>62</sup> This thesis reverses the current approach, by looking at the problem from the top-down, and selecting an influential, even exceptional woman. By taking one of the most important sites of conflict in the ‘war of the two Frances’, namely education, my aim is to insert Ségur into the debate as an active subject. What she shows is that the old republican stereotypes are hardly a fair representation of the reach of women’s engagement in their religion. They could be (and were) involved in religious agitation at many different levels, and their interaction with male hierarchies was in fact a rather complex process, and not as segregated as current research implies.

If we are looking for Catholic women’s voices from this period they are not hard to find. The 1850’s experienced a great publishing boom, and along with this religious literature reached its zenith, taking up around twenty per cent of the market.<sup>63</sup> Numerous women authors were included in this cultural surge, and many were celebrities, championed, as Ségur was, by the Catholic establishment. Besides the comtesse de Ségur, were women such as Zenaïde Fleuriot, Victorine Monniot, Julie Gouraud, the comtesse Drohojowska, Eugénie

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<sup>62</sup> This is the main thrust of Harrison’s criticism of Ford’s *Divided Houses*. Cf. the work that has been done on Catholic feminists, David Barry ‘Hermance Lesguillon (1812-1882): The Diversity of French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century’ *French History*, 13, (1999), 381-416, and James F McMillan, ‘Wollstonecraft’s daughters, Marianne’s daughters, and the daughters of Joan of Arc: Marie Mauderet and Christian feminism in the French Belle Époque’, Clarissa Campbell Orr (ed) *Wollstonecraft’s Daughters. Womanhood in England and France 1780-1920* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1996) pp 186-198

<sup>63</sup> Claude Savart, *Les catholiques en France au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le témoignage du livre religieux*, (Paris, Beauchesne, 1985) pp 189-251

Guérin, Madame Craven, Mathilde Bourdon, and Josephine de Gaulle, amongst many others. In fact, rather than being an exception to the rule, it soon became apparent over the course of my research that the comtesse was part of a much wider grouping of women novelists, journalists and activists who were all energetically engaged in ‘the war of the two Frances’. Such women as the comtesse de Ségur were far from being in the thrall of priests. Rather, they had social and political questions uppermost in their minds when they delivered manuscripts to their editors. This case study therefore adds a new dimension to scholarship on the French culture wars, by revealing the importance of women, children, and children’s publishing to the religious revival mid-century.<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, it seems appropriate to add the comtesse de Ségur to the growing pantheon of women whose contributions to French public life have been documented by the school of research known as the ‘New Biography’.<sup>65</sup> Gender is the overarching narrative of this thesis, for, simply by entering into professional life and entertaining ambitions of power, the comtesse was contravening the strict gender codes that structured society in nineteenth century France. Michelle Perrot describes these codes as the “invisible barriers” that framed French society.<sup>66</sup> These invisible barriers prevented women from getting ideas above their station. She may have been an imperious aristocrat, but Madame de Ségur was first and

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<sup>64</sup> A colloquium on religion and children’s literature came to the same conclusion, namely the important role children’s literature played in the religious revival mid-century and notes that this was a Europe-wide phenomenon. See Jan De Maeyer, Hans-Heino Ewers, Rita Ghesquière, Michel Manson, Pat Pinsent, and Patricia Quaghebeur (eds), *Religion, Children’s Literature and Modernity in Western Europe 1750-2000* (Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2005)

<sup>65</sup> Jo Burr Margadant (ed), *The New Biography. Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2000), pp 1-32

<sup>66</sup> Michelle Perrot, Preface, Alain Corbin, Jacqueline Lalouette, Michèle Riot-Sarcey (eds) *Femmes dans la Cité 1815-1871* (Grâne, Créaphis, 1997)

foremost a woman. Even the Empress Eugénie had learned to her cost the dangers of venturing too far beyond her allotted role.<sup>67</sup>

There are tensions inherent in choosing the comtesse as a subject. The general thrust of the ‘New Biography’ school thus far has been overwhelmingly feminist. To enter the public sphere, its practitioners argue, is automatically an act of resistance to culturally accepted gender roles. However, the comtesse de Ségur, as author of the best-selling *Petites Filles modèles*, was one of the most successful creators of just such cultural norms. Can the comtesse de Ségur qualify for a ‘New Biography’? What can a study of the comtesse’s life bring to this school of research? It ought to be remembered that it was not just feminist heroines that acceded to the public sphere, and that not all women used their opportunities as a public platform to denounce their repression; indeed, in the case of the comtesse de Ségur quite the opposite was true. However, as Elizabeth Macknight’s article on the reluctance of French noblewomen to push for equal rights points out, “negative responses or lack of response to campaigns for women’s rights form part of the historical narrative of feminism”.<sup>68</sup>

What is more, Ségur forms a crucial part of girls’ culture, and as such merits study. Despite her ascendancy over mid-nineteenth and twentieth century girls’ culture, she has been

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<sup>67</sup> Victoire Bidegain, ‘L’origine d’une réputation: l’image de l’impératrice Eugénie dans la société française du Second Empire (1853-1870)’, Corbin et al, *Femmes dans la cité*, pp 57-67

<sup>68</sup> Elizabeth C. Macknight, ‘Why Weren’t They Feminists?: Parisian Noble Women and the Campaigns for Women’s Rights in France, 1880-1914’ *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 14 (2007) 127-141

noticeably absent from the main syntheses of girls' education<sup>69</sup>. This is in part because the focus remains overwhelmingly on the history of institutions, the teaching profession, or treatises that have a more obvious pedagogical use. Her books are 'educational', in the moral and religious, and behavioural sense, rather than the strictly 'instructional' sense. Researchers often seem unsure where to place her. Marie-Françoise Lévy discounted the comtesse's books from the corpus of education manuals she examined for her study of domestic education, *De mères en filles*, because she explained "ces écrits plus romancés que littéraires obéissent à un genre particulier – et si l'oeuvre de la comtesse de Ségur s'y rattache, elle se distingue néanmoins par une écriture s'apparentant davantage au roman."<sup>70</sup> This, despite the jacket cover having lured readers in with the promise "nous avons tous – ou presque – appris à lire avec la comtesse de Ségur, sans savoir pour autant quelle histoire se dissimulait derrière les aventures de Sophie. *De mères en filles* lève le voile de ce mystère." Most importantly, the concept of the 'petite fille modèle' has entered into French idiom to describe precisely the type of girlhood experience Lévy wanted to unveil.<sup>71</sup> This is why the

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<sup>69</sup> Françoise Mayeur, *L'Éducation des filles en France au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, (Paris, Hachette, 1979); Françoise Mayeur and Jacques Gadille, (eds), *Éducation et images de la femme chrétienne en France au début du XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle. Entretiens de La Combe de Lancey (Isère) 8, 9, 10 octobre 1978 à l'occasion du centenaire de la mort de Mgr Dupanloup*, (Lyon, Éditions l'Hermès, 1980); Rebecca Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom. Educating Bourgeois Girls in Nineteenth Century France* (Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005); Christina de Bellaigue, *Educating Women. Schooling and Identity in England and France 1800-1867* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007); Marie-Françoise Lévy, *De mères en filles: l'éducation des françaises 1850/1880* (Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1984). More literary works by Isabelle Bricard, *Saintes ou pouliches: L'éducation des jeunes filles au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, Albin Michel, 1985); Colette Cosnier, *Le silence des filles de l'aiguille à la plume* (Paris, Fayard, 2001); and Paule Constant *Un monde à l'usage des demoiselles* (Paris, Gallimard, 1987) occasionally mention Ségur

<sup>70</sup> Lévy, *De mères en filles*, p 13

<sup>71</sup> For example, Philippe Lejeune records how an editor interested in his research on girls' diaries had an idea for a book "il me propose d'écrire *Je suis une jeune fille modèle* (!). En fait je crois que je suis plutôt un bon petit diable..." *Le Moi des demoiselles*, p 37. Lucile le Verrier's published diary calls her "une petite fille (presque) modèle", while Michelle Perrot's

jacket of *De mères en filles* used Ségur's books to explain to the public what the book was about. If feminist historians are interested in the concept of 'cultural norms', against which they measure the lives and struggles of women, then surely it makes sense to examine the production of such norms in close detail? If they have been interested in the history of education, it is often for precisely this reason. Simone de Beauvoir (b. 1908), whose philosophy of feminism "on ne nait pas femme, on le devient" has proved so influential on gender history, was well aware of the importance of the comtesse de Ségur.<sup>72</sup> This thesis will therefore look at various 'readings' of Ségur to try to understand what has been her impact upon her feminine audience.

The problem of focusing on a sole person in a study that purports to nuance current historiography is that it is unsatisfactory to make one individual 'speak' for many. On the one hand, Madame de Ségur was in many ways an exceptional woman, and so to what extent is this thesis justified in arguing that she can help historians to reevaluate our understanding of Catholic women's experience in nineteenth century France? On the other hand, it must also be recognised that the 'comtesse de Ségur', that is to say the woman in the public sphere, was in many ways a set of symbols designed to be 'read' by her public, and subsequently shaped by varying forces. This idea is drawn from the 'New Biography', and developments in social history in general, which emphasise the importance of situating individuals within a wider network of meaning in which they worked, and into which they projected their image. The notion that women were wholly barred from the public sphere, as

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deconstruction of Caroline Brame's gendered self uses the 'petite fille modèle' as a point for comparison, *Le journal intime de Caroline Brame*, p 174.

<sup>72</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe* (Paris, Gallimard, 1949) 2: 37; see also her *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, pp 29, 42, 70-1, 77-8

the cultural ideal of the nineteenth century held, has been challenged by recent research. Still, such an enterprise was often extremely difficult and involved a careful performance of the correct personae. Chapter one examines the selves that Madame de Ségur enacted in public, and the stories she created in order to conform to the restrictions placed upon Ségur by her gender, her class, and her religion. It looks at the meaning that they held for contemporaries, and most importantly of all, the important use they had in the culture wars, as it became imperative to make private piety public.

The first chapter therefore introduces the main biographical details of the comtesse de Ségur's life. From there on the thesis is organised thematically rather than chronologically. Still, it follows in logical succession, to tease apart the forces at work that produced the 'comtesse de Ségur' the phenomenon. So it looks first at the books; then the involvement of her editor; before getting to the heart of the culture wars, namely Ségur's role in the ultramontane network formed by her family and close friends, and then situating her in the wider context of the new militant strain of 'governess' literature. The thesis closes with a consideration of her impact upon girls' culture.

In the scholarship on the 'war of the two Frances', children are all too often left out of the equation, or simply mentioned in passing. However, they were certainly not forgotten by contemporaries: the comtesse's eldest son Gaston de Ségur called children 'little missionaries in the home', and was convinced that they represented the key to regenerating French religion. Thus, chapter two, on the collected works of the comtesse de Ségur, concentrates on the question of how their militant designs impacted upon the Catholic construction of 'childhood' and the ways in which this changed in the nineteenth century. The comtesse's



approach to children's writing calls into question the idea that Catholics remained alienated from the modern revaluation of childhood that began with the Enlightenment.<sup>73</sup> In response to the argument currently popular in literary scholarship on the comtesse, which posits that religion was not her central concern, this chapter argues that Ségur skilfully weaves religious morals into her fictions.

This notion of modernity is developed further in chapter three, which shifts the focus to Madame de Ségur's relationship with her editor, Émile Templier, at Hachette. Using Ségur's dealings with Templier, and in particular her struggles against the censorship of her work, we can trace the tribulations of an author in a time of rapid industrialisation of the print trade. In the early Second Empire, Ségur struggled to please the market in the context of intense moral pressure. In the aftermath of 1848, Napoleon III's regime kept the print trade under close watch. As her books were likely to be read by little girls, a series of correctors and editors scrutinised her works for any hint of impropriety which might spell disaster for her publisher. The tables were turned as the Empire liberalised, for Ségur's increasingly militant aims were by extension anti-government in tone, as the intransigents had fallen out with Napoleon III over his policy in Italy. This brought her into conflict with her editor once more. The process laid bare the comtesse's aims for the new, ever expanding reading public, how she perceived her writing and its possibilities, but also the ways in which she constructed a professional voice for herself in order to protect her interests as an artist.

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<sup>73</sup> Glénisson, 'La littérature pour la jeunesse' cf. De Maeyer et al, *Religion, Children's Literature and Modernity in Western Europe*, which is the first attempt to really challenge this assumption. Jan de Maeyer's essay, 'The Concept of Religious Modernisation' is particularly instructive

Following on from the question of what were Ségur's aims for her reading public is those of her close circle. Through her family and close friends, the comtesse de Ségur was linked to a network of militant writers and propagandists, this chapter examines their workings. This chapter assesses the importance of her role as matriarch, presiding over the literary phenomenon that was the Ségur family in mid-century France. It looks at the importance of the 'family', as a public entity, and underscores the political importance of performing piety in public.

The final chapter situates the comtesse in the school of "governess" literature. Using the methodology of the 'New Biography' it looks at how perceptions of these writers affected how she constructed her public identity. "Governess" authors laboured under misogynistic notions of women pedagogues. Such old stereotypes died hard in their case, for they have proved distasteful subject matter for feminist historians. Finally, it asks how the development of girls' literature and literacy impacted upon the ways in which little girls constructed their gender identity in this period.

Above all, this thesis highlights the ambiguities of the Second Empire, where a Catholic woman preaching self-abnegation and conformism to her readers, entered centre stage in the supposedly masculine public sphere. The comtesse and her colleagues were not feminists, but they were certainly women in the public sphere, and as such wielded not inconsiderable influence.

# Chapter 1

## Life Stories

A MES PETITES-FILLES  
CAMILLE ET MADELEINE  
DE MALARET

Mes très chères enfants,  
Voici les contes dont le récit vous a tant amusées, et que je vous avais promis de publier.  
En les lisant, chères petites, pensez à votre vieille grand-mère, qui, pour vous plaire, est sortie de son obscurité et a livré à la censure du public le nom de la

COMTESSE DE SÉGUR,  
née Rostopchine”<sup>74</sup>

In this dedication to her first book, the comtesse de Ségur introduced herself to the public. It contains all the crucial ingredients of her ‘brand’ that was to prove so popular. She evokes a delightful picture of two little girls, sitting listening rapt as their grandmother tells them stories. What could be more innocent and charming than for the comtesse to give in to her little darlings’ desire to see these stories in print? Yet this is no ordinary grandmother. With dramatic flair, she builds up to her grand announcement: that the illustrious comtesse de Ségur, daughter of the formidable General Rostopchine, is entering into the public arena.

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<sup>74</sup> *Nouveaux contes de fées* (1857), *Oeuvres* 1:2

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the grand outlines of the comtesse de Ségur's life, and ask: who was this dear, but rather contradictory, old grandmother? As she was a celebrity and an aristocrat, her life was automatically considered of public interest; moreover she was a writer who presided over a family of writers, and therefore there exists a wealth of material with which to reconstruct her life. However, as can be seen from this opening paragraph, such a task is far from straightforward, because her identity was so carefully packaged for popular consumption. The comtesse de Ségur was a master storyteller, and some of the most attractive stories she told to her public were about her 'self'.

Undertaking to write a person's life in the wake of the post-modernist rejection of the unified 'self' is fraught with pitfalls, if indeed it is possible at all. In 1986 Pierre Bourdieu spoke ominously of the "biography illusion"<sup>75</sup>. He argued that identity is fluid, and contingent to time, place, and a variety of historically specific factors that are all subject to change. The one fixed point in a person's life is their name (and even so, this is only true for men). The medium of biography has been exposed as a creative exercise which seeks to impose a single, coherent narrative upon the disorder of multiple and contradictory selves that a person constructs in the course of their life. Besides the epistemological complications, biography had fallen out of favour with historians, as it was associated with an outmoded vision of history centred upon the stories of great events and great men. For a long time, in spite of the perennial popularity of the genre with the general public, many historians viewed biography's rightful place to be hidden away under a sub-heading of

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<sup>75</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, 'L'illusion biographique', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 62/63 (1986) 69-72

literature. In recent years however, the growing interest of social historians in how individuals fashion identity within the social constraints imposed upon them by their gender, or race, religion, class, occupation, and so on, has led to a resurgence of biography. They have embraced the idea of multiple selves, seeing this not as a problem, but as a key to deconstructing the workings of prescriptive roles upon a person. This is the methodology currently favoured by researchers looking at women in the public sphere, and is known as the ‘New Biography’<sup>76</sup>. The ‘New Biography’ provides a useful set of tools with which to read the personae constructed by and about the comtesse de Ségur throughout her public life.

Rather than a biography, this chapter will provide a ‘new biographical’ analysis of the comtesse de Ségur’s life stories. It will make use of primary source material from the Veuillot family papers at the Institut Catholique, which has not been used before either in scholarship on the comtesse de Ségur or indeed by any researchers, and which sheds new light on the comtesse’s approach to writing her books. The novelty of this project is to critically evaluate the published source material – her books, family correspondence, memoirs, and the Ségur family biographies – and to read them together, setting these documents in their specific cultural context, in order to reconstruct the pressures which determined the comtesse de Ségur’s narrative choices.

The New Biography is particularly interested in the experiences of women who challenged the nineteenth century concept of society divided into “two spheres”. The “public sphere” was designated masculine, while the allotted place of women was in the “domestic sphere”.

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<sup>76</sup> Margadant (ed), *The New Biography*, pp 1-32

For men to be present in public meant public office, honour, and civic duty, while for a woman to be in public carried shameful connotations of consumption and objectification.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, many women did enter the public sphere in the nineteenth century, out of necessity or desire. To do so, they had to carefully negotiate the strict gender norms set out by society, to avoid being accused of transgressing decency. Biography is therefore a useful vehicle for examining such structures and their effects upon individuals.<sup>78</sup> New Biographies focus on the lives of prominent ‘public’ women, and the personae they had to adopt in order to accede to public life. The majority of New Biographies have focused upon women who were in some way subversive. The comtesse de Ségur is a controversial choice because she was a deeply committed, ‘intransigent’ Catholic, and therefore believed in the importance of self-abnegation. As we shall discuss below, it is precisely because of her conservatism that Ségur is a most interesting subject for such a study.

Although all those in the public eye had to present a legible persona,<sup>79</sup> for women in the nineteenth century the personae available to them were strictly limited. To be a ‘public woman’ was to lay oneself open to misogynistic scrutiny as a transgressor of all that was considered natural and proper. Women had to conform to the accepted image of femininity, or risk defamation, censorship, possibly even prison. Thus, the comtesse de Ségur, like many of the women represented in the New Biography, acceded to professional opportunities through her insistence upon respectable domesticity. As can be seen in her dedication

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<sup>77</sup> Michelle Perrot, *Femmes Publiques*, (Paris, Les Éditions Textuels, 1997)

<sup>78</sup> Joan Walloch Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, (Revised Edition, Columbia University Press, 1999) p 44

<sup>79</sup> William Reddy, *The Invisible Code: Honour and Sentiment in Postrevolutionary France, 1814-1848*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997); Carol E Harrison, *The Bourgeois Citizen in Nineteenth-Century France. Gender, Sociability and the Uses of Emulation* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999)

quoted above, the comtesse boldly announced the fact that she was renouncing her “obscurity”, and exposing the name of the comtesse de Ségur née Rostopchine to public censure. It is interesting that she characterises her former domestic existence rather witheringly as “obscurity”, presumably an indication of how greatly she prized her new professional status as an author. Nevertheless, her choice of words indicates just how risky an enterprise this could be. She was exposing the “names” of Ségur and Rostopchine to the public. Her use of the impersonal “the”, rather than referring to them as “my” names is revelatory – first and foremost they were the names of her father and her husband. Family honour was at stake. This was the critical filter through which all information about the comtesse in the public domain has passed.

### **Biographies as Sources**

The selves which Madame de Ségur fashioned need to be considered in conjunction with the normative role which such life stories were supposed to perform in this period. Her books, but also her ‘real’ biographical life were to reinforce each other, to present a ‘model’ life. The illusion that this was her ‘real’ life functioned to underline the message that this was a model of behaviour intended for the reader to imitate. Thus, alongside her own self-fashioning we find biographies of the comtesse by her family. They all worked hard to ensure the continuation of the image of the comtesse de Ségur as a devoted grandmother surrounded by her grandchildren. Cécile Dauphin and Philippe Lejeune suggest that family biographies obey several of the rules of autobiography, because of the close involvement of the author in the subject they are writing about. The authors identify themselves as a member of the family, and alert the reader to the fact that this is not a history of *a* family,

but of *their* family. As such, their interest lies less in literary concerns, more in writing the family identity as they wish it to be preserved.<sup>80</sup>

The idea that the life stories of great men and women should inspire others has always been central to the genre of biography. Furthermore, in Catholic culture, biography, in the form of the lives of saints, plays an important part in religious instruction. As a Catholic celebrity, the comtesse de Ségur's life was swiftly put into print to inspire others following her death. Exemplary versions of her life were enshrined in a series of biographies written by her family.<sup>81</sup> Her daughter Olga also produced two volumes of edited correspondence.<sup>82</sup> These texts form the bulk of information on the comtesse de Ségur's private life. Moreover, they were also the major point of reference for subsequent biographers, and so were crucial in the construction of the 'official' image of her. A great deal (though by no means all) of the source material on the comtesse de Ségur has passed through this ideological filter.

According to the family ideal, the comtesse de Ségur's life and vocation can be summed up in the phrase "Dieu et mes enfants", the legend which she had inscribed on her tombstone.

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<sup>80</sup> Cécile Dauphin, Pierette Lebrun-Pézerat, and Danièle Pouban, *Ces bonnes lettres. Une correspondance familiale au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, (Paris, Albin Michel, 1995) Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1975, 1996, new, revised edition)

<sup>81</sup> Mgr de Ségur, wrote about his mother's and sister's lives and deaths in *Ma Mère. Souvenir de sa vie et de sa sainte mort* (Paris, Tolra, 1875). Her second son, Anatole de Ségur was the main biographer of the family. His best-known work is *Mgr de Ségur. Souvenirs et récit d'un frère* 2 vols, (Paris, Bray et Rétaux, 1882) which contains precious details on the family's religious conversion. Anatole also transcribed letters between the comtesse and her father, in *Souvenirs et causeries du soir*, (Paris, J. Lefort, [1900]). The youngest daughter, the Vicomtesse Olga de Simard de Pitray, dedicated two books to her mother and elder brother's memories, they both contain extensive details on the comtesse: *Mon bon Gaston, souvenirs intimes et familiers par sa sœur Olga*, (Paris, Gaume et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1887), and *Ma chère maman (Comtesse de Ségur, née Rostopchine) pour faire suite à Mon bon Gaston. Souvenirs intimes et familiers* (Paris, Gaume et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1891)

<sup>82</sup> Vicomtesse de Simard de Pitray, (ed) *Lettres de la Comtesse de Ségur née Rostopchine au Vicomte et à la Vicomtesse de Pitray* (Paris, Hachette, 1891), and *Lettres d'une grand'mère: La Comtesse de Ségur à son petit-fils Jacques de Pitray* (Paris, Librairie H. Oudin, 1898)



They emphasised her role as an exemplary Catholic grandmother, who turned to writing almost accidentally, as an extension of her maternal role. The second concern of these family biographies, beyond sanctifying their mother's life, was to glorify the new generation of the Ségur family. They formed a part of a whole body of books on the Ségur family.

As the reading revolution progressed, and literacy rates continued creeping upwards, Church authorities and moralists concurred that real-life examples of Catholic lives were far more appropriate than any other form of writing (notably novels or fairy tales). As the Jesuit Father Marquigny explained, “les aventures imaginaires de ces êtres d’exception, [characters in novels] pour lesquels on sollicite notre enthousiasme, n’ont pas la pénétrante influence des faits authentiques et d’actions réelles.”<sup>83</sup> The Catholic Church recognised the missionary potential of private spiritual writings, and many ecclesiastics or Catholic editors published the so-called ‘secret’ diaries of pious women.<sup>84</sup> The lives of saints such as St François de Sales, or the *Imitation of Jesus Christ* were best-sellers in this period,<sup>85</sup> which also saw the publication of a whole series of contemporary diaries, letters and biographies. Faced with what many Catholics saw as the threat of modernisation, these life stories were to provide not just a blueprint for the life of the modern Christian, but a precious weapon in the struggle against anti-clericalism and dechristianisation. It was important to make private piety public.

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<sup>83</sup> Le P. E. Marquigny de la Compagnie de Jésus, *Une femme forte. La comtesse d’Adelstan. Étude biographique et morale*, (Paris, Jacques Lecoivre, 1873), p 15

<sup>84</sup> Michelle Perrot, ‘Une jeune fille du faubourg Saint Germain’, Caroline Brame, *Le journal intime de Caroline Brame* Annotated and with essays by Michelle Perrot and Georges Ribeill, (Paris, Editions Montalba, 1985) pp 170-171

<sup>85</sup> Claude Savart, ‘Le livre religieux’, *HEF*, 3:406-7

Such pious concerns on the part of her family created a dualistic image of the comtesse, as there was always tension between the holy image they sought to perpetuate, and the much more complex selves which the comtesse had projected through the medium of her books and writings. Paradoxically for somebody who traded so heavily on a loving grandmother image, her books feature countless examples of older women prone to losing their temper and administering brutal beatings to little children. While the comtesse always identified herself with the gentle, Catholic grandmother figures in her books, she became indissolubly associated in the popular imagination with her other female characters' excessive violence. Indeed, the content of these tales that 'grand'mère' was reading to the nation's children was often far from reassuring. Ségur certainly had a vivid imagination, and delighted in encouraging children's interest in blood and gore. In her capacity as grandmother, she informed her young grandson Jacques de Pitray "le sang chaud enivre comme le vin", when explaining what his missing pet ferret might be up to.<sup>86</sup> As will be seen below, this dualistic image was exacerbated by her father's reputation. The suspicion that there was a darker side to the nation's grandmother dogged her career from the very outset.

The sheer volume and variety of material she produced as a writer allows the study in detail the self-fashioning of a Catholic woman; in other words of a woman who was supposed to have annihilated all notion of self. Coupled with the fact that she was a celebrity, and as such prompted interest from a range of critics, this gives rise to a number of contradictory narratives to the official exemplary grandmother line that her family emphasised. This is the first 'New Biography' of such a woman. It allows us to nuance, or at least add flesh to the

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<sup>86</sup> Letter to Jacques de Pitray, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1864

symbols of maternity, silence, suffering, and self-abnegation that formed the ideal of religious womanhood in this period.<sup>87</sup>

## I. Childhood

“C’est singulier qu’on puisse si bien oublier pendant des années ce dont on se souvient si clairement après.”<sup>88</sup>

So mused little Sophie on the forgetting and remembering of her sad childhood in *Les Vacances*. Several scholars have highlighted the poignancy of this idea in the mouth of Sophie, the comtesse’s semi-autobiographical character.<sup>89</sup> Sophie is the heroine of her Fleurville trilogy, comprising of *Petites Filles modèles* (1858), *Les Malheurs de Sophie* (1858), and *Les Vacances* (1859). The trilogy followed her first book, a collection of fairy tales. Ségur announced that her new works were based upon real life, the ‘model’ real life of her family in Normandy which she was recording for the profit of her readership. Privately she admitted that they were also in part based upon her own childhood, and that she was using literature to confront ghosts from the past. This approach leads to a strange concoction of past and present in the trilogy. She was obliged by the conventions of the day to mask her reminiscences in a subtle play of fiction and memory. In the prudish mid-century, the idea that a woman aristocrat from the pious faubourg Saint Germain would write her childhood memories with anything other than exemplary aims in mind was shocking. Michelle Perrot

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<sup>87</sup> Mills, ‘Negotiating the Divide’; Michaela di Giorgio, ‘La bonne catholique’, Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot (eds) *Histoire des femmes en Occident* (Paris, Plon, 1991), 4: 169-194

<sup>88</sup> *Oeuvres* 1:434

<sup>89</sup> Isabelle Nières-Chevrel “‘Les Vacances’ de la Comtesse de Ségur ou en finir avec le malheur de Sophie’ *La revue des livres pour enfants*, 131-132 (1990)

emphasises that the notion of an individual “self” was contrary to the values of this aristocratic society that placed the family before the individual, and preached Catholic self-abnegation to its women.<sup>90</sup> Memoirs were generally written by great men, or perhaps society women, and recorded important events. Writing about something as banal as one’s childhood on the other hand was a dubious practice that had been invented by Rousseau, a hate figure in *bien-pensant* circles. That George Sand had recently turned her hand to remembering her childhood no doubt confirmed the disreputability of the undertaking. Moreover, the comtesse felt that her childhood had been anything but exemplary. She appears to have used her own experiences to try to warn a new generation not to resort to corporal punishment. This was not an appropriate subject in the century that particularly idealised the relationship between mothers and children. Jules Vallès’ *L’Enfant* (1879) caused outrage due to its frank portrayal of his mother’s violent methods of disciplining her son.<sup>91</sup> As we shall see in chapter three, even in a fictional guise the violence in the Fleurville trilogy caused problems with the censor for the comtesse. However, the heavy restrictions upon writing her story did not prevent the comtesse from weaving a web of childhood past and present in order to revisit her own memories, and in so doing fashion her identity as an author with a specific agenda on childcare.

It is often noted that many children’s authors experienced traumatic childhoods. Madame de Ségur was no exception.<sup>92</sup> The future comtesse de Ségur, née Sophie Rostopchine,<sup>93</sup> was

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<sup>90</sup> Perrot, ‘Une jeune fille du faubourg Saint Germain’, p 171

<sup>91</sup> Zeldin, *France 1848-1945*, 1:336-7

<sup>92</sup> Aside from her semi-autobiographical Fleurville stories, information on the comtesse de Ségur’s family and childhood comes mostly from the family biographies. Anatole also produced a biography of the comte Rostopchine, and reproduced family letters. Conserved within the Ségur family papers is correspondence between the comte and comtesse

born into the highest ranks of the Russian aristocracy in 1799. Her godfather was Tsar Paul I. The comte Rostopchine was a prominent figure in Russian high society. Tolstoy characterised him as a flamboyant, witty socialite, and ultimately, the embodiment of all that was decadent and weak in Alexandrian Russia.<sup>94</sup> Thanks to Rostopchine's favour at court, the family was extravagantly rich, and owned several properties, of which the most impressive was the country estate at Voronovo, just outside Moscow. The comte Rostopchine devoted much of his wealth to embellishing this enormous palace, whose estate comprised several thousand serfs.<sup>95</sup> Despite such an illustrious setting, by all accounts the comtesse de Ségur's childhood was rather unhappy,<sup>96</sup> and she entitled her semi-autobiographical book *Les Malheurs de Sophie* [usually translated as *Sophie's Misfortunes*]. The children's upbringing was entrusted entirely to their mother, the comtesse Rostopchine, a singular woman. Anecdotes of her alleged brutality abound.<sup>97</sup> Her daughter Sophie's storybooks certainly portray her in a deeply ambiguous manner, while the writings of her

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Rostopchine with their daughter, in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Nouvelles Acquisitions Françaises 22834. Later, several members of the comtesse's Russian family went on to produce biographies of her parents, the comte and comtesse Rostopchine. Her eldest sister's memoirs, Nathalie Narichkine, née Rostopchine, *1812 Le comte Rostopchine et son temps* (St Petersburg, Société R. Golicke et A. Willborg, 1912) contain some details on their childhood. Marthe de Hédouville edited *Les Rostopchine Une grande famille russe au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, (Paris, Éditions France-Empire, 1984), which translates and transcribes Rostopchine family correspondence discovered in the 1970's by the Franco-Russian researcher Marcel Orbec

<sup>93</sup> I have chosen to use the French spelling of her Russian name, as this was how the comtesse signed her books, and have similarly adopted this policy of simplicity with her parents' names.

<sup>94</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *War & Peace* (1865-9)

<sup>95</sup> Gaston's travel diaries written during his visit to Russia give an idea of the size and grandeur of the estate, see Paul Loyrette and Marie-José Strich, *Sur les pas de la comtesse de Ségur. Le voyage en Russie de Louis-Gaston de Ségur*, (Paris, Gallimard, 2005); Narichkine, *1812*, pp 68-9

<sup>96</sup> Both the family and more recent biographies concur on this point. Her sister's biography constantly reiterates that theirs was an unhappy upbringing, Narichkine, *1812*.

<sup>97</sup> See Marthe de Hédouville's biography *La Comtesse de Ségur et les siens*, (Paris, Editions du Conquistador, 1953)

other daughter Nathalie Narichkine, and granddaughter, Lydie Rostopchine,<sup>98</sup> paint her as violent, vindictive and dangerous.

Ségur's daughter, Olga, explained “dans son livre des *Malheurs de Sophie* (par le mot ‘malheurs’ ma mère a voulu spirituellement sous-entendre ses méfaits enfantins) l’auteur s’est souvent mis en scène. L’enfance de ma mère fut très attristée par les rigueurs extrêmes qu’elle eût à subir... Je me hâte d’ajouter que cette manière d’élever ses filles était le résultat d’une conviction sincère et que, dans la suite, ma grand’mère, devenue plus indulgente et moins absolue dans sa manière de voir, regretta cette façon d’agir et éleva plus doucement ses derniers-nés.”<sup>99</sup> Inspired by Rousseau’s *Emile*, the comtesse Rostopchine felt that her children should be brought up to reject luxury or comforts of any sort, and learn how to look after themselves. She forbade her children to drink or eat anything between allocated meal times. The worst torture was thirst, particularly in summer, and the children resorted to drinking from the dog’s bowl. The elder sister Nathalie recalled harsh Russian winters spent without being allowed boots, hats or gloves, “comment sommes nous restés en vie avec le régime que ma mère nous faisait suivre, c’est ce que je ne comprends pas.”<sup>100</sup> Interestingly, in Ségur’s *Les Malheurs de Sophie* the guilt is projected onto the child. Madame de Réan, the mother, is portrayed as distant, and rather severe, but she is always in the right. The incident with the dog bowl for example is transformed from a survival tactic into a childish misdemeanour. To amuse her friends who are coming to celebrate her birthday, Sophie wants to set up a little tea party. When her mother refuses to give the child real tea and cakes, the girl decides to make an ersatz tea instead, using water from the dog bowl, chalk

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<sup>98</sup> Lydie Rostoptchine, *Les Rostoptchine*, (Paris, Balland, 1984, [1919])

<sup>99</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Mon bon Gaston*, p 156

<sup>100</sup> Narichkine, *1812*, p 85

for sugar lumps, and white paint for milk. Her plan fails when the guests spit out her tea in disgust, and a fight ensues. The moral of the tale is that Sophie ought not to have disobeyed her mother. The problem that Ségur faced when disguising difficult childhood memories in the form of educational books for children becomes clear. The adult's moral perspective must prevail.

This example illustrates just how complicated the Fleurville books are as a source for Ségur's childhood, but it is also fascinating to see Ségur's process of reconstructing her early life. The dedication to *Les Malheurs de Sophie* announces "voici des histoires vraies d'une petite fille que grand-mère a beaucoup connue dans son enfance"<sup>101</sup>, although this is really a clue for the discerning reader that the protagonist and the author are the same. Both are called Sophie, they share the same birthday, and a description of Sophie, "elle avait une bonne grosse figure bien fraîche, bien gaie, avec de très beaux yeux gris, un nez en l'air un peu gros, une bouche grande et toujours prête à rire, des cheveux blonds pas frisés et coupés court comme ceux d'un garçon"<sup>102</sup> resembles a portrait painted of the author around the same age<sup>103</sup>. Her son and daughter both confirm that *Les Malheurs de Sophie* was indeed based upon the comtesse's childhood. Biographers have therefore made extensive and often uncritical use of these stories to illustrate their accounts of Ségur's childhood. They also conclude that, as these books are a trilogy, and feature the same characters throughout, it is logical to assume that all three contain autobiographical elements. This is to do a terrible disservice to the comtesse as an author. If the tragic tale of little Sophie and her terrifying

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<sup>101</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1:272

<sup>102</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1:289

<sup>103</sup> Portrait of Sophie Rostopchine by Salvatore Tonci, c. 1805, see first illustration insert *Oeuvres*, 1

stepmother (see below) have had such widespread appeal, we must attribute this to Ségur's unerring sense of what made for good copy. Wicked stepmother Madame Fichini certainly owes a literary debt to fairy tales. So, while evidence suggests that hers was indeed a traumatic childhood, we must qualify this notion with the fact that the comtesse was also a talented storyteller with a view to selling books.<sup>104</sup>

Moreover, if we follow Philippe Lejeune's definition of what constitutes an autobiographical text, it becomes clear that to take Ségur's Fleurville trilogy as strictly autobiographical or realist material is a highly questionable procedure, for the Fleurville trilogy does not fulfil the conditions of the "autobiographical pact"<sup>105</sup>. Her use of the form of fiction immediately excludes the comtesse's Fleurville books from being considered strictly autobiographical, and the pact she establishes with her readers is rather coy about who these "true stories" are about. Moreover, the books do not respect the chronology set out in the dedication to *Les Malheurs de Sophie*. The trilogy is set firmly in Normandy in the late 1850's, so how could grandmother have known Sophie during her childhood, when this girl is growing up in the present? Her friends are Camille and Madeleine de Malaret, whom we already know from the dedication to her first book, and also that of *Petites Filles modèles*, are the comtesse's granddaughters and "existent bien réellement"<sup>106</sup>. That these books are set in the present is further emphasised by her use of family Christian names, and thinly disguised surnames (for example, Ségur becomes Rugès), as well as place names near her home in Normandy. The comtesse de Ségur deliberately blended fiction and reality in her

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<sup>104</sup> Heywood, *Growing up in France*, chapter 1

<sup>105</sup> Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique*

<sup>106</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1:119



books. Given the subject matter of the books, it is rather surprising that she pretended to realism at all, particularly in the use of her family's names.

However, we should not lose sight of the fact that Ségur made it clear that some of this material was written about her self, and she had an important purpose in mind when doing so. We know from her children's biographies that she did not make any secret of the autobiographical elements to *Sophie*. However, her family do not refer to the Sophie depicted in *Petites Filles modèles*, who is, according to the logic of the trilogy, is the same girl, now a few years older. This child is now an orphan, who is mercilessly beaten by her stepmother, Madame Fichini. The happy ending sees Sophie taken in by Madame de Fleurville, who advocates a much gentler discipline regime. In *Les Vacances* we learn that la Fichini beats her stepdaughter with such malignant force in revenge for the whipping she had received from the girl's dead father. Little Sophie recounts how her father had learned that his second wife had been mistreating her, and had in a fury seized a horsewhip, "[il] la saisit par le bras, la jeta par terre, et lui donna tant de coups de cravache qu'elle hurlait plutôt qu'elle ne criait... quand il la laissa se relever, elle avait un air si méchant, qu'elle me fit peur.... Il sortit, m'emmenant avec lui. Quand il fut dans sa chambre, il me prit sans ses bras, me couvrit de baisers, pleura beaucoup, me répéta plusieurs fois: 'Pardonne-moi, mon enfant, ma pauvre Sophie, de t'avoir donné une pareille mère!'"<sup>107</sup> He died that very night, abandoning his child to her terrible fate. Running through the Fleurville trilogy is the suggestion that beneath the veneer of the most respectable families lay repressed misery and violence.

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<sup>107</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1:432

Madame de Ségur laid a great deal of importance on the notion that Madame Fichini was “real”. She told her editor that his corrector might have been shocked by Madame Fichini’s brutality, but that she had based the character on a real mother. Further, she was not a stepmother, but a biological mother, and that Ségur had not exaggerated this woman, rather she had softened her cruelty for her readers.<sup>108</sup> Remarks made by a family friend, Élise Veuillot, in private correspondence with her brother Louis Veuillot, suggest that the comtesse did not conceal from her entourage that the monstrous Madame Fichini was linked in her mind to “grand’mère Rostophine”. Élise Veuillot was reporting a row between herself, the comtesse and the comtesse’s daughter, Olga, over how to discipline Olga’s unruly son Jacques, “Olga sera comme la grand mère Rostopchine, Madame Fichini sera son portrait, elle aura son volume.”<sup>109</sup> This episode is interesting, as it indicates not only that the comtesse used her mother as a kind of ogress to frighten her children with, but also that she threatened her family with literary retribution if they did not stop spanking their children. Such impassioned interference caused further ructions between parents/ guardians and their charges. Élise complained that her nieces were disobedient because they knew that the comtesse would rush to their defence. The harmonious scene set out in the comtesse de Ségur’s dedication, depicting herself telling stories to her granddaughters Camille and Madeleine de Malaret, was not so straightforward in the privacy of the family home. Élise Veuillot observed, “Maman Ségur fait la suite des *Petites filles modèles* que Mr de Malaret maudit assurant que ce livre l’obligera à fouetter ses filles à 15 ans encore.”<sup>110</sup> The incident also indicates the emotional charge invested in her memories that she committed to paper.

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<sup>108</sup> Letter from the comtesse to Templier, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1858, *Oeuvres* 1:LXVII

<sup>109</sup> Letter from Élise Veuillot to Louis Veuillot, 26<sup>th</sup> July 1858, ICFV, Carton 18, Envelope G

<sup>110</sup> Letter from Élise Veuillot to Louis Veuillot, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1858, ICFV, Carton 18, Envelope G

By setting her own memories in the present, the comtesse underlined that violence against children continued.

The comtesse was also engaging with the wider debate on child protection that was heating up in the latter half of the century. “Mme de Ségur est d’une école plus moderne. On lui voit même une certaine irritation contre les parents qui donnent le fouet.” So wrote Louis Veuillot, also a close family friend, (and kept well informed by his sister), in his review of *Petites Filles modèles*. He also hinted that this might have something to do with her childhood, “en vérité je ne sais comment on gouvernait l’éducation chez les Rostopchine; mais le fouet y aurait eu quelque rôle, que cela ne serait pour le faire mépriser. Voilà bien le preuve qu’il n’éteint pas l’ardeur et l’agrément de l’esprit. A travers le livre, on voit l’auteur.”<sup>111</sup> For the journalist, the comtesse was in fact living proof of the efficacy of corporal punishment. The practice was still common in nineteenth century France. Attitudes towards child rearing were slowly changing following the ideas of Rousseau, who advocated a more rational approach to discipline. (Clearly the comtesse Rostopchine did not pay too much attention to that section of *L’Emile*). It was still considered acceptable to spank a disobedient child (the direct translation of the verb “*fouetter*” is to whip, but it generally referred to spanking or beating with a switch),<sup>112</sup> however, attitudes were changing. The liberal Bishop Dupanloup condemned corporal punishment, saying that it bred rebellion against authority.<sup>113</sup> The Christian Brothers’ manuals advised against beating children, but the practice evidently continued and in 1856 parents of nine novices withdrew them from classes after accusations

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<sup>111</sup> Louis Veuillot, ‘Les contes de Madame de Ségur’, p 426

<sup>112</sup> Heywood, *Growing up in France* pp 161-65

<sup>113</sup> Charles de Vineau, *Bishop Dupanloup’s Philosophy of Education*, (Washington, 1930), pp 8-9, and 27

of mistreatment. They were forced in 1860 to ban corporal punishment from their schools, apparently against their will.<sup>114</sup> Veillot became embroiled in debates in the late 1860's over whether corporal punishment should be used in schools. He energetically insisted that to spare the rod was to spoil the child. It was only at the very end of the century that the state began to intervene in the family. Protective legislation to remove children from brutal parents was enacted 1889 and 1898, although parents still had to the right to lock their children up in reform schools if they saw fit.<sup>115</sup> The comtesse was placed steadfastly on the reforming side.

In light of the terrible family dramas that play out in her Fleurville books, it is difficult to reconstruct an idea of the comtesse's relationship with her father. Certainly, like the General Rostopchine, the father in *Les Malheurs de Sophie* is perpetually absent, before being swiftly killed off in *Petites Filles modèles*. However, absent fathers were normal in the nineteenth century, indeed over the course of the century they became more and more distant from the home.<sup>116</sup> It has not escaped modern biographers' attention that the scene where Madame Fichini is horsewhipped by her husband is suggestive of feudal society, whereby the master of the house was perfectly within his right to use the rod to punish his servants, children, and even wife if he saw fit.<sup>117</sup> Travellers' anecdotes revelled in describing the brutality of Russian feudalism, which became notorious in the Western European imagination. However, we have absolutely no indication that the comtesse was writing about scenes

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<sup>114</sup> Sarah Curtis, *Schooling the Faithful. Religion, Schooling and Society in Nineteenth century France*, (Illinois, Northern Illinois University Press, 2000), p 100

<sup>115</sup> Michelle Perrot, (ed) *A History of Private Life* (Cambridge Massachusetts, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990) 4:157-9

<sup>116</sup> Hugh Cunningham and Michael Morpurgo, *The Invention of Childhood*, (Radio 4 series, BBC Audiobooks 2006), episode four

<sup>117</sup> Ghislain de Diesbach, *La comtesse de Ségur, née Rostopchine* (Paris, Perrin, 1999), chapter one

which had taken place within her own family. Her sister Nathalie Narichkine merely notes in passing that while his children were desperately drinking from the dog's bowl, Rostopchine was very busy, looking after his horses.<sup>118</sup>

The General Rostopchine was a very charismatic figure. His children appear to have worshipped him as a hero, but also as a fond and caring father when he was around. Olga describes how her mother had “le culte du souvenir”, especially for her father.<sup>119</sup> “Ma mère nous a transmis l’affection respectueuse et passionnée qu’elle avait pour son illustre père. Aimer son père, c’était aimer la Russie que personnifiait son incomparable patriotisme: notre enfance s’est passé à écouter avidement les récits émouvants concernant le gouverneur général de Moscou, le grand patriote, celui qui arrêta Napoléon, vainqueur de l’Europe; ma mère nous parlait avec orgueil de l’infatigable énergie de son père.”<sup>120</sup> We also possess several quotations from her father, selected for reproduction by Anatole de Ségur. True to the Western tradition of biography, they point to her early talents as a writer and storyteller. General Rostopchine wrote affectionately about his daughters, describing how “Sophalette, ayant la santé d’une campagnarde robuste, remplit les fonctions de bouffon. Elle est remplie d’intelligence et aime à inventer des historiettes auxquelles personne ne comprend rien. Ayant fait une fois une faute en copiant dans un livre, elle imagina de corriger le livre même; mais l’encre fit tache et son crime fut ainsi découvert. Sa mère lui disant, un jour, qu’on ne pouvait déchiffrer son écriture, elle répondit: “mais qu’avez-vous besoin de lire ce que j’écris? Vous avez tant de livres!” – Un autre jour, ayant entendu la petite d’Allonville louer l’écriture de ma femme et dire “Quand je serai grande, j’écrirai aussi bien!” elle devint toute

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<sup>118</sup> Narichkine, 1812, p 85

<sup>119</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Ma chère maman*, p 76

<sup>120</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Mon bon Gaston*, p 14

rouge, se fâcha et lui répondit avec vivacité: “c’est joli! vous êtes une petite fille, et vous voulez écrire comme maman, qui est une dame savante.” Il faut te dire que mes filles ont cela de commun avec moi qu’elles sont emportées.”<sup>121</sup> The tone of General Rostopchine’s letter is that of a proud, indulgent father. He describes the young Sophie Rostopchine as talented, funny, and afflicted like him with a hopelessly short temper. He greatly respected his daughter’s early talent for storytelling, and encouraged her to pursue her studies.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, the picture that emerges is of a family in which learning was respected and encouraged. The children received an extensive education. Sophie Rostopchine spoke four languages fluently. Her mother was a “dame savante” who produced several religious treatises. This quotation also suggests that Sophie Rostopchine held her mother in esteem, particularly her status as a woman of letters. They received a Western European education, as her mother was steeped in the philosophers of the Enlightenment, while her father apparently had been greatly impressed by Madame de Genlis. Their governesses were usually English.<sup>123</sup> Many years later, his daughter rendered a strange literary tribute to Rostopchine. General Rostopchine became General Dourakine, and she explains to her reader that “dourak” means “stupid” in Russian. The General Dourakine is a bumbling, loveable old fool, given to violent temper tantrums. He finally moves to France for good and becomes a grand seigneur in Normandy.

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<sup>121</sup> Letter from the comte Rostopchine to the comte Voronzow, quoted in Anatole de Ségur, *Vie du comte Rostopchine*

<sup>122</sup> Of their correspondence only Rostopchine’s replies remain, in NAF 22834, published in part, along with other letters not included in this dossier, in Anatole de Ségur, *Souvenirs et causeries du Soir* (Paris, J. Lefort, [1900])

<sup>123</sup> Narichkine, 1812, p 17

Crucially, in his daughter's novels, her father becomes a Catholic grand seigneur. Religious questions and conversions were central to her family's story. The Rostopchine family situation became complicated once the comtesse Rostopchine converted to Catholicism, and began to keep company with Jesuit émigrés, "elle eût le bonheur de se faire catholique à l'âge de trente-deux ans, en 1806".<sup>124</sup> This was during the Napoleonic Wars, when France and all things French were fast falling out of favour in Russia. She kept her new faith secret for many years. Her bold move threatened to cause the breakdown of her marriage. Judging by the heated tone of her children's accounts, it certainly caused a huge rift within the family<sup>125</sup>. Rostopchine, who had embraced the cause of Russian nationalism, was appalled to discover his wife was willing to renounce her native religion. As Gaston de Ségur, her grandson – and a Catholic priest – delicately put it, "mon grand-père, alors absent, fut très-irrité lorsqu'à son retour il apprit ce qui s'était passé; mais son excellent coeur pardonna bientôt."<sup>126</sup> She was a determined woman however, and preferred to risk letting her marriage flounder rather than compromise her new found faith. Moreover, the comtesse Rostopchine was determined to save her family's souls no matter what the personal cost. Nathalie describes how their mother bored the children silly with her pious books, refusing to read them anything else.<sup>127</sup> The only one of her progeny she succeeded in convincing to renounce their Orthodox faith was Sophie, although she apparently managed a deathbed conversion for her youngest daughter. A letter to her sister announcing the loss began thus, "ma soeur, félicitez-moi; Lise

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<sup>124</sup> Mgr de Ségur, *Ma mère*, p 6; Daniel Schlafly, 'De Joseph de Maistre à la 'Bibliothèque Rose' le catholicisme chez les Rostopcin', *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique*, 11 (1970), 93-109

<sup>125</sup> Narichkine, *1812*, and André Rastaptchine [Rostopchine] *Russie Anecdotique, Bibliographique, Biographique, Géographique, Historique, Littéraire, Statistique et, contrairement à l'ordinaire, Véridique*, (Bruxelles, M-J Poot et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1874)

<sup>126</sup> Mgr de Ségur, *Ma mère*, pp 12-13

<sup>127</sup> Narichkine, *1812*, p 100

est morte, mais elle est morte catholique.”<sup>128</sup> These were the first in a series of conversion narratives that the Ségur family biographies delighted in telling, a point we shall return to below. She became close to the new, intransigent counter-revolutionary Catholicism emerging in nineteenth century Europe. The comtesse Rostopchine and her sisters attended the salon of seminal Catholic thinker, Joseph de Maistre, in St Petersburg, which he immortalised in *Les Soirées de St Petersburg*. Nathalie Narichkine underlines the families’ closeness, recalling how Maistre’s son Rodolphe had asked for Sophie Rostopchine’s hand in marriage<sup>129</sup>. She was too young, however.

## II. Exile

The 1812 war against the invading Napoleonic Army was to change everything. Moscow, under General Rostopchine’s governorship, had been burned to prevent it falling into Napoleon’s hands<sup>130</sup>. In the bitter aftermath the family’s star fell, and they moved to Restoration France in 1817. The comte Rostopchine was a celebrity across Europe in this period, as one of Napoleon’s most colourful foes, and the family was received in Paris with great curiosity. “J’ai eu un succès ici comme aucun étranger n’en a eu... Dès mon arrivée on a été curieux de me voir, et j’ai inspiré l’intérêt qu’aurait causé un monstre marin, un éléphant”<sup>131</sup>. Already the comtesse had experience of the perils of living in the public eye and

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<sup>128</sup> Mgr de Ségur, *Ma mère*, p 13

<sup>129</sup> Narichkine, *1812*, pp 115, 227-8

<sup>130</sup> Tolstoy *War & Peace*; for the family’s response see *L’incendie de Moscou raconté par Rostopchine et par Mme Narichkine, sa fille*, this re-edition of Narichkine’s, *1812* also includes Rostopchine’s *La vérité sur l’incendie de Moscou* (1823) and correspondence with Tsar Alexander I (Paris, Editions Historiques Teissèdre, 2000)

<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Nicolas Ross, *Saint-Alexandre sur-Seine. L’Église russe de Paris et ses fidèles des origines à 1917*, (Paris, Cerf, 2005), p 116



of the immense pressure public opinion could bring to bear on an individual. The hostile public had forced their father into voluntary exile. In 1816, Rostopchine wrote to his daughter, “Il pourra très bien que tu reçoives cette lettre à Moscou, cette superbe ville qui m’a valu un peu de célébrité, beaucoup de mauvais sang, et un dérangement de santé.”<sup>132</sup> General Rostopchine’s notoriety was to inform public (and private) perceptions of his daughter. In the popular imagination he was an ogre – a barbarous arsonist who was descended from the fearsome Eastern despot, Genghis Khan. He had encouraged this reputation, and cultivated the family legend that the line had been founded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Boris Rostopcha, a Crimean who moved to the Russian court, and claimed to be a descendent of the great Mongol conqueror.<sup>133</sup> While he elicited admiration as the man who had successfully resisted Napoleon, the name Rostopchine had a distinct whiff of dangerous exoticism.

Sophie Rostopchine never returned to Russia. Once the family had moved to Paris, her mother engineered with Madame Swetchine (another Russian émigrée converted to Catholicism) a French Catholic match for her daughter. This was imperative, for, in converting to Catholicism she had compromised her chances of finding a Russian suitor. She was effectively in religious exile. Sophie Rostopchine was married to Eugène, comte de Ségur, on the 14<sup>th</sup> July 1819, by the cardinal de la Luzerne in his private chapel<sup>134</sup>. The bride

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<sup>132</sup> Letter dated 1816, reprinted in Anatole de Ségur, *Souvenirs et causeries du soir*, (Paris, Bray, 1858) p 258

<sup>133</sup> See Paul I’s charter confirming Rostopchine’s titles, 1800, reproduced in François Gasnault and Alexei Kisselev (Dirs) *Paris – Moscou, un siècle d’échanges 1819-1925. Documents inédits des Archives de Paris et de Moscou*, (Paris, Archives de Paris et Musées de Paris, 1999), p 25

<sup>134</sup> Mgr de Ségur, *Ma Mère*, pp 18-19

brought an enormous 300, 000 fr dowry<sup>135</sup>. When the Rostopchine family returned to Russia, Sophie remained. This exile would be permanent, and she would never return to her country of origin even to visit. However, owing to her father's immense fortune, her exile was not ignominious. She had married into one of the great noble families of France.

A portrait of the comtesse in her youth, by Orest Kiprensky, depicts a lively young woman, with large blue eyes, high cheekbones, and dark blonde hair curled in little ringlets framing her face. The Bibliothèque Nationale Collection des Éstampes dates this portrait 1829, however Claudine Beaussant suggests it is much earlier, probably c. 1820. A print preserved at the Musée Carnavalet is dated 1823, so the latter interpretation would seem more plausible. Moreover, the comtesse looks very young and full of energy, in comparison to the weariness she soon exhibits in subsequent paintings. Contemporary accounts suggest that she did not conform to the ideal of beauty in France at the time, but that she had a certain grace in her comportment that was attractive nonetheless. Her daughter describes her as, “à la taille gracieuse et svelte, et dont la tournure était aristocratique au suprême degré. Simple et gaie, elle s’ignorait complètement et ce n’était pas le moindre de ses charmes.”<sup>136</sup> The Ségur family were less enamoured. Eugène de Ségur's cousin, Célestine de Ségur (b. 1832), who became the comtesse d'Armaillé, recorded in her memoirs that the Ségur family considered the Russian bride's looks a little too foreign to their taste, “Mlle Rostopchine n’était nullement jolie, ses traits avaient même le caractère tartare et elle manquait de fraîcheur. Sa taille était en revanche élégante et noble, elle était très grande et portait

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<sup>135</sup> Wedding Contract AN Minutier Central ET/ CXVII/ 1098

<sup>136</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Ma chère maman*, p 23

admirablement la toilette.”<sup>137</sup> All emphasise her considerable height. She was also, as the comtesse d'Armaillé underlines, regarded as a foreigner, with questionable, possibly even barbarian origins.

### III. Marriage and Motherhood

In comparison with the great number of pages in the family biographies devoted to the comtesse's life as a mother, they draw a veil over her married life. The Chanoine Cordonnier's study of her life as an exemplary Catholic admitted, “on la représente mieux mère qu'épouse.”<sup>138</sup> One of the only references we find to her marriage in Mgr de Ségur's biography is when he refers to “le milieu libéral, pour ne pas dire plus, ou elle s'était trouvée jetée depuis son mariage.”<sup>139</sup> The number of less sympathetic sources who refer to the marital discord, and the silence of family and subsequent ‘*bien-pensant*’ biographers on the subject, would suggest that this was not a happy marriage. Or, perhaps we should say, it did not remain happy. Certainly it had initially been a distinctly fertile union, producing a total of nine children of whom eight survived. This would indicate that the spouses had been attracted to each other, at least in the 1820's when the first eight were conceived. Overall, the problem when trying to reconstruct the comtesse's early years as a wife relates back to the fact that the bulk of documents we possess have been edited by her descendants who were keen to paint a picture of the Ségurs as a Catholic family. The comte Eugène de Ségur was a liberal, even a libertine, and remained impervious to attempts to convert him to the

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<sup>137</sup> Comtesse d'Armaillé, (née Ségur) *Quand on savait vivre heureux (1830-1860) Souvenirs de jeunesse*, Publiés par la comtesse Jean de Pange, (Paris, Plon, 1934) p 193

<sup>138</sup> Cordonnier, *Silhouettes familiales*, p 209

<sup>139</sup> Mgr de Ségur, *Ma mère*, p 32

extreme new form of Catholicism the rest of his brood were to adopt. He features little in their biographies; Anatole de Ségur happily donated papers to the Bibliothèque Nationale that cast the comte and his relatives as venal; furthermore the comtesse's books ruthlessly kill off or punish husbands and other men who do not conform to the Catholic model. Most of her writing and self-fashioning that we have dates from after the collapse of the marriage, and following her conversion to Catholicism, so it is far from positive. We have to agree with Cordonnier that Ségur's identity as mother and matriarch of the Ségur brood completely eclipses that of her identity as a wife.

Eugène de Ségur came from the less successful branch of the Ségur family,<sup>140</sup> which was more or less ostracised by Parisian society at this time due to the father's suicide, widely believed to have been precipitated by his wife's infidelities. The new bride's dowry was to provide much needed funds for repairing the damage. This marriage of necessity bucked the trend in the social elite of the nineteenth century, described by Margaret Darrow, whereby the groom was often older, took greater initiative in choosing his bride, and assumed a more dominant role in the marriage generally.<sup>141</sup> The Ségur marriage had been arranged by the bride's family, and the comte was barely older than his future wife. Further, the large discrepancy in wealth meant that she considered some of their assets to be rightfully hers, as we shall see below. This was because soon after their marriage, Rostopchine had given his daughter a considerable sum of money to buy a large country estate that he had found in Normandy for the newly weds.

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<sup>140</sup> Laura Kreyder, "Défendu de grimper aux arbres" ou la généalogie chez la comtesse de Ségur', *Cahiers Robinson* 9 (2001), 85-97

<sup>141</sup> Margaret H Darrow, 'French Noblewomen and the New Domesticity', *Feminist Studies*, 5, (1979), 41-65, see p 50

There exists in the public domain only one letter as evidence of communication between husband and wife, written by the young comtesse.<sup>142</sup> It was written when she was 22 years old, and they had been married three years. The couple had two children by this time, Gaston (b. 1820) and Renaud (b. December 1821). Her family were still in Paris. The tone is affectionate and intimate, “il y a longtemps que je suis tourmentée par l’envie de t’écrire, mon ami... tâches d’expédier tes affaires le plus promptement que tu pourras, car je m’ennuie bien d’être sans toi”. She chides her husband gently for speaking out of turn to her sister, “mais voilà assez grondé, mon petit ami; passons à la politique”, and so her conversation turns to discussing international diplomacy. In all likelihood she is reporting an earlier conversation she had had with her father who loved teaching his daughter about such matters. The comtesse in no way defers her authority on the subject to her husband. She already shows a keen interest in politics, foreshadowing her later desire to engage in the public sphere, when she began corresponding with journalist Louis Veillot in the 1850’s.

The couple lived most of the year in Paris, established at 91 rue de Grenelle, in the heart of the faubourg Saint Germain. This address in what was known as “*le faubourg*” signalled that the Ségurs belonged to the exclusive upper echelons of the French nobility.<sup>143</sup> The marriage was rather fecund. Between 1820 and 1835, the couple produced Gaston (b. 1820), Renaud (b. 1821, d. 1822), Anatole (b. 1823), Edgar (b. 1825) Nathalie (b. 1827), then twins Henriette and Sabine (b. 1829), and finally, (an accident?), Olga (b. 1835). Theirs was an

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<sup>142</sup> Undated letter, c. January/ February 1822, from the comtesse to the comte Eugène de Ségur, from a private collection, transcribed in *Les amis de la comtesse de Ségur*, 8, (1997)

<sup>143</sup> Anne Martin-Fugier, *La vie élégante, ou la formation du Tout-Paris 1815-1848*, (Fayard, Paris, 1990), pp 109-117

unusually large family for the *faubourg*. Although there are examples of large families in the upper aristocracy, the norm was to have around four children. This was a marked increase from the eighteenth century, where women rarely had more than two children.<sup>144</sup> However, to have produced eight children was considered by some in the Ségur family to be a little excessive – particularly as the comtesse had given birth to four sons in succession, so the family lineage was quite clearly safe. The comtesse d'Armaillé recalls how their grandmother, the comtesse Octave de Ségur gave fashionable children's tea parties, and she lists the illustrious guests and their offspring who graced them with their presence, “puis une bande d'enfants du faubourg Saint-Germain. C'étaient ceux d'Eugène de Ségur.”<sup>145</sup> Her caustic tone suggests that to arrive surrounded by a bevy of children was hardly elegant.

Motherhood dominated over thirty years of the comtesse de Ségur's adult life. Between the ages of 21 till 55 she was either pregnant, nursing, or overseeing the children's upbringing. Nineteenth century noblewomen were much more involved in their children's lives than in previous centuries. Motherhood was central to their identity and status. Later, in her books, Ségur would castigate any mother who rejected the joys of mothering for the superficialities of society. Women's lives therefore increasingly revolved around their children, and this altered the face of feminine sociability. The comtesse de Boigne referred to children as “the tyrants” of Restoration salons.<sup>146</sup> The comtesse d'Armaillé describes the social whirl which surrounded noble children, “on aimait, à ce temps-la, à amuser et à réunir les enfants; c'était un reste des usages de la cour de Louis XVI et de l'époque de Berquin. Tous les hivers nous avions de petits bals, de petits spectacles, chez des amis de nos parents.” As already

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<sup>144</sup> Darrow, 'French Noblewomen', pp 48-51, and p 60 appendix table 3

<sup>145</sup> D'Armaillé, *Quand on savait vivre heureux*, p 19

<sup>146</sup> Quoted in Darrow, 'French Noblewomen', p 51

mentioned, the comtesse Octave de Ségur, Sophie de Ségur's mother-in-law, was famous for her "elegant" children's parties. The comtesse d'Armaillé notes however that the practice fell out of fashion, as they tired the children out too much and were hard work.<sup>147</sup> Interestingly, the comtesse de Ségur only rarely depicted the tea parties and social occasions that characterised the *faubourg* childhood when she was bringing up her children. When she did so, as in *Les deux nigands* (1863), she presented a piteous scene. Here, a bourgeois girl arrives dressed in her finest apparel, only to find that she is an object of ridicule, as she has not respected the strict code of conduct that ruled the *faubourg*. Worse, she loses her fine tresses, which are accidental cut off when the aristocratic girls remove her 'ridiculous' headdress. Hostess Madame de Roubier "ne fut pas fâchée de cette leçon donné à la vanité de Simplicie".<sup>148</sup> The moral of the story is to warn children not to be seduced by delusions of society and glamour, and also gives us an insight into the horror that transgression of the unwritten codes of conduct inspired in the *faubourg*. Being an elegant, but also devoted, mother of eight children in the faubourg Saint Germain was no easy task. It was an achievement which formed her identity. When Ségur began to write books, she wrote for children, based upon her authority as a mother, who knew and loved children. Indeed her maternal experiences prompted the comtesse to write her first book, a children's health manual. She wanted to help educate young mothers, "participer aux fruits de ma longue expérience", and prevent them the pain of losing a child, as she had done<sup>149</sup>. Family biographies emphasise that she was a devoted mother, who loved children, almost to a fault. Louis Veuillot's article echoed this sentiment. Even the comtesse d'Armaillé concedes that the Russian bride became a generous and loving mother.

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<sup>147</sup> D'Armaillé, *Quand on savait vivre heureux*, pp 19-28

<sup>148</sup> *Oeuvres* 1:435

<sup>149</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:1083

Motherhood also meant the terrible physical reality of seven pregnancies, including the birth of twins. By the time Madame de Ségur gave birth to her final child she was aged 36, and it almost killed her. She was left with difficulties walking, speaking, and subject to crippling migraines for a further period of ten years. Olga remembered “quelle peine alors de voir notre pauvre mère livide, les yeux éteints, le front couvert d’une sueur froide, le visage décomposé par la souffrance! Elle pouvait à peine articuler une parole, malgré son courage.”<sup>150</sup> The eldest son Gaston de Ségur was a talented artist, and painted many pictures of his family. In portraits of his mother he always gives her a slightly simpering look, possibly meant to convey maternal love, or emphasise her tenderness. The eyes seem more hooded, and contrast starkly with the alert expression that Kiprensky saw in 1820. A drawing of the comtesse by Achille Deveria from the 1830’s paints her reclining in a chair – almost slumped – looking into the middle distance with a melancholy air. Perhaps this was considered a romantic pose, or, had the strains of motherhood and marriage begun to take their toll on her? Certainly, the lithe and graceful young body had been ravaged by illness and childbirth. When Gaston painted her in the same period, her shoulders are hunched, and wrapped in a voluminous shawl, indicators of the ill health she suffered following Olga’s birth in 1835. The family biographies abound in descriptions of how these repeated births and the strains of looking after such a large family caused their mother great suffering. They emphasise how Ségur struggled on, sacrificing her health to them as a sign of her great devotion to her maternal duties. The comtesse proudly claimed this feat of dolourism, as she told her daughter, “oui, “pauvre mère!” On peut se figurer quel était son courage dans la souffrance en apprenant que pendant les douleurs de ses sept enfantements, pas un cri ne lui

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<sup>150</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Ma chère maman*, pp 39-40



échappa! C'est elle qui m'a fait connaître ce détail révélant sa force d'âme et son héroïsme patients."<sup>151</sup> In Catholic discourse, the sufferings of motherhood expiated the sins of Eve, and in the nineteenth century the obsession with motherhood surpassed even that with virginity. The chaste, devoted mother was the new paragon of feminine virtue. Above all, she suffered in silence, and spoke very little.<sup>152</sup>

As to the question of the relationship between the comte Eugène and the comtesse Sophie de Ségur, the family papers concerning this marriage suggest it was beset with problems, hinging on the question of money. The papers at the Bibliothèque Nationale contain reams of correspondence detailing the sorry tale of the loss of the Russian dowry, after the Moscow bank it was held in went bankrupt in 1826.<sup>153</sup> All the family papers were donated by Anatole de Ségur, who evidently had no scruples about exposing this particular episode in his family's history. One of the foundations of the marriage had been effectively destroyed. Eugène mustered all the French authority he could, even entreating his grandfather, who had been ambassador to Russia under Catherine the Great's reign, to write to the Tsar. Meanwhile the comtesse tried to persuade her family to give her money, constantly reiterating her need as mother of a steadily growing family "je me crois obligée comme mère de famille de vous importuner de mes affaires et je m'en acquitte avec une confiance sans bornes."<sup>154</sup> She pleaded with her brother, saying she could not afford to be in Paris with her husband, and so was stranded in their country residence, on her own with five children.<sup>155</sup>

Most published memoirs and family correspondence cast the comtesse as the victim in this

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<sup>151</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Ma chère maman*, p 25

<sup>152</sup> Mills, 'Negotiating the Divide'

<sup>153</sup> NAF 22834 Rostopchine Papers, Succession Rostopchine

<sup>154</sup> Letter to her brother's tutor, Mr. Broker, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1826, NAF 22834

<sup>155</sup> Letter to André Rostopchine, c.1830, NAF 22834

situation. The Ségur family regarded her with hostility following this incident, with the exception of Eugène's grandfather, who allegedly reassured her, "eh bien, Sophie, il paraît que nous avons perdu la dot, mais nous gardons le trésor." Mot charmant et qui contrastait avec le dépit et la maussaderie de la belle-mère et du mari de la pauvre jeune femme."<sup>156</sup> The family papers, along with the notarial documents appear to bear this out. They contain a letter from her mother-in-law, Madame Octave de Ségur, hissing to her son about the Russian family's dissolute behaviour, "d'après cela, il sera insensé de croire que tu seras jamais payé de ce qui te reste dû encore."<sup>157</sup> According to the liquidation of Eugène de Ségur's estate, the Rostopchine family paid the lost dowry almost in full, little by little, and Sophie de Ségur sold all her diamonds, whereas Madame Octave de Ségur never paid them the sum she promised in the couple's wedding contract.<sup>158</sup>

The comtesse certainly worked hard to encourage this interpretation of her marriage as one of financial discord in which she was the victim. She wrote to her family in Russia repeatedly to complain about her husband's behaviour. Her sister Nathalie notes "je ne crois pas Eugène aussi méchant que Sophie le dépeint; il est avare, j'en suis sûre, mais c'est un père exemplaire. Il a aimé sa femme comme jamais mari n'a aimé la sienne et je crois que ma soeur envisage les choses sous un point de vue tout à fait faux; elle n'a pas pu voir avec calme l'amour d'Eugène dégénérer en simple affection, et ne reconnaissant plus l'amant dans le mari, elle a commencé à faire des comparaisons du passé avec le présent qui devaient remplir son coeur de tristesse et d'amertume." However, having visited them in 1838,

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<sup>156</sup> D'Armaillé, *Quand on savait vivre heureux*, p 194

<sup>157</sup> Letter to Eugène de Ségur from Madame Octave de Ségur, c.1828, NAF 22830,

<sup>158</sup> AN, Minutier Central ET/ CXVII/ 1301. "La dot de 60, 000 fr constitué par Madame la Comtesse de Ségur mère de Eugène de Ségur, n'a jamais été payée et la communauté n'a eu que les intérêts de cette somme jusq'au jour du décès de la donatrice".

Nathalie agrees, accusing Eugène at one point of cutting his wife off financially in an attempt to force the Rostopchine family to send more money.<sup>159</sup> Whoever was to blame, one thing is clear. Their marriage was, by the 1830's, in evident trouble, and by 1854 they were estranged. The comtesse Rostopchine repeatedly wrote to her daughter in this year, entreating her to at least try talking to Eugène.<sup>160</sup>

The year 1854, one year prior to her debut as an author, proved pivotal. In November 1854 the comte de Ségur proposed to sell the Normandy château, a property Madame de Ségur considered to be her own, as it had been a wedding present to the couple from her father. She was furious “c’est plus ou moins indélicat de vendre malgré mon opposition, malgré celle de tes frères et soeurs, une terre qui est à moi, que mon père m’a donnée.”<sup>161</sup> French law cared little for her opposition, or that of his children. All the legal power rested in Eugène’s hands. However, the property was not sold. Perhaps the comtesse’s indignant refusal to even speak to her husband any more worked. A few years later, during a visit to her eldest daughter’s new home in London in 1856, the comtesse took great interest in how the English system worked, “les femmes régnet chez eux et transmettent à leurs fils les pairies et les titres avec la fortune.”<sup>162</sup> These problems concerning money and power certainly appear to have marked the comtesse. As we will discuss below, this was partly what inspired her to try to find professional work, and so win herself a measure of independence from her husband. Once she had reached a position of authority as a successful author, the comtesse tried to help young women in distress on several occasions. Each time she worried

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<sup>159</sup> Letters from 1837-9, published in Hédouville (ed) *Les Rostopchine*

<sup>160</sup> See letters from the comtesse Rostopchine to Sophie de Ségur November 1854, NAF 22834

<sup>161</sup> Letter from the comtesse de Ségur to her son Gaston de Ségur, c. November 1854

<sup>162</sup> Letter to Olga, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1856

in particular about what she called “atteinte paternelle.”<sup>163</sup> She was only too aware of women’s vulnerable legal position.

The picture that emerges is of a distinctly mismatched couple, who would have benefited from the possibility of divorce. Society gossip portrayed them as an odd couple. Eugene de Ségur was a handsome, highborn aristocrat, but disadvantaged by his parents’ behaviour and lack of money, while Sophie de Ségur a rich foreigner, notorious for her filthy temper. Their marriage had set tongues wagging. He was known to have mistresses, and there were rumours of terrific arguments. “Eugène, le bel Eugène, lui donnait autrefois des soucis qu’elle ne pouvait surmonter silencieusement; et sur les ailes de sa terrible voix roulante, les revendications conjugales gagnaient le pays.”<sup>164</sup> The comtesse d’Armaillé recalled how on one occasion Madame de Ségur arrived at their house seething with rage, with her 13-year-old son Edgar in tow. She refused to let them take him into another room, “non, ma tante, répondit la pauvre Sophie, je veux au contraire que cet enfant puisse m’entendre et vous entendre.” She went on to detail Eugene’s indiscretions with governesses and chambermaids. That very evening however, everyone was surprised to find that all was apparently well between the comte and comtesse de Ségur, and a happy little soirée was underway. “Tel était cet intérieur à drames et à bergeries, où le jugement pouvait manquer ainsi que la prévoyance, mais jamais la bonté, l’indulgence et l’esprit.”<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> For example, the comtesse asked her editor to employ a young translator, but to act with the utmost discretion, as she feared “des colères paternelles”, see letter 6<sup>th</sup> March 1861, *Oeuvres* 1:LXXVIII

<sup>164</sup> La Varende, *La Centaure de Dieu*, 203-206

<sup>165</sup> D’Armaillé, *Quand on savait vivre heureux*, pp 195-6

Her behaviour and values did not seem to fit with those of the Ségur family, and served to irritate her husband. The preface to the comtesse d'Armaillé's memoirs, written by her granddaughter, depicts d'Armaillé as a rather cold, distant woman. She retained an aristocratic distance from her offspring, "bonne-maman m'accueillait avec un petit sourire. Elle n'en était pas prodigue et je devais m'en contenter. Elle ne m'embrassait jamais, ce n'était pas l'usage, et m'indiquait seulement ma petite chaise de la pointe de son aiguille à tricoter: Assieds-toi là! ... Son système était de ne jamais se mettre à la portée des enfants. Elle me parlait toujours comme si j'avais vingt ans."<sup>166</sup> Her memoirs suggest that the comtesse de Ségur's frank and exuberant personality did not conform to the Ségur family's conception of how one ought to behave, "elle était restée vive et assez peu mesurée dans ses propos; mal avec sa belle-mère et assez jalouse de son mari."<sup>167</sup> Madame de Ségur on the other hand ridiculed these manners. Her short story *On ne prend pas les mouches avec du vinaigre* (1865) suggested that keeping children at a distance and beating them in the manner of the old aristocratic families was cruel (see chapter two for further discussion of this). Indeed, her entire oeuvre for children laid great emphasis on emotional declarations of joy and love. Eugène de Ségur often commented on the lack of respect for social conventions in the relationship between masters and servants for example. Her editors would make similar complaints about the amount of kissing and "joyeusetés" in her writings<sup>168</sup>.

Olga de Pitray describes her father as being distanced from the family. Again, this was the accepted norm in the century that exalted the mother's supremacy over the hearth. The role of the father was fixed in the public sphere, meaning that he was much less involved in his

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<sup>166</sup> D'Armaillé, *Quand on savait vivre heureux*, preface by the comtesse Jean de Pange, pp i-ii, v

<sup>167</sup> D'Armaillé, *Quand on savait vivre heureux*, p 195

<sup>168</sup> See chapter three

children's upbringing. Thus, while Eugène de Ségur possessed the authority to send his sons to boarding school against his wife's will, he played very little part in the daily education of his children. Naturally, then, the children's behaviour often resembled that of their mother. This served to alienate the comte from the family circle. "Nous étions tous, comme lui [Gaston], sujets aux *fous rires* (nous tenions cela de maman). Mon père, quoique s'égayant volontiers, ne connaissait pas le *fou rire*, qui l'agaçait invariablement et lui faisait froncer les sourcils."<sup>169</sup> As we shall see in chapter four, this tendency for Eugène de Ségur to feel isolated from his wife and their offspring became greatly exaggerated once Gaston de Ségur moved to assume the headship of the family.

Madame de Ségur's view of marriage was rather jaded, to say the least. Just after her husband's death in 1863, she set to writing *L'Auberge de l'ange gardien* (1863). This novel features several romantic marriages, but also the General Dourakine, who declares that he had been married once, and would have given anything to be unmarried one year later. When her granddaughter Camille de Malaret made a disastrous match with a man who badly abused her, the comtesse's low opinion of men and marriage was confirmed. She unleashed a torrent of vitriol in a letter to console Madeleine de Malaret, Camille's sister. The force of her feeling is eloquently expressed in language most unbecoming for a lady, particularly the 'nation's grandmother' writing to her granddaughter, otherwise known as one of the *Petites Filles modèles*. "A bas les maris; ce sont de méchants drôles que le bon Dieu a créés pour exercer la patience des femmes et pour leur faire gagner plus sûrement le ciel pour lequel elles ont été créées. Je suis sûre que parmi les gens du monde, une bonne moitié se précipite dans l'enfer; quatre dixièmes grimpent difficilement jusqu'au purgatoire; et un seul petit

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<sup>169</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Mon bon Gaston*, p 146

dixième arrive dans le paradis (je parle des hommes). Les coquins! Ils méritent bien leur sort.”<sup>170</sup>

#### IV. Foreigner

According to local legend in Normandy, the comtesse de Ségur was considered rather an eccentric, colourful figure. Jean de la Varende, a novelist and ardent Norman patriot, also referred to as the “chronicler of the rustic nobility”,<sup>171</sup> collected gossip about the comtesse. “Des souvenirs familiaux nous permettent de croire que ‘la comtesse Eugène’ ne fut point sans un peu scandaliser. Le marquis de Semerville nous disait: ‘c’était une grande diablesse qui se promenait en bottes et qui avait une vraie figure jaune de cosaque; pour la prise de Malakof, comme le curé de Laigle annonçait un *Te Deum* d’actions de grâces – sans avoir vérifié son auditoire – Madame de Ségur cria: Vive Sébastopol! et sortit, entraînant une nuée d’enfants autour d’elle.”<sup>172</sup> La Varende conceded that this was do doubt a slightly unfair portrayal of her, from an old, ruined provincial nobleman, who felt snubbed by the “haughty” Ségur family. La Varende then immortalised her in a novel, *La Centaure de Dieu* (1938), no doubt drawing upon the rumours he had heard.<sup>173</sup> The comtesse appears as a tall, terrifying, savage but warm-hearted foreigner dressed in bright yellow and purple, “elle parlait très vite, en multipliant et en roulant les R, sur un registre grave.” This was not the average nineteenth century chatelaine, “Elle amusa par ses colères inouïes, dont retentissaient la maison et les jardins, et par son goût du dramatique.” The marital discord

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<sup>170</sup> Letter to Madeleine de Malaret, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1869

<sup>171</sup> Jean de la Varende, *Lettres à Michel de Saint Pierre* (Editions Hervé-Anglard, 1983), see preface by Michel Saint Pierre.

<sup>172</sup> La Varende *Les châteaux de Normandie*, pp 70-71

<sup>173</sup> La Varende, *La Centaure de Dieu*, pp 203-206

was apparently something of a joke, as was the comtesse's resulting temper. The reputation of General Rostopchine's daughter preceded her. One society host was alleged to have quipped "surtout cachez-lui bien des allumettes!"

The comtesse, along with family and friends also cultivated the Rostopchine family legend. We have seen above that she venerated her father, and her fatherland, delighting in telling stories about her youth. She also wrote two fictions set in Russia, in which, rather paradoxically one might have thought, she portrays her homeland as a barbaric and dangerous place. Similarly, the family excused the comtesse's legendary temper by blaming it on her eastern heritage. Olga de Pitray describes the comtesse as a woman who was utterly devoted to her loved ones; but could be merciless in equal measure to those she considered her enemies. She cites the example of when the comtesse met one of her friend Louis Veillot's detractors, "elle avait donc une physionomie formidable (j'étais là) et des regards digne de la petite-fille de Gengis-Kan; ses réponses à l'importun furent si glaciales, si tranchantes, si pleines de politesse méprisante que le visiteur, atterré, se retira promptement et ne tenta plus de revenir."<sup>174</sup> Louis Veillot affectionately called her "la terrible tartare".

There is a pervading sense that Ségur's reputation suffered from accusations of excess and violence. Many of the family biographies feel it necessary to categorically deny that she ever raised a hand against a child or lost her temper. Thus, Gaston protests "l'ardeur avec laquelle elle exprimait parfois ses sentiments et ses impressions n'était jamais, chez elle, qu'un excès de franchise. Je l'ai vue bien souvent s'indigner contre le mal et l'injustice, ou du moins contre ce qu'elle croyait être injuste et mauvais; mais *jamais*, aussi loin que se reportent mes

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<sup>174</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Mon Bon Gaston*, p106



souvenirs, jamais je ne l'ai vue se mettre en colère ni même s'impatienter."<sup>175</sup> While her great granddaughter Arlette de Pitray, writing just after La Varende's *Centaure de Dieu* was published, insists, "jamais, au grand jamais ses mains qui sentaient bon la pâte d'amande ne donnèrent autre chose que des caresses sur les joues rébondies de ses enfants et petits-enfants."<sup>176</sup> The family's attempts to cover over the glaring problem of their ancestor's temper made little difference. Family friend Charles Baille was so frustrated by Gaston de Ségur's biography of his mother that he felt moved to publish a corrective, "on éprouve de l'embarras à constater à quel aveuglement l'amour filial peut entraîner: "jamais, dit Monseigneur, je n'ai vu ma mère se mettre en colère, ni même s'impatienter." Jamais est en italiques. Des colères, son impétueuse nature en eût été capable, mais sa haute piété les lui eût fait dominer. Quant à des impatiences...elle n'y résistait jamais quand elle se sentait froissée." He goes on to recount the comtesse's violent reaction to an artwork that she had commissioned, a copy of a painting by Gaston of the nativity scene. Incensed by what she interpreted as an insult to her son's talents, she refused to pay the artist, "mais cet enfant-là, grimaçant, ratatiné, est un foetus qui sort d'un bocal d'esprit de vin. Jamais je ne donnerai deux sous de cet avorton."<sup>177</sup> Élise Veuillot's letters also mention the comtesse's flashing eyes. Upon learning that Élise had spanked her niece, Madame de Ségur, "prend une figure terrible, me lance des yeux qui m'auraient épouvantée, si je m'épouvantais facilement."<sup>178</sup>

The story of her father, and perceptions of Russian brutality were exciting and sensational, so hard to suppress. Olga insists that the comtesse hid from her celebrity, but that once

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<sup>175</sup> Mgr de Ségur, *Ma mère*, p 89

<sup>176</sup> Arlette de Pitray, *Sophie Rostopchine, Comtesse de Ségur*, (Paris, Albin Michel, 1939) p 137

<sup>177</sup> Baille, *Souvenirs sur Mgr de Ségur*, pp 8-9

<sup>178</sup> Letter from Élise Veuillot to Louis Veuillot, 26<sup>th</sup> July 1858, ICFV, Carton 18, Enveloppe G

famous her father's reputation preceded the comtesse, "on savait bien que c'était la fille de l'illustre Rostopchine, de l'incendiaire patriote de Moscou."<sup>179</sup> Contemporary accounts describe her variously as a 'terrible Tartar' with a vicious temper, or as a 'yellow-faced Cossack', with 'Kalmouk' cheekbones<sup>180</sup>. Moreover, the predilection for portraying violence in her books served to confirm suspicions. The comtesse d'Armaillé's granddaughter recalled, "toute petite, j'avais déjà bien compris que ma grand-mère n'avait jamais ressenti une bien vive sympathie pour l'héroïne des célèbres *Malheurs*. En me lisant quelques chapitres du *Générale Dourakine* ou du *Bon petit diable*, elle ne manquait pas de marquer sa mauvaise humeur en soulignant certains passages excessifs d'un "grattez le Russe, vous trouverez l'ours" qui me frappait beaucoup."<sup>181</sup>

## V. Conversion

The most important element of the comtesse de Ségur's story as told by her descendants has thus far been missing, and that is religion. This is because once married, Madame de Ségur happily abandoned the Catholicism that her mother had introduced her to, in favour of the "milieu libéral" which her husband inhabited. All this was to change when her son Gaston discovered the Catholic faith in 1838 and began a concerted mission to lead his family back into the fold, starting with his mother. Thus began the process that would transform the comtesse into the devout old lady of letters who became so beloved of the Catholic establishment in the Second Empire and beyond.

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<sup>179</sup> Olga de Pitray (ed) *Lettres d'une grand'mère*, p 9

<sup>180</sup> Baille, *Souvenirs sur Mgr de Ségur*, d'Armaillé, *Quand on savait vivre heureux*

<sup>181</sup> D'Armaillé, *Quand on savait vivre heureux*, see the preface by the comtesse Jean de Pange, p vii

The comte and comtesse de Ségur had allowed their children to grow up more or less without any religious education. When Anatole de Ségur describes the “funeste” effects of the school which the boys attended, he swiftly glosses over the point that if the children had barely set foot inside a Church during their youth, then surely the parents must also share some of the blame.<sup>182</sup> Indeed, the family received the news of Gaston’s conversion with trepidation, and his decision to enter the priesthood in 1842 with utter horror. Chapter four deals with this episode in more depth, but it suffices to say here that Gaston de Ségur’s conversion marked a huge turning point not just for the comtesse, but also for the history of the Ségur family as a whole. By the 1850’s, thanks to his determination, Gaston had succeeded in convincing his mother and most of his siblings to turn to God.

The religion they embraced was a new strain of Catholicism that had emerged as an important force in early nineteenth century Europe.<sup>183</sup> In the wake of the dislocation caused to the Catholic Church by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era, the nineteenth century saw a dynamic religious revival. The Ségurs subscribed to the most extreme form of this new Catholicism, known as intransigent ultramontanism, that had been developed initially by thinkers like the comtesse Rostopchine’s friend, Joseph de Maistre.<sup>184</sup> The intransigents felt that modern European society was deeply flawed, and needed to be brought under the authority of the Pope, who would restore order and harmony. They were

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<sup>182</sup> Anatole de Ségur, *Mgr de Ségur*, 1, chapter 1

<sup>183</sup> Christopher Clark, ‘The New Catholicism’, Clark and Kaiser (eds) *Culture Wars*

<sup>184</sup> Gough, *Paris and Rome*; Bruno Horaist, *La dévotion au pape et les catholiques français sous le pontificat de Pie IX (1846-1878) d’après les archives de la Bibliothèque Apostolique Vaticane* (École Française de Rome, Palais Farnese, 1995); Emiel Lamberts, (ed) *The Black International (1870-1878) The Holy See and Militant Catholicism in Europe* (Brussels, Rome, Institut Historique Belge de Rome, 2002)

known as ultramontanes because they looked to the Pope (over the mountains, *Ultra montes*). Gaston de Ségur emerged as a key figure in the diffusion of this extreme brand of ultramontanism in the Second Empire. It was in this period that the family developed a close friendship with leading journalist Louis Veuillot, and his family. Likewise, Veuillot's influence over the religious imagination of Second Empire France cannot be underestimated. A more detailed discussion of ultramontanism and the Ségur/ Veuillot activities forms the focus of chapter four.

In 1852 Gaston de Ségur was made auditor of the rote and sent to Rome on a diplomatic mission to convince the Pope to preside over Napoleon III's coronation ceremony. The mission failed, but he would stay in Rome in this capacity until 1856. He resigned because he had gone blind two years previously, and no longer felt able to fulfil his duties. His sojourn in Rome was crucial in confirming Gaston's extreme ultramontanism. It was here that Madame de Ségur's faith was also greatly strengthened. According to Gaston's account of his mother's conversion, this renewal of faith was like a re-birth. The illness which had blighted her existence for many years was miraculously cured. Upon visiting Rome in October 1852-April 1853, Gaston claimed that her health was completely restored. The comtesse's faith slowly deepened, in 1858 she had a chapel installed in her château in Normandy (Les Nouettes), and in 1866 she joined a Franciscan Tertiary Order.<sup>185</sup> Indeed, the theme of conversion runs through all the family biographies. For example, Gaston revelled in detailing Catherine Rostopchine's great courage, like an early Christian martyr, in openly practising her faith in the teeth of state repression. Meanwhile, Anatole, writing in 1882, used Gaston's conversion as an opportunity to denounce the effects of an education without God, in other

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<sup>185</sup> Mgr de Ségur, *Ma mère*, pp 37-40

words to warn about the spiritual devastation that the Third Republic's laic laws would cause.

This was the lens through which Gaston de Ségur saw his life, and, by extension, that of his mother. His siblings followed suit, to a greater and lesser extent. Their religion was the ideology that shaped the comtesse de Ségur's later years in life – and as these were the years in which she entered the public sphere, they are by far the best documented. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, religious concerns were paramount when writing biographies, or presenting family documents to the public. All of the comtesse's correspondence that the family published dates from after her conversion, or relates to her relationship with Gaston. Anatole reprinted the letters she wrote to Gaston when she learned of his desire to enter the priesthood for example. We only find fragments of earlier letters that escaped the stringent family editorial policy. Moreover, her books recast her childhood in the mould of Second Empire France, allowing her to introduce a Catholic morality that was missing from her early years.

## **VI. *Grand Motherhood***

Looking back over her life at the age of sixty-nine, the comtesse de Ségur characterised it as “ma longue carrière maternelle” to which she attributed, and in particular to her son Gaston, “le bonheur de toute ma vie de femme.”<sup>186</sup> Then, aged seventy-two, she wrote the public conclusion to her second, literary career. It was inextricably linked in her mind to that of her maternal career. She brought a close to the family saga that had played out in her books by

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<sup>186</sup> AN, Reserve 1018 Minutier Central ET/ CXVII/1361

dedicating her swansong to the next generation, her great grandchild, Camille de Malaret's newborn son. As Ségur explained, she had dedicated her first book to Camille, and so it was fitting that "c'est à toi que je dédie le dernier et vingtième ouvrage, qui se trouve représenter le nombre de mes petits-enfants... je te bénis en finissant ma carrière littéraire." This second phase of her maternal career had ensured she was not only educating her own family, but a much wider audience, whom she also acknowledged in this final farewell, "prie pour moi quand je ne serai plus de ce monde. Puissent mes lecteurs en faire autant: le bon Dieu aime les prières des enfants."<sup>187</sup> This was "grand" motherhood, an important shift in her life hitherto lived. She now had a voice.

Madame de Ségur took up the pen at a turning point in her life, when her maternal role had effectively ceased. Her children were all grown up and no longer needed her in the same way. She faced the prospect of losing her status in society, based on her biological utility as mother. Not surprisingly, she was in a rather morbid frame of mind. In March 1854 Ségur wrote to Gaston, "à quoi sert une vieille femme dans ce monde; une fois passée à l'état de grand-mère pour tous ses enfants, son rôle est bien fini, elle n'est indispensable à personne."<sup>188</sup> This same letter refers to the comte de Ségur's projected sale of the Normandy château. It would therefore appear that her negotiations with Hachette (circa late 1854/1855) and certainly her children's health book (published privately in 1855) coincided with this rather agitated period in her life, when her roles as wife and mother were ending. Her letter shows that Ségur was particularly preoccupied with the day-to-day consequences: where

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<sup>187</sup> Dedication to Paul de Belot, in *Après la pluie, le beau temps*, Hachette first edition, 1872 (consulted at the British Library). Camille de Belot, née Malaret was unhappy with this dedication and it was removed from later editions. Presumed lost by Claudine Beaussant, it does not figure in Laffont's edition of Ségur's collected works.

<sup>188</sup> Letter from the comtesse to Gaston de Ségur, 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1854

would she live? What would she spend her time doing? “On sent l’inutilité de l’existence”. Growing old was a distressing process, she confessed to her daughter “ah! vois tu, reprit-elle avec une candeur pleine de simplicité, c’est que la vieillesse est peu attrayante. On a des rides, on craint de sentir mauvais (elle disait cela, elle qui était d’une minutie exquise de propreté!); d’ailleurs, l’Abbé X..., mon confesseur, m’a bien avertie de ne pas me faire illusion en avançant en âge. “Voyez-vous, lorsqu’on vieillit, on devient insupportable”, m’a-t-il dit.”<sup>189</sup> Ségur concluded “Vive la jeunesse! À bas la vieillesse! À la porte les vieux. Leur porte, c’est la tombe.”<sup>190</sup> At the same time, the ageing woman, while she was considered useless, was also accorded more freedom. This same letter to Gaston in 1854 suggests her hopes. Her main concern was to be able to visit him in Rome, and “de vivre à ma guise”. She was about to enter a new stage in her life.

Becoming a writer gave Madame de Ségur the financial independence from her husband that she so desperately needed. There was real psychological importance in earning her own wage. When first negotiating an advance payment with her new editor, she explained “vous savez, Monsieur, que dans une communauté conjugale, la bourse du mari ne s’ouvre pas toujours devant les exigences de la femme; c’est ce qui m’a donné la pensée et la volonté d’écrire”<sup>191</sup>. Her use of language in this phrase is interesting. The phrase ‘communauté conjugale’ is a legal term, used in marriage contracts to designate the distribution of wealth within the union. Ségur underlines the contractual nature of her marriage, (subconsciously?) alluding to her husband’s abuse of his legal hold over her. Financial reward was one of the major considerations the comtesse mentions when she talked about her writing, and in her

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<sup>189</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Ma chère maman*, p 91

<sup>190</sup> Letter from the comtesse to Louis Veillot 29<sup>th</sup> September 1859

<sup>191</sup> Letter to Templier, 5<sup>th</sup> February 1858, *Oeuvres* 1:LXV

business dealings with her editor. Her need for financial independence should be understood as perhaps first and foremost as a consequence of marital difficulties, which had as its corollary, negative impact upon her performance of class, motherhood, and her role as a charitable *grande dame*. After having handed in her manuscript to Hachette, she wrote, “je ne peux pas m’empêcher de coller ici la preuve de ma victoire.”<sup>192</sup> Her victory gave her independence, “je suis allée au bazar de la rue Bonaparte où j’ai acheté quantité de ciseaux à bouts ronds, canifs, bougies de couleur et ballons. J’espère que, cette fois, il y en aura pour toutes les vacances. J’ai trouvé très amusant de faire tous ces achats avec l’argent que j’ai gagné.”<sup>193</sup> She could go out and buy presents for the grandchildren without having to ask permission. Michelle Perrot lists the three main venues for elite women’s sociability as the Church, the tearoom and the department store.<sup>194</sup> If her husband kept a tight rein on the purse strings, this resulted in a further lack of control over her own sociability, and ability to fulfil her role as grandmother. As Chaline points out, within Catholic women’s charitable organisations, one of the major areas of women’s sociability, a social hierarchy can easily be traced, and a key factor was being able to afford the rather steep subscription fee.<sup>195</sup> When the comtesse asked for an advance on her wage from Hachette (which happened with every book, almost without exception), she always explained this was because she needed money for charitable works, “j’écris au profit des pauvres.”<sup>196</sup> While this could perhaps be partly explained as an accepted formula to cover her embarrassment at having to ask for money, it

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<sup>192</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> October 1856 (see footnote below)

<sup>193</sup> April 1857. Letters quoted in *La Comtesse de Ségur au Château des Nouettes à Aube de 1821 à 1872*, Aube, Musée de la Comtesse de Ségur, exhibition catalogue 1996 (the letters’ destination and context sadly are not given)

<sup>194</sup> Perrot, *Femmes publiques*, p 40

<sup>195</sup> Jean-Pierre Chaline, ‘Sociabilité féminine et “maternalisme”, les sociétés de Charité Maternelle au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle’, in Corbin et al, *Femmes dans la cité*, pp 69-74

<sup>196</sup> Letter to Templier, 5<sup>th</sup> February 1858, *Oeuvres* 1:LXV



was more than likely that she did use the money to give to charity. Her need for financial independence translates as a need to maintain her class identity as well. Her letters to her family had cited money as one of the main reasons why she was stuck in Normandy with the children, it effectively barred her from the nerve centre of aristocratic society.

However, before we blacken the name of Eugène de Ségur too much, we should note that it was he who used his connections to gain employment for his wife, perhaps as a gesture of reconciliation. Eugène de Ségur's position as president of the Eastern Railway Company brought him into contact with Louis Hachette, who was negotiating the train station kiosk monopoly (see chapter three), and the comte evidently took this opportunity to suggest his wife as a possible author for their new collection.<sup>197</sup> As her husband and legal representative in the eyes of the law, he was required to give his permission to let his wife sign a contract with Hachette and receive payment from them.<sup>198</sup> There is also no indication that Eugène objected to her enjoying her new income as she pleased, when he would have been within his rights to do so. By 1859 he had given his legal endorsement of his wife's new liberty in a letter to Hachette, renouncing any claim to her earnings. A cooperative husband was imperative for any woman hoping to operate in the public sphere, to treat with institutions, sign contracts and so on, as fathers and husbands had absolute right of control over women. Furthermore, the comte de Ségur allowed his wife to publish books under her real name, that is to say his family's name. This was no empty gesture, a point we shall return to in chapter three.

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<sup>197</sup> Letters to Templier, *Oeuvres*, 1:LXI-LXII

<sup>198</sup> Hachette traités 1844-1865, IMEC

The ability to “vivre à [sa] guise” was to prove one of the perks of growing old. Although she found the aging process frustrating, the comtesse certainly learned to enjoy the new found freedom of time and lifestyle now that she was released from having to look after children all day every day. It allowed her to begin her writing career, an activity that evidently improved her health and self-confidence. She could also travel on her own. A woman of a certain age was permitted far greater liberty of movement, without a chaperone, as she was considered beyond scandal<sup>199</sup>. The comtesse spent her advanced years constantly on the move. Her role as grandmother, whose children were dispersed across France and Europe, gave the comtesse the chance to travel to London, Rome, Brussels, not to mention the miles she covered within France, often alone. But there was more to her itinerant lifestyle than simple maternal duty, whatever she might say to her editor or daughter. Gaston wryly thanked his sister for giving him news about their mother, unreachable, as she is off, manuscript in hand “en train express sur la route des Nouettes à Hachette”<sup>200</sup>. Her travel had another function; that of a professional going to work, the famous author off to negotiate contracts with her editor.

Most importantly, her freedom allowed her the time to write her books and letters. Although she loved her grandchildren dearly, she complained when their parents left her in charge of them, as they prevent her from writing “j’ai dû perdre mes plus belles heures d’écriture”<sup>201</sup>, and from leading this life of her own “malgré moi, je compte les jours qui me séparent de mon centre de vie et d’action.”<sup>202</sup> When Eugène de Ségur fell seriously ill in the

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<sup>199</sup> Perrot, *Femmes publiques*, p 49

<sup>200</sup> Letter from Gaston de Ségur to Olga de Pitray, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1866

<sup>201</sup> Letter to Olga de Pitray, 21<sup>st</sup> November 1856

<sup>202</sup> Letter to Olga de Pitray, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1859

late 1859, and social conventions dictated that the comtesse must return to his side to nurse him, she was displeased at his imposition on her new life. She constantly refers in her letters to Olga to feeling imprisoned, and suffocating in their Parisian apartment. Her frustration is palpable: “je serai forcément clouée à Paris, à cause de ton père.”<sup>203</sup> Eugène de Ségur’s illness had proved trying for both of them. It meant that the estranged couple were forced to live together once more. This was a far from ideal situation; they argued like cat and dog over whose doctor was best. The comtesse, who had written a health manual with her favourite, Dr Mazier, was furious that Eugène de Ségur refused to recognise her doctor’s superiority, “ton père va positivement mieux; il prétend que ce mieux, qu’il avoue, n’est dû qu’aux temps, et que M. Mazier n’y est pour rien. C’est de l’ingratitude, mais ce n’est pas le premier ni le seul ingrat parmi les hommes et ce ne sera pas lui qui en fermera la liste.”<sup>204</sup> The old comte became very tearful when their daughter and her children left after a brief visit. Élise Veillot, viewed events with a disapproving eye: “monsieur de Ségur paraît devoir mourir tout seul à Paris.”<sup>205</sup> However, one would have to speculate whether he really appreciated being nursed by his estranged wife. He died at his brother’s house in 1863. A great obstacle had been removed, and she set about leading her life exactly as liked it. Her daughter admits, “aussi fut-ce un beau jour pour elle que celui où elle se vit libre de s’occuper du ménage et où elle put diriger tout, suivant son bon plaisir.”<sup>206</sup> This meant a rather austere regime, with her time entirely given over to her books, correspondence, and keeping up with *L’Univers* “sauf deux demi-heures d’inspection au dehors, j’ai toujours écrit; il est cinq heures du soir...

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<sup>203</sup> Letter to Olga de Pitray, 30<sup>th</sup> September 1859

<sup>204</sup> Letter to Olga de Pitray, 19<sup>th</sup> May 1860

<sup>205</sup> Letter from Elise Veillot to Louis Veillot, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1862, ICFV, Carton 18, Envelope

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<sup>206</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Ma chère maman*, p 44

J'ai déjeuné à midi, et, pour gagner du temps, je lis mes journaux en déjeunant”<sup>207</sup> Her nephew noted – rather controversially considering the comtesse’s husband had died less than one year ago – “ma tante va fort bien, la vie calme et régulière qu’elle mène lui convient sous tous les rapports et jamais sa santé n’a été meilleure. Elle vient de finir un nouveau livre qu’elle va livrer à M. Hachette; elle en a un autre à l’impression.”<sup>208</sup> In the years following her husband’s death, the comtesse’s literary output was suddenly increased. During his illness she had struggled to produce more than two manuscripts per year, in 1860, she had only managed one. After his death, she produced at least three, sometimes four works each year, including the incredibly labourious grandmother’s Bible series.

Several of these books considered the vagaries of ageing. The bulk of analysis on Ségur’s constructions of self has focused on the character Sophie. This has been to the detriment of her later books, which feature characters where Ségur muses on the absurdities of getting old.<sup>209</sup> In her correspondence Ségur communicated her frustration with the ridiculous predicament of being young at heart, but weighed down by her aging body, “peu s’en faut que je ne témoigne pas ma vive satisfaction par des bonds et des sauts; heureusement que le poids de l’âge et le poids du corps arrêtent les élans de ma joie et me laissent terre à terre comme il convient à une vieille grand-mère et une respectable mère.”<sup>210</sup> Then, like a ventriloquist’s dummy, the General Dourakine in *L’Auberge de l’Ange gardien* (1863) expresses this exact same sentiment. One episode has him refusing to admit that he cannot travel by

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<sup>207</sup> Letter to her granddaughter Élisabeth Fresneau, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1865

<sup>208</sup> Letter from Waldemar Fillipi to Olga Rostopchine, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1864, Hédouville, *Les Rostopchine*, p 240

<sup>209</sup> With the notable exception of Claudine Beaussant’s analysis of Dourakine, in her ‘dictionary’ section, *Oeuvres* 1:859-60

<sup>210</sup> Letter to Émile de Pitray, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1856

foot like his young friend. The corpulent General is forced to ride back into the village, red faced and puffing, on the back of a donkey<sup>211</sup>. The reference is unmistakably to Ségur's husband's joke about her riding into posterity on Cadichon's back. The General's lumpish corporality is a constant source of irritation to him: "mon gros ventre, ma taille épaisse, mes lourdes jambes. On a son amour-propre, comme je vous l'ai dit jadis, et on ne veut pas, devant une jeune fille et une jeune femme, passer pour un infirme, un podagre, un vieillard décrépit"<sup>212</sup>, as well as amusement for the reader, as he knocks over the priest and then the maid with his windmill gestures<sup>213</sup>. Ségur wickedly mocks his approaching senility, as he constantly suggests ridiculous, but good-hearted ideas "est-ce que je n'ai pas l'âge de raison? Est-ce qu'à soixante-trois ans on ne sait pas ce qu'on fait?"<sup>214</sup> Needless to say the comtesse was herself sixty-three years old when she wrote the book.

Writing meant more to the comtesse than simply earning money or filling her time; she attacked her task with gusto, devoting as much time and energy to it as she could. Writing had given her a voice and a precious new identity. Motherhood and illness had robbed her of the capacity to even form words, let alone communicate with the *grand public*. Now she was famous people listened to her, and appreciated her ideas. The great Louis Veillot sang her praises in *L'Univers*, her favourite newspaper. As a child she had venerated her mother's intellectual work, as this commanded her respect. While motherhood earned a woman a certain status in society, writing made the comtesse into a "dame savante", a woman to whom people would listen, and she made a clear distinction between her life before

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<sup>211</sup> *Oeuvres*, 2:583

<sup>212</sup> *Oeuvres*, 2:580

<sup>213</sup> *Oeuvres*, 2:546, 609

<sup>214</sup> *Oeuvres*, 2:547

becoming a writer, and after. The comtesse de Ségur's entry into the public sphere as a woman of letters gave her a new confidence, and she was not going to be silenced. She wrote her first letter to Louis Veillot, stating emphatically, "je parlerai, je veux parler... que moi, nouvelle Cornélie, je garde le silence quand j'ai une faute à réparer, un remerciement à adresser, une tendresse à exprimer, c'est trop exiger de la femme, de la mère, de l'amie..."<sup>215</sup> Hence she became incredibly prickly when her editor suggested that her work needed improvement. Her wounded pride took solace in her glittering reputation, that she clearly hoped to preserve "je renonce à augmenter ma gloire tombante", before considering the terrible implications of losing her voice again "et je redeviens muette comme je l'ai été pendant 56 ou 57 ans."<sup>216</sup> When she grew too old to write depression took hold, "tout me fatigue. Tout m'attriste. C'est le *plomb de la vieillesse* qui me domine et qui m'écrase. C'est pourquoi grand-mère est muette."<sup>217</sup>

By the early 1870's the comtesse was seriously ill. While her daughter looked after her in Brittany, Madame de Ségur watched with horror as first the Prussians invaded her beloved adopted country, and then Paris descended into bloody civil war. Although grandmother was no longer publishing material, she was far from 'mute'. She poured out streams of invective in letters to friends and family, fulminating against the Prussian invaders, followed by the Communards and the wicked cowardice of Thiers. "Dieu veuille nous débarrasser définitivement de ces abominables visiteurs et ne pas oublier un bon coup de balai pour les

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<sup>215</sup> Letter to Louis Veillot, 21<sup>st</sup> August, 1856

<sup>216</sup> Letter to Templier, 5 June 1864, *Oeuvres* 1:XCVII

<sup>217</sup> Letter to her granddaughter, Henriette Fresneau, 4<sup>th</sup> may 1872

rouges”.<sup>218</sup> She frightened her grandchildren with tales of Prussian brutality. Her dearest wish was that the pontifical Zouaves would return from Italy: Charette would lead them first to victory, and eventually a restoration of Henry V to the French throne. Gaston was working fervently towards this end, publishing pamphlets, and corresponding with the pretender. He was also sheltering with his mother in Brittany, revolutionary Paris being too dangerous for an incendiary priest like Mgr de Ségur. On their return to Paris the comtesse moved in with her son. She was too feeble to join his counter-revolutionary activities, and became truly ‘mute’. By 1873 she was bed-ridden. She died in Paris, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1874.

Her last agonising months were meticulously recorded by Gaston de Ségur, in the curious biography of his mother, *Ma mère*, which he published the year following her death. Rather than a biography, it is an ex-voto, dedicated to immortalising the Christian deaths of both his sister Sabine and his mother. It has an incredibly intimate feel as he lays their pain bare on the page. No detail is spared. The nation’s grandmother is reduced to a frightened old woman, “devenue maigre et débile.”<sup>219</sup> His graphic depiction of the mortification of the flesh accords with the Baroque sensibilities of the cheap devotional literature popular in the nineteenth century.<sup>220</sup> Lengthy passages repeat cries of fear, pain, and Christ-like resignation in the face of death. These are what Kselman calls “textbook illustration[s] of the good death as described by clerical manuals.”<sup>221</sup> Gaston clutches a crucifix which has been blessed by two Popes, and then sanctified by the dying breaths of various members of the Ségur family;

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<sup>218</sup> Letter to Isaure (unknown recipient), 9<sup>th</sup> January 1871, reproduced in *La comtesse de Ségur, née Rostopchine (1799-1874)* Catalogue n° 29, Librairie Thierry Corcelle, Paris, 1999

<sup>219</sup> Mgr de Ségur, *Ma mère*, p 90

<sup>220</sup> Thomas Kselman, *Death and the Afterlife in Modern France*, (Princeton University Press, 1993), p 74

<sup>221</sup> Kselman, *Death and the Afterlife*, p 94

Lourdes water performs miraculous cures, he even uses it to drive away the demons tormenting his mother on her death bed. The doctor admits defeat before the superior healing powers of Lourdes water. Miracles abound in the Ségur family. Gaston attributes healing powers to her embalmed heart. The book was originally only intended for the family, but he was convinced to publish these painful memories, “on m’assura tellement qu’ils pourraient faire du bien à grand nombre d’âmes, que je me suis décidé à les publier, après en avoir retranché toutefois certains détails par trop intimes. En cédant à ces désirs, je crois rendre à la mémoire bénie de ma mère un hommage cent fois mérité, et j’espère que les familles chrétiennes où les livres si charmants, si aimables de ma bonne mère ont pénétré, seront heureuses de la connaître davantage et de savoir de quelle source découlaient ses eaux toujours pures et gracieuses, qui fécondaient l’esprit et le coeur de leurs enfants.”<sup>222</sup> This strange book demonstrates just how far the family’s religious concerns dictated the details of the comtesse’s life that were released to her public. Not only the story of her life, but also of her death could play an important role in winning back souls for the Catholic Church.

In conclusion, her second public career coincided with her new role as grandmother. At the age of 55, she decided to renounce the obscurity of her domestic identity, and assume a new professional role as an author. In this way, she became a modern woman, who relished the independence this new-found income gave. It was only once she was an old woman, and her biological career had ended that she found the freedom of movement and time that allowed her to do this. It gave her a new, positive identity, “ce titre de grand’mère, doux et sacré, ma mère le porta comme une couronne”.<sup>223</sup> She dedicated her books to her numerous

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<sup>222</sup> Mgr de Ségur, *Ma mère*, preface

<sup>223</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Ma chère maman*, p 2



grandchildren, who also provided the subjects for many of her writings. Her writing process, her authorial identity, her public image, and the books themselves were all linked in her mind with her grandchildren. Her new career allowed the comtesse to prolong her biological maternity beyond its natural end, extend it even, by reinventing this role as *Grand* motherhood: a subsequent hagiographer developed this idea of the “bonne” maman he felt Ségur embodied in her later years.<sup>224</sup> Telling bedtime stories, and then publishing them so that many more children might benefit was much more than simply an extension of her maternal role: she became the nation’s grandmother. Small children would come up to her in the street and ask to kiss her hand. Gaston describes how many of her young readers were distraught when their beloved comtesse died, who, they wanted to know, would write them stories now?<sup>225</sup>

## Conclusion

“I want to speak... I will speak.” These determined words, uttered by the woman considered by many commentators to be a paragon of Catholic maternal virtue, and written to none other than Louis Veuillot (a man who declared he had married an illiterate woman on purpose), demonstrate the strength of feeling that motivated the comtesse de Ségur to take up the pen. The comtesse depicted finding her voice as a triumph, and she expressed pleasure in her new found financial independence, as well as her fear of becoming voiceless once more. In her mind there was a clear distinction between the mutism of motherhood and the voice that she found in her second, literary career. The silent suffering of

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<sup>224</sup> Cordonnier, *L'idéale grand'mère*, pp 90-91

<sup>225</sup> Mgr de Ségur, *Ma mère*

motherhood had been an important achievement however, and one to which the comtesse would later insist upon, for it confirmed her identity as a Christian 'femme forte'. Clearly there were tensions between her twin identities of the long-suffering, silent mother and the woman determined to speak. And yet the two were intertwined, for if the comtesse de Ségur had such a strong desire to write, it was because she wanted her ideas on motherhood, childcare and religious education to be heard. Moreover, this idea that writing for children and motherhood were both expressions of the same maternal instinct was entirely accepted by contemporaries. As we will go on to discuss in chapters two and five, the specific knowledge that women possessed as mothers gave them valuable skills in the struggle to regenerate France as a Catholic nation. Madame de Ségur's case illustrates that this was not just limited to her work in the domestic sphere. Her status as a mother gave Ségur the authority to contribute to debates on corporal punishment, education, and childcare, which had much wider political import.

Madame de Ségur also used her fictions as a vehicle to write stories about her self. She revisited memories of childhood traumas, and wrote them into the present, creating a literary challenge to modern parents who dared to inflict corporal punishment on their children. That she disguised her autobiography in fiction suggests the problem of creating a sense of 'self' through exploring her childhood, or expressing her anger at her failed marriage, in the context of a community that did not admit such a concept. Furthermore, by rewriting her Russian memories and her identity as a mother into Second Empire France she endowed them with a religious morality that they did not originally have. As a child she had been brought up according to Enlightenment precepts, and as a mother she had brought her children up without any meaningful religious instruction. This perhaps explains the strange

mixture of sympathy and censure with which the comtesse treated her younger selves. Still, we should be slightly wary of the obsession with violence and dysfunctional families in her books, or her colourful claims about her husband in her correspondence. One might be tempted to conclude that her childhood was as terrifying as that of the fictional Sophie, or her husband an utterly villainous man; if, that is, we let ourselves be seduced by the stories by Madame de Ségur, the talented author.

She certainly obliterated her role as wife from her life stories. Catholic discourse in effect allowed for this, as the ideal mother was a chaste mother who modelled herself on the Virgin Mary. The family were happy to paint their father out of the picture, for his values were an affront to their own. In examining the roles she assumed, and the various personae that were attributed to her, we also lay bare the process of elimination attempted by her family in order to construct the image of the “nation’s grandmother”. This process was all the more important because the comtesse was the matriarch of the Ségur family. Family biographies aim to create a corporate identity. The new Ségur family was militantly Catholic, and the old comte did not fit their story. Their conversion to the new Catholicism was the dominant narrative in the Ségur family story, and determined many of their editorial choices. However, it was impossible to completely impose this identity on the comtesse de Ségur, no matter how much she and her family attempted to. Her Russian identity made the comtesse a dangerous outsider to some, and an exotic figure in the eyes of her public. Ségur’s legendary temper added fuel to the rumours that the ‘nation’s grandmother’, as styled in her dedications and the family biographies, was a myth. Moreover, her denunciations of corporal punishment and child abuse of different kinds translated into an obsession with violence that haunts many of her books, and served to further exaggerate her dualistic reputation.

## Chapter 2

### Nobles, Saints, and Delinquents:

### Constructions of Childhood in The Collected Works of Madame de Ségur

The child, ‘king’ of the prosperous middle-class family, was a nineteenth century phenomenon, a corollary of the division of the public spheres and the cult of motherhood. Bourgeois women increasingly stayed at home to look after fewer children.<sup>226</sup> There was a new respect for children, and this, coupled with increased prosperity, shrinking family sizes, and industrial advances which allowed manufacturers to satisfy the demands of a growing consumer society, was to have important consequences for children’s books. The comtesse de Ségur wrote her works in the period experts agree saw the first ‘golden age’ of children’s literature in the Western world. Many use the date that Ségur signed her first contract with Hachette to mark the dawn of this golden age in France.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Hugh Cunningham *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (Harlow, Pearson Education, 1995, 2005); Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood. Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times* (Oxford, Polity, 2001)

<sup>227</sup> On the history of children’s books in France see Glénisson ‘Le livre pour la jeunesse’; François Caradec, *Histoire de la littérature enfantine en France* (Paris, Albin Michel, 1977); Isabelle Jan, *Essai sur la littérature enfantine*, (Paris, Les Éditions Ouvrières, 1969); the more recent synthesis in the relevant chapters of Élisabeth Parinet’s *Une histoire de l’édition à l’époque contemporaine XIX<sup>e</sup> – XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, Seuil, 2004); also Annie Renonciat, (ed), *The Changing Face of Children’s Literature*; on Europe, see Ganna Ottevaere Van Praag, *La littérature pour la jeunesse en Europe Occidentale (1750-1925)*, (Berne, Peter Lang, 1987); De Maeyer et al, *Religion, Children’s Literature and Modernity*

It is generally agreed that the Enlightenment marked the culmination of a process, begun in the early modern period, which altered perceptions of childhood, and the related concepts of pedagogy and literature designed specifically for children. In France, Rousseau's *Émile* (1762) is recognised as a crucial turning point. He argued that children ought to be allowed to be 'children', an innocent, natural state different to that of adulthood. Children were not imperfect adults, nor were they sinful, they were simply lacking in knowledge. As such they had specific educational needs that were not being satisfied by the current state of books. Rousseau only allowed his pupil to read Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and the French counterpart, Fénelon's *Télémaque*. Despite Rousseau's reluctance to make young children read at all, his ideas inspired a generation of educationalists, such as Arnaud Berquin (1747-91), his pupil Nicholas Bouilly (1763-1842), and Madame de Genlis (1746-1831). Their books proved to be the bestsellers for the first half of the nineteenth century, a period which was to produce its own classics as well, notably Desnoyer's *Les aventures de Jean-Paul Choppart* (1834), and Madame Guizot's popular works.

*Les français peints par eux-mêmes* complained in 1840 that the nation's youth was being corrupted; Mathurin-Joseph Brisset's article depicted a post-Rousseauian age, in which a whole industry had grown up around a new phenomenon: the Parisian spoilt brat. Children had been transformed into little consumers, seduced by the great number of books, plays, and toys produced for them.<sup>228</sup> In the 1840's, editor Hetzel commissioned big names like Charles Nodier and George Sand to turn their hand to writing for his collection *Magasin des*

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<sup>228</sup> Léon Curmer (ed) *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Encyclopédie morale du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1840, this edition Omnibus, Paris, 2003, with additional notes by Pierre Bouttier) volume 4, 'Les enfants à Paris', Mathurin-Joseph Brisset, pp 723-734

*enfants*. Children's literature was flourishing, but, as it did so, there were new circumscriptions being placed upon it. Fearing that they had lost their grip on children's education, owing both to the influence of the Enlightenment and to the state of disarray that the Church was in following the Revolution, the Catholic authorities from the Restoration period onwards were keen to reassert their authority over a domain they saw as rightfully theirs. Using tools such as distribution networks, Episcopal endorsement of suitable books, and a monthly review of book production, the Church mounted an impressive campaign to regain control. In this atmosphere, the big Catholic publishing houses like Mame of Tours dominated the children's market. They lavished great attention on producing attractive packaging for their books, whilst ensuring the content remained as conservative as possible.<sup>229</sup> In Hetzel's absence (his involvement in the 1848 revolution forced him to leave the country), it was Louis Hachette who became one of the first lay editors in France to really rival their dominance. He set up his children's collection in 1856, an offshoot of his *Bibliothèque des chemins de fer*, aiming to provide beautifully presented, illustrated storybooks to amuse children on train journeys. It was to become one of the company's biggest successes<sup>230</sup>. Then, in 1860, Hetzel returned from exile. He resurrected his *Magasin des enfants*, and began waging a passionate campaign to free French children from what he famously termed the "livres en plomb dont on écrase le premier âge dans notre soi-disant frivole pays de France"<sup>231</sup>.

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<sup>229</sup> Glénisson, 'Le livre pour la jeunesse'; Michel Manson, 'The Editorial Strategies of Provincial Catholic Publishing Houses for the Young in 19<sup>th</sup> Century France', De Maeyer et al, *Religion, Children's Literature and Modernity*

<sup>230</sup> See chapter three

<sup>231</sup> In his preface (under his pseudonym P-J Stahl) to Charles Perrault's *Contes* illustrated by Gustave Doré, (Paris, Hetzel, 1862)

There is some disagreement amongst scholars as to how to characterise the development of children's literature in France. It is generally agreed that the 'golden age' of children's literature in France was down to the combined efforts of lay publishers Hachette and Hetzel to profit from this new market<sup>232</sup>. Jean Glénisson, however, has argued that it was Hetzel and his authors, especially Jules Verne and Jean Macé, who truly inaugurated the golden age of children's books in France. Hachette's flagship author, the comtesse de Ségur, cannot be included in this triumphant narrative, for, in Glénisson's view, she was merely a skilled practitioner of the old, didactic 'governess' school of writing<sup>233</sup>. To his mind, the important factors in the modernisation of children's literature were freedom from Catholic morals, and a return to the fabulous, as exemplified in the re-edition of Perrault; all of which was part of a wider concern for stimulating the child's imagination.

Still, both views reflect the conventional account of the history of children's literature, which traces a clear path of progress towards imaginative and secular texts. In this schema, religious efforts are dismissed as 'backwards' and 'anti-modern' because of their recourse to censorship, prescribed reading lists, and their emphasis on evangelisation over entertainment. However, leading theorists in the field now reject this idea.<sup>234</sup> Jan de Maeyer argues that instead scholars should see the process as an interaction between religion and modernity. He emphasises that religions in Europe were also modernising, even though this intellectual and technological process was often conceptualised by its actors as being a rejection of the society they lived in. Moreover, Peter Hunt points out that the basic ideas of

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<sup>232</sup> Van Praag, *La littérature pour la jeunesse*, pp 186-187; Lloyd, *The Land of Lost Content*, p 19

<sup>233</sup> Glénisson, 'Le livre pour la jeunesse', p 430; Anna Green, *French Paintings of Childhood and Adolescence, 1848-1886*, (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007), p 232

<sup>234</sup> See in particular Jan de Maeyer, 'The Concept of Religious Modernisation'; Peter Hunt, *Children's Books*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 2001)

what constitutes the functions of children's literature remain fundamentally unchanged across time and place. We expect books to amuse children, but also to instruct and socialise them. It follows that "chronology may be less important than an awareness of the relationship between childhood and cultural and historical change... it is possible to argue that children's writers continually re-invent their fictions and forms in response to changing commercial and cultural constructions of childhood."<sup>235</sup> This chapter will therefore focus on the assumptions underlying the question of measuring 'modernity' in children's literature. The notion that Catholic activities in the field of children's publishing were 'backwards', and thus of little interest, has led to the implication that Catholic attitudes towards children and their books remained static, which was far from being the case. This chapter will argue that it is unsatisfactory to suggest that Catholic authors like Madame de Ségur were not involved in the revaluation of the child which took place in the nineteenth century. On the contrary, children were one of the main targets of the religious revival, and so authors, publishers and missionaries were absolutely focused upon communicating with them in the most effective way possible.

### **Catholic Discourse on the Child and Children's Books in the Religious Revival**

In the nineteenth century the 'Romantic' child emerged as the dominant cultural construct. Derived from Rousseau, and developed by writers like Victor Hugo, the romantic child was a paragon of innocence; a blonde-haired, blue-eyed angel, depicted as closer to Heaven. This was a deeply sentimental view of children, popularised most effectively by the poetry of

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<sup>235</sup> Hunt, *Children's Books*, introduction



Hugo and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore.<sup>236</sup> It also helped to change attitudes towards youth, and was used by Hugo in his campaigns for legislation to protect and educate children. Scholars contrast this new view of childhood with what they term the conservative Catholic approach, based upon Saint Augustine's insistence upon the need to discipline the child because he is innately sinful.<sup>237</sup> In this schema, the comtesse de Ségur's books are argued to testify to the tenacity of the Augustinian 'evil child'.<sup>238</sup> However, although to a certain extent we can find evidence of this notion in her work, particularly in the famous *Malheurs de Sophie*, the divisions between Catholic and Romantic visions of childhood are perhaps not as distinct as is usually suggested. Ultramontane Catholic sensibilities were evolving in a similar direction to Hugo and the Romantics.<sup>239</sup> For example, despite their misgivings about the man, the Catholic reception of Hugo's poems was favourable. One review in the Catholic *Semaine des familles* praised a publisher who had published Hugo's poems on children, calling them "diamants et perles", amongst the "fumier" of the poet's oeuvre.<sup>240</sup> Historians have noted the remarkable fascination for child visionaries, seen to be closer to God in their simple innocence.<sup>241</sup> Further, Cholvy and Hilaire underline the influence of Romantic sensibilities on ultramontane piety<sup>242</sup>. Ralph Gibson talks of an "infantilization" of ultramontanism, which emphasised the need to make oneself as a child before God. This would reach an apogee with the "little flower" Thérèse de Lisieux (who

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<sup>236</sup> Heywood, *Growing up in France*, Chapter 3; Lloyd, *The Land of Lost Content*, chapter 2

<sup>237</sup> For example, Zeldin, *France 1848-1945*, 1:318; Cunningham *Children and Childhood in Western Society*, p 58 associates changes in attitudes towards children with secularisation

<sup>238</sup> Heywood, *Growing up in France*, p 48; see also Green, *French Paintings of Childhood and Adolescence*, p 9

<sup>239</sup> Maeyer, 'The Concept of Religious Modernisation', p 44

<sup>240</sup> G. de Cadoudal, 'La littérature du foyer', *La Semaine des familles*, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1859; Louis Veuillot also appreciated Hugo's poetry, Pierrard *Louis Veuillot*, p 22

<sup>241</sup> Thomas Kselman, *Miracles and Prophecies in Nineteenth Century France* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1983); Harris, *Lourdes*

<sup>242</sup> Cholvy and Hilaire, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine*, p 153

also happened to be an avid reader of the comtesse de Ségur). According to Gibson, Thérèse de Lisieux “managed to wholly shake off that hyperculpabilization which Jean Delumeau thinks has dominated the West since the thirteenth century”. Her “childish statement of an intense sense of the reciprocal love between God and man” encapsulated for Gibson the transformation of French Catholicism from a religion of fear, into a religion of love.<sup>243</sup> The comtesse’s son, Mgr de Ségur, drew upon St François de Sales’ writings for much of his religious inspiration, and frequently invoked his comparison of the believer being like a child suckling at his mother’s breast. Gaston de Ségur was one of the key authors to popularize the nineteenth century taste for so-called “childish piety”<sup>244</sup>. It is no surprise then to find that the comtesse conceptualised her attitude towards children as both ‘modern’ and Catholic: that is, based upon the new theology centred upon love, and an explicit rejection of the old emphasis on fear.

Moreover, Catholic ideas on children’s literature were also evolving. From the 1830’s enlarged literacy was an inescapable fact. The Catholic Church was obliged to overcome its repugnance for popular reading, and address instead the issue of what these new audiences ought to be reading.<sup>245</sup> Initiatives to distribute ‘good books’ grew rapidly. One of the most important consequences of this was the development of a new critical discourse on books and reading. In order to create a nationwide network of libraries and good book initiatives, those involved needed to have a common reviewing system to decide which books were ‘good’ and why. The most enduring, and influential, publication to respond to this need was

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<sup>243</sup> Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism*, pp 265-267

<sup>244</sup> Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism* pp 182-3

<sup>245</sup> Anne-Marie Chartier, and Jean Hébrard, *Discours sur la lecture (1880-2000)*, (Paris, Fayard/BPI-Centre Pompidou, 2000), chapter one; Loïc Artiaga, ‘Les catholiques et la littérature “industrielle” au XIXe siècle’

the *Bibliographie Catholique*, established in 1841 by the ‘Oeuvre des bons livres’, and whose full title gives a good idea of its ambitions: *Bibliographie Catholique. Revue critique des ouvrages de religion, de philosophie, d’histoire, de littérature, d’éducation, etc. destinée aux ecclésiastiques, aux pères et mères de famille, aux chefs d’institution et de pension des deux sexes, aux bibliothèques paroissiales, aux cabinets de lecture chrétiens, et à toutes les personnes qui veulent connaître les bons livres et s’occuper de leur propagation*.<sup>246</sup> It is striking to note just how many of the books that featured in this monthly review were designated for children and adolescents. Similarly, Catholic magazines and journals for children were also proliferating, and, again, they devoted much space to reviewing books.<sup>247</sup> Their interest is hardly surprising, for according to Claude Savart’s meticulous research, the real bread and butter of religious publishing were the books aimed at children (usually catechisms, but also prize books and more amusing stories).<sup>248</sup>

The idea of the child as innocent predominated the Catholic reviews. The ‘good books’ movement was essentially reactive in nature; it had been born out of a fear of the competition of cheap literature and novels, and so it followed that they saw young readers as being in mortal danger, and needing protection, which further reinforced the sense of their innocence. Further, the desire to replace this ‘bad’ literature forced a reconsideration of the new readers’ needs. The *Bibliographie Catholique* complained that ‘good’ books needed to take more care in their work, “beaucoup de ces livres sont négligés dans la forme, dépourvus d’intérêt ou mal écrits, et semblent, sous ce rapport, ne pas montrer assez de respect pour le

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<sup>246</sup> See Savart, *Les catholiques en France au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, pp 408-411

<sup>247</sup> Alongside Louis Veuillot’s reviews for *L’Univers*, and *Bibliographie Catholique* 1841-1872, the sample used to analyse ‘Catholic discourse’ in this chapter is taken from *Journal des Demoiselles*, *Semaine des Familles*; also consulted were *Poupée Modèle*, *Journal des Jeunes Personnes* and *Journal des enfants de Marie*

<sup>248</sup> Savart, *Les catholiques en France au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, pp 440-2

lecteur.<sup>249</sup> When Jean Glénisson argues it was only secular authors who could be considered responsible for the progress of children's literature, what he was really objecting to was the small-mindedness of the "black-garbed censors" at the *Bibliographie Catholique*. To a certain extent this was true, for the publication devoted countless pages to dissecting the favourites of French children's literature; accusing their authors of Deism, or Protestantism, or worrying about the immorality of fairy tales. Reviewers readily admitted that concern for the moral purity of a book often outweighed their literary judgements when they selected volumes for recommendation. However, to argue that Catholics were alienated from all developments in children's writing is unhelpful. It was precisely their desire to ensure that children read only 'good' books that led them to promote new authors, propagate books, and to consider such questions as suitability of books according to their age, as well as emphasise the need for illustrations. For example, the concerns of secular editor Hetzel's for the need to reinvigorate the genre found their Catholic echo in Louis Veuillot's (an unlikely admirer of Hetzel<sup>250</sup>) ferocious campaign against the terrible quality of writing that he felt undermined children's publishing.<sup>251</sup> Many of the reviews in *Bibliographie Catholique* admit that despite their Deism, the works of authors such as Berquin and Bouilly, or the more recent Sophie Ulliac-Trémadeure, are well-written and pleasing to children. The *Semaine des familles* regularly recommended books published by Hetzel, even those by Jean Macé, while the staunchly pious *Journal des Demoiselles* gave Jules Verne's books a positive review. What they unanimously advocated was parental caution, as well as arguing for more consideration of

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<sup>249</sup> 'Des collections de bons livres, à l'usage de la jeunesse, des familles, des bibliothèques paroissiales etc', *Bibliographie Catholique*, 4, November 1847

<sup>250</sup> A. Parmenier et C. Bonnier de la Chapelle, *Histoire d'un éditeur et de ses auteurs: P. J. Hetzel (Stahl)*, (Paris, Éditions Albin Michel, 1953), pp 489-90

<sup>251</sup> Pierrard, *Louis Veuillot*, pp 22-23

what the reader needed, and providing solid support to authors who wrote explicitly Catholic books.

Similarly, it is not useful to understand the comtesse de Ségur as alienated from advances in writing for children, or changes in attitudes towards the child. This presents a far too simplistic view of the comtesse de Ségur's oeuvre, and also ignores important shifts in Catholic sensibilities. While Madame de Ségur was not given over to the syrupy idealisation of childhood innocence so characteristic of her contemporaries (such as Michelet, or Hugo – she could not stand his poems), neither does she truly fit with the didactic approach supposedly favoured by Catholic moralists concerned to discipline the 'evil child'. The stern and pious novelist, Mathilde Bourdon, commended Ségur for having struck this difficult balance, "Madame de Ségur sait éviter à la fois les mièvreries que quelques auteurs (qui ne sont ni pères ni mères probablement) prodiguent *aux petits anges blonds et roses*, et l'enseignement austère et nu de la morale que les mêmes petits anges trouveraient fort ennuyeux."<sup>252</sup> [Her emphasis] Moreover, the 'redemptive' child, whose innocence redeems adults who have been corrupted, so favoured by authors like Charles Dickens and Victor Hugo, is certainly also to be found in evidence in Ségur's oeuvre. Laura Kreyder's excellent study of the saintly child in Ségur's books, links this to Veillot's portrayal of saintly, rustic shepherd boys, and the fascination for child visionaries like Bernadette Soubirous<sup>253</sup>. Kreyder notes that while she adopted a deeply conservative stance on the moral benefits of child agricultural labour, Ségur also advocated a far more sympathetic understanding of the effects of corporal punishment on child psychology.

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<sup>252</sup> Bourdon, Review of Ségur's early works, *Journal des Demoiselles*

<sup>253</sup> Kreyder, *L'enfance des saints et des autres*, section four

Above all, her work resists pigeonholing. Ségur was conscious of writing to please her market. When it came to constructing ‘childhood’, the comtesse approached her subject with a certain humour. Her donkey Cadichon commences his memoirs “je ne me souviens pas de mon enfance; je fus probablement malheureux comme tous les ânonns.”<sup>254</sup> She turned to her own painful childhood memories (*Petites Filles modèles*, *Les Malheurs de Sophie*), or the miseries described by Dickens (*Un bon petit diable*) for inspiration. The comtesse did not wholly subscribe to the prescriptions of earlier authors such as Berquin and Madame de Genlis, who vaunted the pedagogic value of everyday life.<sup>255</sup> The comtesse was often given to skipping over the humdrum details of children’s upbringing in favour of the dramatic. Thus the heroine of *Histoire de Blondine, Bonne-Biche et Beau-Minon* falls into a deep sleep, and awakes aged fourteen, metamorphosed into a beautiful young woman. She has been educated in her sleep by her new friends: Blondine, the narrator, and the reader have all been saved from “les ennuis des premières études”<sup>256</sup>. (What does it say about the author’s attitude towards childhood if she lets her protagonist sleep through her formative years?) Similarly, in *Petites Filles modèles* she soon abandons the rather pedestrian storyline of Camille and Madeleine educating their young charge Marguerite, in favour of the sad tale of Sophie and her wicked stepmother, Madame Fichini. The plot races along from then on. Ségur’s concern appears to have been to adopt a narrative approach that would engage her young readers’ interest and amuse them; otherwise the message would never sink in. She sugared her moral pill with prodigious skill.

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<sup>254</sup> *Oeuvres* 1:523

<sup>255</sup> Glénisson, ‘Le livre pour la jeunesse’, p 417

<sup>256</sup> *Oeuvres* 1:13

When presenting children with ‘adults’, that is to say, a construct of parental authority, the comtesse de Ségur’s stance is not easy to pin down. For somebody who so passionately espoused an authoritarian cause, not all her grown-ups can be described as disciplinarian. Old people in particular provide comic foils. Ségur has regularly been criticised for poking fun at adults, and providing children with bad role models<sup>257</sup>. This would suggest that she moved away from the traditional ‘didactic’, authoritarian approach, and joined the new school of writing, where the author stepped down from the position on high they previously occupied, to speak to their child reader on the same level.<sup>258</sup> Further, Ségur’s portrayal of wicked adult figures in her works stems from her firmly held conviction that, more often than not, if a child is badly behaved then the parents are to blame. It is rare to find innately evil children in her oeuvre.

Ségur went to great lengths to make her stories accessible to her readers. This meant taking care over her use of language, as well as the page layout and dialogue structure. Olga de Pitray recalled her mother’s advice on how to write for children, “on parle enfant comme on parle français, me disait-elle un jour; les mots compliqués découragent les petits qui les lisent. Ils demandent l’explication du premier, mais ils se rebutent devant le second et ne vont pas jusqu’au troisième.”<sup>259</sup> This often caused the comtesse problems, as the very notion of adapting adult language for children went against dominant pedagogy: “je ne me trouve pas toujours d’accord avec *mon correcteur* qui fait tenir aux enfans [sic] un langage très au dessus de

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<sup>257</sup> Jacques Zeiller, *La comtesse de Ségur* (Paris, Bloud, 1913) Montesquiou, *Les Roseaux Pensants* (1897) amongst many others

<sup>258</sup> Hunt, *Children’s Books*, pp 8-22; Hans-Heino Ewers, ‘La littérature moderne pour enfants’, Egle Becchi and Dominique Julia (eds) *Histoire de l’enfance en Occident* (Paris, Seuil, 1998), 2: 457-483

<sup>259</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Ma chère maman*, pp 127-128

leur âge.”<sup>260</sup> Ségur used theatre-style dialogue “les noms formant scène, donnent beaucoup plus de vie au dialogue, les *dit-il, répondit-elle, reprit-il, s’écria-t-il, continua-t-elle*, sont fatigans [sic] et engourdissent l’action.”<sup>261</sup> The comtesse also made every effort to tailor her work to her young readers, pestering her editor to make sure the print was big and wide-spaced so that children could read them easily. This sometimes came into conflict with Hachette’s policy of luxurious packaging, which she felt hampered the child’s ability to handle the book on its own. When sending her books to the Prince Imperial, she asked her editor not to give him volumes with gold edging on the pages, “c’est difficile et ennuyeux à décoller, les feuilles tiennent ensemble et un enfant ne viendrait pas à bout.”<sup>262</sup> (Conversely, she also objected to giving gold-edged books from her collection to “poor apprentice” boys, this time because she was concerned it might spoil them by accustoming them to luxury consumer items<sup>263</sup>).

This survey of Madame de Ségur’s works will be structured around several key aspects. It will look at the vision of the child presented, and in what ways she engaged with the new Catholic discourse on children’s literature, as well as asking what other influences she drew upon in her work. It identifies, broadly speaking, three main types of children which Ségur depicts in her work; noble children, saintly or redemptive children, and delinquent children. These three categories form the three phases which Ségur’s writing follows, although, as noted, Ségur’s oeuvre is large and varied, and any attempt to squeeze her works into neat categories will encounter difficulties. Hence, several of the works discussed stand alone. To counter this problem, and to highlight changes in her writing, as well as the impact of

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<sup>260</sup> Letter to Templier, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1858, *Oeuvres* 1:LXVI

<sup>261</sup> Letter to Templier, 20<sup>th</sup> February 1861, *Oeuvres* 1:LXXVIII

<sup>262</sup> Letter to Templier, 19<sup>th</sup> February 1864, *Oeuvres* 1:XCXV

<sup>263</sup> Letter to Templier, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1863, *Oeuvres* 1:LXXXIX



reviewers' discourse upon Ségur's ideas, this survey adopts a broadly chronological approach. Finally, using Peter Hunt's guidelines on how to analyse the historical specificity of children's writing, taking into account style, tone, content, her own comments on her writing, and narrative strategies, it will analyse to what extent Ségur wrote for her young readers as a 'modern' and Catholic children's author.

## **I. Noble Children**

When starting out her writing career, Madame de Ségur produced a health manual, followed by a collection of fairy tales. She then turned to writing novels designed for children, and it is these more ambitious works of fiction which form the main focus of this section. She explained to her readers that the characters in these novels were not fictional creations; rather they were portraits from real life. Each book was dedicated to a grandchild, and more often than not, the grandchild would then appear as a character in the plot. These were Ségur's 'noble' children, whose alleged basis in reality was designed to inspire readers to emulate their piety, generosity, and charity. They are both noble in blood and character. Because they were 'real', Ségur took care to endow these 'noble' children with faults that needed correcting, which again helped the young reader to understand and imitate the model presented to them.

The reception of Ségur's first work of fiction, *Nouveaux contes de fées* (1857), gives us an insight into how and why she developed her recognisably Catholic, 'noble' children. It seems

that it was Louis Veillot who advised her to “put away her magic wand.”<sup>264</sup> Maxime de Montrond’s comments in *Bibliographie Catholique* give us a further idea of the sort of pitfalls she had to avoid. Fairy tales were a contentious choice of genre. Despite the continuing success of Perrault’s *Contes*,<sup>265</sup> fairies and the fabulous were looked upon with deep suspicion by the clerical authorities, as they had been by many authors in the eighteenth century. It is not hard to see what they were objecting to. Set in the Manichean world of fairies, events in Ségur’s book are ordered by the struggle between good and bad fairies, in which the humans seem to be mere pawns. Protagonists take little meaningful personal responsibility for their actions, and this creates a tension between the fairy tale genre and Ségur’s Catholic morals.

In his review for the *Bibliographie Catholique* of Ségur’s first two storybooks in 1859, ultramontane author Maxime de Montrond observed that although Ségur dedicated her fairy tales to her granddaughters, they were hardly appropriate reading matter for little these girls. He objected to the many happy endings in which the young protagonists fall in love and get married.<sup>266</sup> Montrond complained that these fairy tale endings taught young girls that virtuous behaviour will be rewarded with marriage to a handsome prince, rather than turning their thoughts to the recompense in the next world, “n’y a-t-il pas quelque danger de fausser l’esprit de ces petits enfants, en leur montrant ainsi, quoique dans des contes, l’amour d’un prince jeune et beau et le titre de reine, comme la récompense des vertus, des sacrifices, et l’idéal de la félicité?” His criticism rested upon a view of the child reader far removed from the ‘evil child’; rather it was reading matter that risked corrupting infant’s minds, “leur petit

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<sup>264</sup> See his comments in his review of her books, ‘Les contes de Madame de Ségur’, p 424

<sup>265</sup> They consistently figure in Martyn Lyons’ bestsellers lists for the nineteenth century, see *HEF*, 3:369-397

<sup>266</sup> Review of *Les Malheurs de Sophie*, and *Nouveaux contes de fées*, by Maxime de Montrond, *Bibliographie Catholique*, 22, October 1859

coeur, tout innocent, impressionable comme une cire molle, ne recevrait pas sans danger l’empreinte du sentiment tendre et vif qui règne dans toutes ces charmantes pages.” He exhorted the author to “reste[z] dans le vrai et dans l’utile.” The young were easily influenced, and so their authors needed to avoid stirring their imaginations with fanciful stories of love and fairies. The everyday was a far safer setting for fiction.

*The Fleurville Trilogy:*

*Petites Filles modèles* (1858), *Les Malheurs de Sophie* (1858), and *Les Vacances* (1859)

The Fleurville trilogy was Ségur’s first foray into realism, and it was here that she developed her ‘noble’ children. The trilogy is set in the grounds of Château Fleurville, a large estate in Normandy, just like the one in which the comtesse lived and brought up her own children. Fleurville was her idyllic, Burkeian vision of a world untouched by revolutions and industrialisation, where young aristocrats learned the values of charity, generosity, obedience, and their responsibilities in the gender and social hierarchy. The idea that these books were at all ‘realistic’ is of course an illusion, however, it was an important illusion. As Mathilde Bourdon noted with approval, these were stories by a real mother, about real children.<sup>267</sup>

In Fleurville, the heroes and heroines all have the noble particle, and are named after her grandchildren. The reader knows this because her dedications explained the connection. In order to further highlight this sense of realism, Ségur’s noble children are not always good, as she says of Camille and Madeleine: “elles ont des défauts, des ombres légères qui font

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<sup>267</sup> Bourdon, review of Ségur’s early works, *Journal des demoiselles*

ressortir le charme du portrait et attestent l'existence du modèle.<sup>268</sup> Their progress was supposed to provide readers with the possibility of emulating their virtues: 'real' children depicted in everyday situations would inspire readers to compete with them. Although 'emulation' was primarily a masculine concept, the idea had percolated through into children's education, and reviews of Ségur's work certainly use the word in this context.<sup>269</sup>

Children's stories in the 'improving' genre generally featured aristocratic protagonists. This reflected the origins of such literature in the eighteenth century, when the consumers of these books would have been families of the social elite, the only people who could have afforded to devote such time and money to their children's education. By the time Madame de Ségur began writing, the market for such books had grown considerably, but the usage remained. She certainly drew upon the conventions of the genre. Her 'noble' children, growing up on a country estate far from the adult world, are reminiscent of the characters in Madame de Genlis' books for example.<sup>270</sup> The name 'Ségur' was instantly recognisable, and so further reinforced in parents' minds that her education was genuine, and traditional, and that these characters really were noble children in all senses of the word.

The charm of Madame de Ségur's fairy stories had been in their evocation of a fantasy world, inhabited by talking animals and ostrich-drawn chariots, where fairies swish their

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<sup>268</sup> *Oeuvres* 1:119

<sup>269</sup> For a discussion of the concept of 'emulation' see Carol E. Harrison, *The Bourgeois Citizen in Nineteenth-Century France. Gender, Sociability and the Uses of Emulation*, (Oxford University Press, 1999) chapter one; Rogers has shown how it was adapted for girls by Madame Campan, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom*, chapter one

<sup>270</sup> On Madame de Genlis' influence on Ségur, see Penny Brown, 'La femme enseignante': Mme de Genlis and the moral and didactic tale in France', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 76, (1994) 23-42

wands and young women suddenly find themselves dressed in jewel encrusted dresses that shimmer like butterfly wings. In direct contrast, her Fleurville trilogy emphasised the importance of simplicity. Although the stories are set in a large chateau, its inhabitants are taught to reject the trappings of wealth. Covetousness is the sin of parvenus, who invariably end up returned to their original place in the social hierarchy. True 'noble' girls are dressed in plain white percaline (cotton) dresses, and any hint of vanity is punished harshly. Noble children learn that they their wealth has been given to them by God, and accordingly they must use it for the good of the community.

However, Ségur's Fleurville trilogy was not simply a series of edifying lessons enlivened by little stories, which was the technique generally favoured by authors like Madame de Genlis and Berquin. Instead she wrote her lessons into a trilogy with a complex narrative; itself suggestive of a certain respect for her reader, and desire to stimulate their imagination. Reviewers like Veuillot and the *Bibliographie Catholique* initially read her books such as *Petites Filles modèles* as a collection of episodes which could be read separately. However, when taken as a whole trilogy, there emerges a strong narrative structure. The story begins with *Les Malheurs de Sophie* (confusingly, Ségur wrote the first instalment of her trilogy second) in which we follow the misadventures of four-year old Sophie and her cousin Paul. Then, at the end of the book, their families leave for America. We find out in *Les Petites Filles modèles* that they were shipwrecked, and Paul's family, and Sophie's mother were lost. Sophie's father remarries in America, to a certain Madame Fichini, whose name he takes in order to inherit a vast sum of money. By the beginning of *Petites filles modèles* however, the unlucky Sophie is now an orphan, and she is brutally treated by her stepmother. Luckily, she is rescued by her aunt Madame de Fleurville, whose château is also a refuge for Madame de Rosbourg and her

daughter, whose husband is lost at sea. In *Les Vacances* Sophie is reunited with Paul, who has spent the past four years marooned on an island with Monsieur de Rosbourg, who, by coincidence, was captain of the fateful ship. The happy ending has Monsieur de Rosbourg decide to buy a château near to Fleurville, and all the cousins marry each other. The family circle is then closed by Paul's marriage to Marguerite de Rosbourg, the captain's daughter.

*Petites Filles modèles* (1858)

In correspondence with her editor at the time of writing this book, Ségur referred several times to Eugénie Foa's *Petite maman* (1841). Ségur recommended to Templier that he publish it within the *Bibliothèque Rose*, explaining it is well written, amusing and instructive<sup>271</sup>. When setting out to write a realist story for the first time, she looked to recent examples for help. Like Foa's book, the initial plot of *Petites Filles modèles* concerns Ségur's model granddaughters being assigned the task of educating a young girl, Marguerite, while her mother is ill. The premise is that following a coach accident, which leaves Madame de Rosbourg injured, she and her daughter Marguerite must move in to Château Fleurville with Madame de Fleurville and her daughters Camille and Madeleine. This provides the opportunity for Camille and Madeleine to learn to be good mothers by looking after the younger girl, Marguerite. The girls play in the garden, look after their dolls, and learn to be charitable towards "leurs pauvres". However, and Ségur herself admitted this later in reference to Foa, the set-up lacks excitement. Her model little girls are rather priggish characters: they are so well behaved as to be completely unbelievable. She quickly abandoned this storyline, in favour of the melodrama of their cousin, the orphan martyr Sophie and her stepmother, Madame Fichini.

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<sup>271</sup> Letters dated 27<sup>th</sup> September and 29<sup>th</sup> October 1857, *Oeuvres* 1:LXII, LXIII

It is not Camille and Madeleine's imperfections that bring the model into relief, but rather the huge, bulbous shadow cast by la Fichini.

This sorry pair "like Saint Roche and his dog" [patron saint of the pestiferous]<sup>272</sup> are introduced into Fleurville in order to demonstrate far more convincingly the efficacy of the gentle, pious Fleurville education. Madame Fichini's ideas on education consist largely of whipping her charge "c'est le seul moyen d'élever les enfants; le fouet est le meilleur des maîtres"<sup>273</sup>, and keeping her in a state of semi-starvation. Otherwise Madame Fichini lets the girl lead a feral existence, without bothering to offer her even the rudiments of instruction. Sophie cannot spell her own name. This woman is a monster who keeps switches under her shawl, ready to whip them out and thrash little children, as in the episode where Sophie nearly drowns, and she beats her for having dirtied her dress. Sophie is left "criant, courant et sautant par excès de souffrance, le corps rayé et rougi"<sup>274</sup>. Another time she is described as looking as if an army of cats had attacked her.<sup>275</sup>

Sophie is a problem child, who puts the gentle Fleurville methods to the test. Her wild temper tantrums are blamed squarely on her mother's deficiencies (the book constantly muddles the terms mother and stepmother). She hits, kicks, scratches and bites the model girls, and deliberately disobeys orders. Madame de Fleurville breaks the girl's will by locking her in the 'Cabinet de pénitence'. After letting Sophie expend her savage anger, Madame de Fleurville delivers a firm lecture. Although the child breaks down into tears and apologises,

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<sup>272</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1:155

<sup>273</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1:152

<sup>274</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1:153

<sup>275</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1:182

she is not permitted to leave. Instead, Sophie is forced to meditate on her own mortality, and the fatal consequences of her sins. This is the only way to inculcate true contrition into the child. She learns to appreciate that instead of beating her, Madame de Fleurville has shown her compassion. After a day and night left to her thoughts and prayers, Sophie understands the consequences of her behaviour towards her mentor, and towards God. She is then allowed to rejoin the group, and they pray together, “pour remercier Dieu d’avoir ouvert au repentir le coeur des coupables, et pour avoir ainsi tiré un grand bien d’un grand mal.”<sup>276</sup> The central aim of the book is to use the Fichini/ Fleurville dyad to teach parents not to beat their children, but rather to use a much more effective method in which they learn the real meaning of contrition. This perhaps indicates the brutality to which parents had recourse, if the idea of locking a child in a darkened room for twenty-four hours was considered ‘gentle’. Madame de Fleurville is often referred to as “douce”, but her education is firm.

Séguir returned to this idea of her ‘gentle’ education much later on, in a short play entitled *On ne prend pas les mouches avec du vinaigre* (from the collection of short stories and plays, *Comédies et Proverbes*, 1865). Here she made it explicit that her method of bringing up children is modern, and goes hand in hand with the new religion of love. She contrasts the new bourgeois devotion to the child, with the old aristocratic view of education, which she portrays as cold, severe, and concerned with appearances rather than the child’s spiritual wellbeing. The playlet features an aging aristocrat, Madame d’Embrun, who agrees to look after two little girls, while their mother goes to a spa. She immediately inaugurates a strict system, to inculcate decent values in these young ladies. Her education is clearly rooted in the *ancien régime*, “je voulais les rendre dociles comme des machines, tranquilles et calmes

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<sup>276</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1:201



comme des eaux dormantes, silencieuses comme des statues de pierre, courageuses et endurant la souffrance comme des Lacédémoniens, polies et de nobles manières comme des dames de la cour du grand roi Louis XIV<sup>277</sup>. In Madame d'Embrun's view, the problem with modern French families is that they no longer teach children respect, "de mon temps, le respect était la première des sciences! Car c'est une science, une vraie, grande et belle science! Maintenant on aime! Beau progrès, en vérité, aimer! Mais c'est ridicule, inconvenant, impertinent d'aimer ceux qu'on doit craindre et respecter. A présent on veut aimer tout le monde, jusqu'au bon Dieu! Ce n'est pas la crainte qu'on inculque aux enfants, c'est l'amour!"<sup>278</sup> Ségur emphasises that not only have attitudes towards childrearing altered significantly, but that this was also a symptom of a wider shift in religious beliefs. The eighteenth century God of fear had become, for the ultramontanes at least, a God of love. For Ségur, this meant a new, more loving conception therefore of childhood. Once the girls' mother returns to her château she is horrified to hear stories of beatings, and torturous hours spent trussed up in strange mechanisms. Madame d'Embrun is obliged to leave. With her daughters gathered around her, the mother concludes that their "modern" ways might be "bourgeois et vilains", but that one catches more flies with honey than vinegar. In other words, a gentle education is more effective than Madame d'Embrun's harsh methods.<sup>279</sup>

This new system emphasised love, but, as with the new Catholicism, this did not imply a lack of order. Ségur castigated with equal force those parents who interpret love for a child as letting go of all discipline. In the same collection, *Les caprices de Gizelle* presented an upper class family in which the parents' love for their child leads them to spoil her. The resulting

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<sup>277</sup> *Oeuvres* 1:1052-3

<sup>278</sup> *Oeuvres* 2:1052

<sup>279</sup> *Oeuvres* 2:1058

'brat' creates havoc. Finally, the parents are convinced of the error of their ways, and resolve to be much more firm. Ségur considered weak parenting to be a terrible dereliction of duty. Referring to a neighbour and her two little terrors, Ségur wrote "la mère ne les reprend jamais, les embrasse au lieu de les claquer; je ne comprends pas qu'elle ne comprenne pas le mal réel qu'elle leur fait par cette condescendance qui vaut l'indifférence et l'abandon."<sup>280</sup> In these later stories Ségur was also at pains to respond to Veillot's criticism of the education presented in *Petites Filles modèles*, where he accused her of laxity.<sup>281</sup> She set out to demonstrate that her 'tender' method might eschew corporal punishment, but it still laid a strong emphasis on discipline.

*Les Malheurs de Sophie* (1858)

In this book we find the same Fleurville protagonists, but a few years previously, when Sophie had not yet been orphaned. Moving away from the didactic 'model' approach of *Petites Filles modèles*, the comtesse adopted a more complicit tone with her readers in this book. She chooses to focus on a child protagonist who is far from perfect, and with whom they can identify. Furthermore, in her presentation of this character, the comtesse, the nation's grandmother, identifies herself with the heroine. She reassures her readers that even saintly grandmothers were naughty little girls once upon a time: "Grand-mère n'a pas toujours été bonne, et il y a bien des enfants qui ont été méchants comme elle et qui se sont corrigés comme elle."<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Letter to Olga de Pitray, 11<sup>th</sup> May 1869

<sup>281</sup> See chapter one of this thesis, section one

<sup>282</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1:272

This type of narrative strategy was becoming popular in mid-nineteenth century Europe. As children were accorded greater respect, so authors began to try to speak to children on their level rather than dictate to them from on high<sup>283</sup>. Ségur turned to her own childhood memories in order to find an authentic voice for her story. It also allows Ségur to write with a rather brutal, puerile sense of humour. Take for example the book's opening sequence, where Sophie receives a doll from her father. By the next chapter, we are assisting at the toy's funeral. The model little girls ask Sophie to break another doll, "pour pouvoir recommencer un enterrement aussi amusant."<sup>284</sup> The childish viewpoint lets Ségur ridicule the popular notion that dolls were the best way to nurture young girls' maternal instinct.<sup>285</sup> The book has achieved iconic status, and ranks first, followed by *Mémoires d'un Âne* (1860), and *Petites Filles modèles* in the comtesse's biggest sellers in the long run.<sup>286</sup>

This childhood is far removed from the beautiful blonde princesses of Ségur's fairy tales. Sophie "n'était pas jolie". Instead of fine bejewelled robes, "elle aimait à être bien mise et elle était toujours très mal habillée". Dressed in a cotton dress all year round, the four-year-old is never allowed a hat or gloves during the harsh winter, because "sa maman pensait qu'il était bon de l'habituer au soleil, à la pluie, au vent, au froid"<sup>287</sup>, her hair is cropped like a boy's, and she is forbidden food and water between meals. As already discussed in chapter one, this was taken from the comtesse Rostopchine's views on education, which were based upon her understanding of Rousseau. This education is seen through the child's eyes, as she struggles

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<sup>283</sup> Hunt, *Children's Literature*, pp 8-22

<sup>284</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1:277

<sup>285</sup> Leïla Sebbar-Pignon, 'Mlle Lili ou l'ordre des poupées' *Les Temps Modernes*, 31 (1976) 1794-1828

<sup>286</sup> Legros, *De l'Histoire à l'histoire. Lire la comtesse de Ségur*, 2: annex 3

<sup>287</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1:289

to satisfy her natural impulses against her mother's proscriptions. Thus, young Sophie works out ruses to make herself pretty (cutting her eyelashes to make them grow, or standing under a drain to make her hair curl like her model little friends) or to satisfy her greed (by eating bread destined for horses, or stealing her mother's sweets). In contrast to the delightful Madame de Fleurville from *Petites Filles modèles*, the mother in this story is a secondary character. This means that the story strays from being strictly didactic, as it is the child's interests, rather than the mother's lessons that drive the plot.

However, the narrator is not necessarily sympathetic to Sophie's plight. The scene could be set for a dramatic transformation, for the plain little Sophie to turn into a beautiful princess, or a *petite fille modèle*. Instead the book still strains under the heavy notion of her sinfulness – unlike Rousseau, here Ségur can be seen to subscribe to an Augustinian view of children's innate tendency towards vice. Sophie is incessantly condemned for her inability to control herself; the blame is laid at her door. The title of the book does not refer to Sophie's unhappiness, rather her misdemeanours. Each episode is structured around a vice, and ends with her suffering the effect caused by her naughty action, which is the Good Lord's punishment for her disobedience. The book could be read as a Catholic critique of Rousseau's ideas on education, for the child's natural impulses are invariably sinful: Sophie's urges lead her to behave in a selfish, vain, and greedy manner. Where Rousseau's *Émile* learns through experiencing the consequences of his actions, Sophie is told that her 'misfortunes' are divine punishment. For the adult reader the book feels oddly dissatisfying, because the episodic structure of the book promises a build up of experience in the child. Logically, Sophie is expected to mend her ways by the end as grandma did in the book's dedication, but this is not the case. The story ends instead on one final accident and a cliff-

hanger: we are told to ask our mothers to buy us *Petites Filles modèles* and *Les Vacances* to find out what will happen to Sophie. Francis Marcoin suggests that the phenomenal popularity of this rather grating book ought to interest psychologists.<sup>288</sup> As she grows older, in *Les Vacances*, the reformed Sophie is a rather sad figure. Cured of her childish enthusiasm, which provided the source for her disastrous “ideas”, she still manages to get into scrapes, but now reflects mournfully on her fatal flaws that prevent her from being truly loved.

*Les Vacances* (1859)

In the final, and less popular, instalment of the Fleurville stories, the girls’ male cousins and fathers return to Château Fleurville for the summer holidays. With the holidays and the arrival of the boys the focus shifts from spiritual education to a more physical, play-centred pedagogy. The children enjoy boisterous games in the garden, where they build Robinson Crusoe-style cabins, and play hide and seek in the woods. The girls join in the games, which provides the comtesse with the opportunity to teach children about their different gender roles in relation to one another. She takes care to emphasise the girls’ fragility, and inability to participate fully. The reader finds out what happened to Madame de Rosbourg’s husband, who has been lost at sea. Ségur inserts a masculine genre into her usual domestic setting, with a little Robinsonnade (Crusoe story) detailing Monsieur de Rosbourg’s adventures on an island with his adopted son Paul. She now teaches boys how to be manly.<sup>289</sup> Monsieur de Rosbourg and Paul are the undoubted heroes of the book; their bravery and strength is put

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<sup>288</sup> Francis Marcoin, ‘Le style et la schize’, *Europe*, 914/915, (2005), p 81

<sup>289</sup> For more in-depth discussion of masculinity in Ségur’s oeuvre, see chapter 4, and my article ‘Petits garçons modèles: la masculinité catholique à travers l’oeuvre de la comtesse de Ségur’ Régis Revenin (ed) *Hommes et masculinités de 1789 à nos jours* (Paris, Éditions Autrement, 2007)

only to good Christian use. Upon their return to France they teach Paul's male cousins to be courageous too, by following their lead. That she succeeded in adopting the male voice is not in doubt: the Crusoe episode was translated into English as *The Sea and the Savages* by Harold Lincoln in 1872, and was destined specifically for boys. It was also one of General de Gaulle's favourites.

“Tout était en l'air au château de Fleurville. Camille et Madeleine de Fleurville, Marguerite de Rosbourg et Sophie Fichini, leurs amies, allaient et venaient, montaient et descendaient l'escalier, couraient dans les corridors, sautaient [the original manuscript version has 'suaient'], riaient, se poussaient. Les deux mamans, Mme de Fleurville et Mme de Rosbourg, souraient à cette agitation, qu'elles ne partageaient pas, mais qu'elles ne cherchaient pas à calmer.”<sup>290</sup>

Thus opens *Les Vacances*. The girls are depicted happily running around. Their mothers look on with affection, and, the author notes, do not seek to stop their activities. That she took care to underline this point would suggest that Ségur wanted to send a clear signal to parents not to prevent their daughters from physical exercise. Both Locke and Rousseau had decried the sedentary lifestyles of privileged children, and the fact that their movements were hindered by cumbersome dress. This, they argued, led to the putrefaction of children's humours, and so to disease. However, in the nineteenth century it was still considered improper for girls in particular to engage in boisterous activities such as running.<sup>291</sup> The

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<sup>290</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1:371

<sup>291</sup> This section is indebted to Yvonne Knibiehler, 'Corps et coeurs', *Histoire des femmes en Occident*, 4:351-387; and Yvonne Knibiehler, Marcel Bernos, Elisabeth Ravoux-Rallo, *De la*

reading committee at Hachette removed the reference to the girls sweating, no doubt for this very reason. However, this word shows how medical ideas were key to Ségur's message, for the sweat indicates that their humours are circulating properly. Children's health was a subject that was very important to the comtesse, for it is a concern that can be traced in many of her works, and the first book that she wrote was a health manual, *La santé des enfants* (1855). According to the introduction to *La santé des enfants* she had completed "quelques études sur l'éducation physique des enfants". She explains that she has written this manual with the help of her family doctor, and wants now to share her knowledge and experience with young mothers.<sup>292</sup>

With this aim in mind, she wove her knowledge of the physical education of children into the narrative of *Les Vacances*. Using the arrival of the boys as an excuse to develop the theme of exercise more fully, Ségur underlines the importance of the girls joining their male counterparts outside in the open air. Throughout the trilogy Ségur explained that little girls should play in simple dresses, "nous ne mettrons pas de belles robes pour pouvoir jouer à notre aise."<sup>293</sup> Their mothers join in games of hide and seek, and again the author notes approvingly how they all sweat (Hachette's correctors missed this reference). Camille exhorts Marguerite to go for a walk, explaining, "si tu restes toujours assise, tu perdras tes couleurs et tu deviendras malade."<sup>294</sup> Her concern was not unwarranted. Rousseau's arguments and the current medical vogue for the idea of girls doing gentle gymnastics and taking constitutional walks had had little impact in this area. Throughout the nineteenth century, and with a peak

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*pucelle à la minette. Les jeunes filles de l'âge classique à nos jours* (Paris, Temps Actuels, 1983), chapter 6

<sup>292</sup> *Oeuvres*, 3:1083

<sup>293</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1:175

<sup>294</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1:130

in the moral years of 1840-60, the death rates of young girls were abnormally high. Doctors were mystified by the alarming rate at which well to do young girls succumbed to disease. The main killer was tuberculosis. Some suspected depression and heartache, while modern historian Yvonne Knibiehler suggests lack of red meat (considered unsuitable for such delicate creatures) fresh air and stultifying education were the culprits.<sup>295</sup> Scholars have suggested that this differentiates Ségur's ideas from those of her close circle, because she demonstrates a concern with the body's health in this life, rather than the hereafter.<sup>296</sup> However, as the *Bibliographie Catholique* pointed out, books written by men on the subject of feminine physical education were an inherently indecent idea. How could a priest justify spending hours considering the physical advantages of gymnastics for young girls?<sup>297</sup> It was clearly a woman's job, and many pious women did indeed write health manuals on this subject.<sup>298</sup>

The fascination for medical matters persists throughout the comtesse's oeuvre. Her stories detail the way to revive a drowned child, as well as how to care for small pox and various fevers. This suggests she never forgot the presence of the parents of her young readers, and that she took a holistic approach to her books. Her aim was not simply to provide amusement and moral guidance for children, but also to ensure their welfare. With this in mind she discreetly spoke over their heads to the adult reader, developing ideas of parenting skills in her narratives. The onus is not just on the mother to pay attention however. She also

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<sup>295</sup> Knibiehler, 'Corps et coeurs', p 360

<sup>296</sup> Notably Doray, *La comtesse de Ségur*, chapter four

<sup>297</sup> Review of *Le livre des jeunes filles* by l'abbé de Savigny, *Bibliographie Catholique*, 7, February 1848

<sup>298</sup> Jacques Léonard, 'Les médecins et les soignants: Femmes, religion et médecine. Les religieuses qui soignent, en France au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Annales ESC*, 32 (1977), 887-907



addresses her child readers directly, and tries to give them useful information, such as how to recognise a rabid dog, or how to save yourself from drowning if you fall into a pond.

In writing the lives of her grandchildren the comtesse de Ségur set out to create an outline of education and upbringing designed to help families. Her books spoke both to children and their parents. Her ideas on children and their upbringing were an amalgam of principles which had dominated children's literature from the eighteenth century onwards, some recent ideas on their welfare, and modern Catholic notions on what sort of reading matter was suitable for them. Although she appears to be criticising Rousseau in her story of Sophie's childhood, the comtesse evidently had some sympathy for the *philosophe* and the medical community's ideas on health. Her 'noble' children dress in plain cotton clothes for both moral and medical reasons. Madame de Ségur may have been conservative, but her concern for the welfare of her little audience extended beyond just their spiritual wellbeing. Her interest in children's physical health placed Ségur at odds with Hachette's correctors, who were unhappy with her explicit references to young girls' bodies.

Moral pressure forced Ségur to abandon writing fairy tales, and set to writing in the genre of education manuals. However, she incorporated elements of the fairy tale into her trilogy, with her wicked stepmother Madame Fichini. Fichini's entry into the text helps develop further the notion that Madame de Fleurville's 'gentle' methods are best. Fichini was also funny and frightening in equal measure. Ségur refused to let the moral embargo on fairy tales restrict her imagination.

*Mémoires d'un Âne* (1860)

In her Fleurville trilogy, Ségur clearly assumed that her readers were from wealthy backgrounds. Possibly as a result of conversations with Louis Veuillot, the comtesse now turned her hand to writing a book where the protagonist was far from noble. This was also her first real success. The first edition of 6,000 copies sold out in around six months between 1860 and 1861, in comparison to the two years and two months it took to dispose of the 5,000 copies of the first edition of *Nouveaux contes de fées*. Looking at the stock registers for Hachette's train station kiosks, her rate of sales had been speeding up considerably since *Les Vacances*, which had taken only one year and four months to sell out, 1859-61.<sup>299</sup> This perhaps was helped by her critical recognition, for she was now important enough to receive her first two reviews in *L'Univers* and *Bibliographie Catholique* in 1859. Unlike *Les Vacances* however, her *Mémoires d'un âne* remained consistently popular in the twentieth century.

This spirited tale is told by a donkey, Cadichon, and follows his misadventures and pranks as he is passed from owner to owner. He suffers at the hands of humans, but his story is fairly gentle in comparison to Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877). Ségur concentrates instead on demonstrating Cadichon's intelligence, comparing his friendship with lonely children and other animals to the ungrateful attitude of many of the grownups and spoiled children he meets. In particular, Cadichon develops a friendship with a hunting dog, Médor, which helps them both survive the misfortunes of being owned by cruel and exploitative farmers. It was this aspect of the text that was selected for use in the school reading curriculum under the Third Republic, the only one of her fictions to be included in the secularised school

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<sup>299</sup> Livre de magasin B 1853-1910: Registre états des stocks en magasin, IMEC. These are only partial records of copies sent out to kiosks and sellers, so the figures can only provide a rough estimate

system.<sup>300</sup> Still, despite this endorsement, it is also one of her more controversial works, because it contains the most explicit example of Ségur's anti-Semitism (apart from her Bible series). In the chapter 'Thérèse', cloth merchant Madame Juivet is accused of being dishonest because she sells the naïve young heroines expensive material for their charitable activities.<sup>301</sup> In the 1970's, Gallimard's edition of *Mémoires d'un Âne* warned readers that it contained material likely to offend<sup>302</sup>.

“Maman Ségur se faisant âne! Dieu qu'elle doit avoir des difficultés!”<sup>303</sup>

This story was the only time in her entire oeuvre in which Madame de Ségur adopted a first person narrative, literally disguising herself as a donkey (as Veillot was amused to hear). The tale has a rebellious message, arguing that she will disabuse the world of such petty prejudices that donkeys suffer. The dumb animal, infant's plaything and object of mistreatments in her Fleurville books, is given his opportunity to speak out. The dedication is his manifesto, “vous verrez enfin que lorsqu'on aura lu ce livre, au lieu de dire : *Bête comme un âne, ignorant comme un âne, têtu comme un âne*, on dira: *De l'esprit comme un âne, savant comme un âne, docile comme un âne*”<sup>304</sup> [her italics]. Ségur had invested herself heart and soul into the project. Cadichon took on a life of his own. She called him “my donkey” in letters. He caught the imagination of readers. Her husband told the comtesse, “vous passerez à la

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<sup>300</sup> Pincet, 'La comtesse à l'école', p 203

<sup>301</sup> *Oeuvres* 1:576

<sup>302</sup> Gallimard Folio Junior edition from 1978, according to Kreyder, *L'enfance des saints et des autres*, p 109

<sup>303</sup> Letter from Louis Veillot to Olga de Pitray, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1858

<sup>304</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1: 522

posterité, montée sur Cadichon.”<sup>305</sup> Cadichon was a particular favourite of Veillot’s: “je crois souvent lire ma propre histoire. J’y trouve bien des choses que j’ai pensées, et un certain mépris pour l’espèce humaine qui me revient fort pour le moment. Je ne sais si Cadichon entrera dans la politique. Ce serait dommage qu’il n’y entrât point.”<sup>306</sup> However, she was hardly taking her spiritual responsibilities towards her readers seriously. The original manuscript had ended with Cadichon throwing a child into a pond to avenge Médor’s death. In response to her editor’s complaint that this was hardly a good lesson for children, the comtesse affirmed resolutely that this was no Christian donkey “mais un Âne tel que vous le qualifiez, âne avant tout”<sup>307</sup>.

Her first attempt to write about a lower class character had been clumsy (although clearly good fun) in terms of what functions this sort of literature should perform. The need for Ségur to give more consideration to the social class of her readership, and their specific requirements, had been an issue first raised by Veillot. He worried that the luxurious world of aristocrats was not suitable for a large readership, “au temps où nous sommes, ces châteaux, ces parcs, ces voitures, pourraient faire pousser de trop gros soupirs; il faut songer à la condition démocratique des lecteurs.”<sup>308</sup> Veillot was well aware of Ségur’s activities, and was often involved in the genesis of her writing. So it is no surprise that soon after his article appeared, her next book to be published was *Mémoires d’un Âne*, followed by *Pauvre Blaise* and *La Soeur de Gribouille*, in which all three books feature downtrodden protagonists, and carry a strong Christian message of respecting the poor and the humble. It is interesting to note that

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<sup>305</sup> Quoted in Cordonnier, *Silhouettes familiales*, p 245

<sup>306</sup> Letter from Louis Veillot to the comtesse de Ségur, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1860

<sup>307</sup> Letter to Templier, 24<sup>th</sup> January 1859, *Oeuvres* 1:LXXI

<sup>308</sup> Veillot, ‘Les contes de Madame de Ségur’, p 425

Veillot thought that Ségur's readership was 'democratic'. Was this really the case? Her audience would mainly have consisted of children whose parents could afford the price of her books, which, at two francs a copy, meant that they were aimed at the middle-class consumer. Still, contemporaries were conscious that the reading public was changing. By the 1850's, most French towns had a parish library thanks to efforts of the 'oeuvre des bons livres', in which novels and amusing books were increasingly popular.<sup>309</sup> Her works were included in the reading lists for the government's new school libraries in 1862,<sup>310</sup> and her son Mgr de Ségur also distributed them in his charitable work. Moreover, Veillot was correct in suggesting that the readership of children's books was expanding. Reviewers were clearly aware that the old style of children's writing, destined for the upper classes, must now change accordingly. They hoped that writers like Ségur would answer their call for a literature destined for the middle and lower classes.

Ségur therefore had to write characters and situations designed for these new readers. Owing to the fact that children were taught to emulate the behaviour of the heroes they found in the books, she needed to include characters from all social classes. As the glowing review of one of Ségur's later works, *Le Mauvais Génie* (1867), in *Bibliographie Catholique* explained, "pour faire du bien dans les familles, dans les écoles, dans les pensions, il est nécessaire de choisir ses héros dans la classe moyenne et ordinaire. Un enfant de cette classe, – et c'est l'immense majorité, – admire les exemples qu'on lui présente sur un théâtre plus élevé, mais n'a pas la pensée de les imiter ; ici, pas une situation, pas un conseil, pas un mot,

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<sup>309</sup> Artiaga, 'Les catholiques et la littérature "industrielle" au XIXe siècle', p 229

<sup>310</sup> See ephemera bound into Hachette Catalogues by Alphonse Langlois, 1862-66, IMEC

qui n'aïlle à son adresse et ne doive l'enflammer d'émulation."<sup>311</sup> Although the hero of *Mémoires d'un Âne* had been a lowly donkey, the moral message of the book was that children must treat their servants with respect, and was clearly directed at the offspring of the social elite. The two books that followed were Ségur's first attempts to speak to a more popular audience. Lower class readers required a different model of childhood. Typically, rather than be seen to endorse the new industrial age, Ségur chose to depict peasant boys, rather than middle-class children, even though it was they who were formed the core of her new readership.

## II. Saintly Children

Once Madame de Ségur moved her attentions down the social scale the tone of her books altered dramatically. Newly conscious that she must teach children from a less fortunate position in life the need for humility, Ségur's characters assume a much more dolourist vocabulary, which she had lifted straight out of contemporary religious propaganda. Claude Savart sums up the vast production of popular literature by the Saint Vincent de Paul Society in two words: "travail et résignation".<sup>312</sup> When Ségur's 'poor Blaise' is powerless to prevent his master from bullying him, he intones dutifully, "depuis que je vais au catéchisme pour ma première communion l'an prochain, je sais que Notre-Seigneur a souffert des méchants, et cela me console de souffrir un peu comme lui."<sup>313</sup> Her humble heroes like Blaise submit to all the hard work, cruelties and injustices which they face in life, and they never question

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<sup>311</sup> Review of *Le Mauvais génie*, *Bibliographie Catholique*, 40, July 1868

<sup>312</sup> Claude Savart, 'Approches de la religion populaire à travers quelques publications de la société de Saint Vincent de Paul', *La religion populaire* (Paris, Éditions du centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1979), p 262

<sup>313</sup> *Oeuvres* 1:724

their lot. Through their saintly suffering they triumph in the end, and usually become the object of a rich benefactor. This does not mean that her lower-class boys are permitted to rise above their station in life. Blaise and his counterparts invariably live happily ever after as their benefactors' man-servants. However, *Pauvre Blaise* was the only one of her socially engaged books to be unrelentingly dolourist in tone. Ségur began to incorporate comic episodes to alleviate the mood, a technique she developed in *La Soeur de Gribouille*.

*Pauvre Blaise* (1861)

Following her donkey's antics, the comtesse turned to the other extreme and produced the sickly sweet poor Blaise. She announced that this was "un livre éminement moral"<sup>314</sup>. The comtesse was uneasy about this overtly pious work, and rightly so, as in comparison with Cadichon's immediate success, *Pauvre Blaise* only ever managed mediocre sales figures.<sup>315</sup> The story revolves around the excessively submissive servant boy Blaise, and his struggles to make his tyrannical young master see the error of his ways. Conscious of his place in the social hierarchy, Blaise adopts a policy of passive resistance (it would be unthinkable for him to disobey his young master). It forms a stark contrast to the more naturalistic children depicted in *Sophie* or *Mémoires d'un Âne*. Blaise is a saintly child: both children and adults, including the curé, are in awe of him "belle et noble âme, en vérité, dit le comte... le coeur toujours plein de charité et de tendresse... Quel beau modèle à suivre!"<sup>316</sup> Finally his example prompts the whole family in the château to rediscover their religion.

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<sup>314</sup> Letter to Templier, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1860, *Oeuvres* 1:LXXVII

<sup>315</sup> Legros, *De l'Histoire à l'histoire*, 2: annex 3

<sup>316</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1:796

Blaise is one of several ‘redemptive’, or ‘saintly’ children in the comtesse’s oeuvre. Alongside the well-known traditional Catholic view of the sinful child, there also existed the possibility of celebrating children’s innocence. Erasmus had developed the idea of *repuerascantia*, ‘growing childlike again’, drawing upon Jesus’ teaching that Christians ought to appear like a child before God “except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven”<sup>317</sup>. Saint François de Sales wrote his classic *Introduction à la vie dévote* in 1607 according to this same premise. Nineteenth century piety once more revived François de Sales’ vision of a simple and innocent religion, which emphasised the small, the childlike and the humble as closer to God. Mgr de Ségur was one of his most enthusiastic devotees. Sales’ *Introduction à la vie dévote*, along with the *Imitation of Jesus Christ* were the two most popular religious works in mid-nineteenth century France.<sup>318</sup> They both celebrate and compare the suffering of the lowly with that of Christ, and this is also the underlying premise of Ségur’s *Pauvre Blaise* (whose hero, it should be noted, receives a “superbe volume de *L’Imitation...*”<sup>319</sup>). This obsession with the childlike had another connotation for ultramontanes. It was a further example of their eagerness to champion innocent piety in opposition to what they saw as the corruption of modern society. Thus, the powerful image Ségur wanted to convey in *Pauvre Blaise* is that of the poor little Blaise converting the mighty and corrupt noble. It was originally entitled *Le Triomphe du Pauvre Blaise*.

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<sup>317</sup> Matthew, 18:3 quoted in Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: on Fairy tales and their Tellers*, (London, Chatto and Windus, 1994) pp 92-93; see also Francis Marcoin, ‘Petites lectures’, *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, 1, (1992) 7-24

<sup>318</sup> Savart, *Les catholiques en France au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p 206

<sup>319</sup> *Oeuvres* 1:804



She further developed this concept of naïve piety in *La soeur de Gribouille* (1862). The story centres on a young seamstress, Caroline, and her struggles to look after her simple brother, Gribouille, once their mother has died. The boy is convinced that he can talk to his mother and the angels, and predicts that he will soon join them in heaven. True to his word, Gribouille dies, by taking a bullet for a Brigadier. What is particularly notable about *Gribouille* is how Madame de Ségur managed to combine ultramontane sensibility with comic frivolity to great effect. *La soeur de Gribouille* is based on a mildly bawdy *boulevard* comic opera, *La soeur de Jocrisse*<sup>320</sup> “une des plus charmantes et spirituelles *bêtises* qui aient été jouées sur la scène”<sup>321</sup>. Such performances were all the rage in nineteenth century Parisian high society, and the comtesse de Ségur greatly enjoyed attending them (or *had* greatly enjoyed: the preface refers to drawing upon her “ancien souvenir” of the play. It is hard to imagine Gaston de Ségur or Louis Veillot approving of the *boulevard*). This was the comtesse’s first real attempt at comedy, a genre that was to feature in many of her subsequent works. True to the stock vaudeville character, Jocrisse, Gribouille’s lack of understanding allows for a variety of misunderstandings, play on words, and slapstick humour. She removes all smut and transforms her Jocrisse into a typically ultramontane romantic hero. Her young boy’s simplicity allows him to see the truth, in contrast with the hypocritical gibbering of many of the villagers. While the comtesse was writing *Gribouille* the Lourdes drama was playing out, with her friend Veillot as one of the principal actors. *Gribouille* contains several elements reminiscent of the Lourdes story, with its small town setting, its ignorant, gossipy village women, and of course the child visionary.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Varner & Duvert, *La soeur de Jocrisse, comédie en un acte, mêlée de couplets*, first performed at the Palais Royal in 1841.

<sup>321</sup> *Oeuvres* 2:3

<sup>322</sup> Harris, *Lourdes*, part one

Séгур exploited the supernatural aspects of the tale to full effect, creating a reassuring vision of death and the afterlife, still tinged with a certain eeriness that steers the book away from becoming too maudlin. For a professional wordsmith, who had really only begun to flex her creative muscles properly with *Mémoires d'un Âne*, she was incredibly pleased with her latest creation, which seemed to satisfy on all fronts, “je me sens une préférence prononcée pour *Gribouille*; contrairement à mon habitude, je le trouve très bien et j’en suis satisfaite”<sup>323</sup> ... “je t’annonce avec un plaisir féroce l’heureuse mort de *Gribouille*... c’est touchant, mais pas trop; c’est gai, mais pas trop non plus; enfin je le trouve bien.”<sup>324</sup> This was precisely what pleased the *Bibliographie Catholique* reviewer “si les enfants qui liront ce petit livre s’égaient souvent d’une manière saine et utile, ils verseront parfois des pleurs salutaires.”<sup>325</sup> One hundred years later, the Catholic novelist José Cabanis wrote that no novels had touched him more than *Pauvre Blaise* and the *Soeur de Gribouille*.<sup>326</sup> However, like *Blaise*, *Gribouille* proved less popular than her Fleurville trilogy.<sup>327</sup>

Séгур returned to the twin themes of redemption and suffering in *Jean qui grogne et Jean qui rit* (1865). The story follows the fortunes of two fourteen-year-old Breton boys who must go to Paris to find work. The cousins, Jean (*Jean qui rit*) and Jeannot (*Jean qui grogne*) go to stay with Jean’s elder brother, who is a waiter in a café. Their lives turn out according to their

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<sup>323</sup> Letter to Templier, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1861, *Oeuvres* 1: LXXXIII

<sup>324</sup> Letter to Olga de Pitray, 11<sup>th</sup> May 1861

<sup>325</sup> Review of *La sœur de Gribouille*, *Bibliographie Catholique*, by Ch. Laval, 27, April 1862

<sup>326</sup> Quoted in *Cahiers Séguriens*, 2, p 87

<sup>327</sup> Legros, *De l’Histoire à l’histoire*, 2: annex 3. *Gribouille* ranks 10<sup>th</sup> and *Blaise* ranks 12<sup>th</sup> out of her 20 books published by Hachette, in terms of re-editions for the period 1863-1941

respective characters: Jean wins the heart of a generous aristocrat and lives happily ever after as his manservant, while Jeannot falls in with a bad crowd and finishes up in a penal colony.

Despite being close relations who grew up together, the two boys could not be more different. Jean is described as “une âme d’élite”.<sup>328</sup> Everyone who meets him falls in love with him. His physiognomy expresses his piety, and adults spend hours contemplating his spiritual beauty. Like Poor Blaise he is a redemptive child. A farmer who meets the boys on their journey learns to show forgiveness from Jean, and muses “et de penser que c’est un garçon de quatorze ans qui m’en remontre, à moi qui en ai trente-cinq! [...] Il a dans la physionomie quelque chose... Je ne sais quoi... Qui fait plaisir à regarder.”<sup>329</sup> Meanwhile his cousin Jeannot has a taciturn disposition, and all who meet him instantly recognise that he is not to be trusted. We learn that he is an orphan, and later that his father was “un gueux, un grédin.”<sup>330</sup> However, the comtesse concludes that it is nature, rather than nurture that is responsible for the differences. Thus when Jean reprimands his cousin for refusing to pray for his aunt he tells him, “tu n’es malheureux qu parce que tu veux l’être. Excepté que j’ai maman et que tu as ma tante, nous sommes absolument de même pour tout. Je me trouve heureux, et toi tu te plains de tout.” Later Jean explains to a stranger, “moi j’ai du courage, et lui est faible. C’est le bon Dieu qui nous a faits comme ça; ce n’est pas par orgueil que je le dis.”<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:125

<sup>329</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:38

<sup>330</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:99

<sup>331</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:15-17

Their relationship introduces the dolourism of the book, as Jean suffers on behalf of Jeannot. This theme is then developed when Jean is employed to look after young Roger de Grignan, who is desperately ill. This tale is a tribute to close friends of the Ségurs and Veuillots – the d’Esgrignys – whose son had died in 1859. He shows that noble children could also be saintly. Ravaged by illness, Roger is skeletal in appearance, and can hardly talk, but he accepts his plight with Christian resignation, “je souffre beaucoup depuis hier; mais ne me plaignez pas, je souffre pour le bon Dieu; je lui offre tout et il m’aide.”<sup>332</sup> His sickbed is like that of a saint. Adults visit him to be fortified by his spiritual strength. One character remarks, “je ne me souviens pas d’avoir été aussi émotionné comme je l’ai été chez cet enfant. Je me suis senti remué jusqu’au fond de l’âme! Ce petit être souffrant, si doux, si tranquille, si heureux!”<sup>333</sup> The boy dies “en odeur de sainteté”. He provides children with a sobering lesson on how to die a pious death, and also underlines, as Jean constantly reminds the rebellious Jeannot, that there is an “APRÈS” to this life, which should dictate their behaviour. This gloomy tale was typical of devotional literature of the period, and certainly Gaston de Ségur’s writings are filled with such edifying deaths. Children were a particular favourite of his. The spectacle of their innocent young lives cut short emphasised how brief our time on this earth is, in comparison to the afterlife.

Ségur had written *Blaise* and *Gribouille* at the real zenith of ultramontane agitation, the years 1859-61, where Catholic cultural output reached impressive proportions in response to the new dangers which faced the Pope in Italy. Veuillot’s paper, *L’Univers*, was suppressed by the government, for criticising foreign policy. Similarly, at home, Persigny, minister of the

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<sup>332</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:122

<sup>333</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:148

interior, was attempting to curtail the power of the religious congregations, one of the largest manifestations of the religious revival. In this atmosphere of paranoia and fear of persecution, the socially engaged tone of her stories, and their obsession with suffering in a corrupt world is hardly surprising. Ségur considered writing a tribute to Louis Veillot: “je vais commencer... j’ose à peine avouer le titre pour lequel il me faut une haute approbation... je commence donc le *Ça et là des enfans* avec cette préface: “Le titre est ambitieux, car il est imité d’un livre fait par un grand talent, un grand esprit, un grand coeur, toutes qualités auxquelles je n’ose ni prétendre, ni aspirer, mais il est si simple, il offre tant de facilités de composition, que je maintiens l’usurpation.”<sup>334</sup> In Madame de Ségur’s view, Veillot’s *Ça et là*, his ultramontane *Decameron*, was a masterpiece. Thus in 1861 she set to writing her children’s *Decameron*, which she entitled *Les bons enfans* (1863). However she did not retain the title, or the preface. Age and ill health, particularly that of her husband, whom she was obliged to nurse, appeared to be taking their toll on the comtesse. “Tous les ans je perd[e] une année de vie”, she said in the rather morbid dedication to all her grandchildren in *Les bons enfans*, predicting that soon “je garderai le silence, pour cacher au public les infirmités de mon esprit”<sup>335</sup>.

Her ominous prediction was in fact premature, and the period which follows, 1862-5, was to prove very fecund. The intense dolourism of *Pauvre Blaise* and certain episodes of *Jean qui grogne* is in fact rather rare in Ségur’s oeuvre. Instead, following what she felt was her success in *Gribouille*, Ségur began to develop her comic talents. She went on to write the incredibly popular *Auberge de l’Ange gardien* (1863) and *Un bon petit diable* (1865), which both combined

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<sup>334</sup> Letter to Olga de Pitray, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1861

<sup>335</sup> *Oeuvres* 2: 170

serious lessons on piety with slapstick humour. Although her *Jean qui grogne* initially sold well, the book's sales dipped dramatically in the twentieth century, and it was her more light-hearted, comic works that proved as enduringly popular as her Fleurville books and *Mémoires d'un Âne*. Ségur mastered the approach resumed in the phrase “instruire en amusant”, which had become the mantra of children's authors and reviewers of all political and religious backgrounds in the nineteenth century.<sup>336</sup> This idea went hand in hand with the new respect for the child. Although some reviewers in the *Bibliographie Catholique* remained suspicious of a concept that risked making light of the serious matter of education, “ce qui coûte à apprendre demeure plus profondément dans l'esprit que ce qu'on apprend en jouant”,<sup>337</sup> on the whole, Ségur's comedies were well received by Catholic critics. Indeed, as we shall see below, she received high praise from Gustave Robert for her *Auberge de l'Ange gardien* in the *Bibliographie Catholique*.

#### *Les deux nigauds* (1863)

The plot concerns two silly, bourgeois children, Innocent and his sister Simplicie, who want to go to Paris to see the bright lights of the city. Their parents send them off to stay with their old aunt, and they meet a whole range of grotesque characters on their journey. The comic vein in her oeuvre really comes to the fore here, with plenty of slapstick and cartoon violence. One episode sees two Polish refugees, Cozrgbrkezski and Boginski (the Russian exile knew how bizarre Slav names sounded to French ears), throw a crabby old woman's

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<sup>336</sup> Jacques Chupeau, 'Instruire en amusant: théorie et pratique du récit éducatif à l'époque de la comtesse de Ségur', *Cahiers Robinson* 9, (2001), 57-65

<sup>337</sup> Review of *Le Journal de Marguerite* by Mlle Monnot, *Bibliographie Catholique*, 19, January-June 1858

smelly dog, Chéri-Mignon, out of the diligence, followed by his mistress<sup>338</sup>. The nation's grandmother was generally at her most vicious and funny when describing the foibles of the aged, and this book features her first caricature of an old woman, Madame Bonbeck. This arthritic whirlwind kicks, hits, and shouts her way through the book, hurling the most outrageous insults at her young charges, the two eponymous boobies. The louche Eugène de Ségur enjoyed the book immensely. He compared his wife's talent to the great Balzac, suggesting she ought to entitle it *Petite comédie humaine*.<sup>339</sup>

*L'Auberge de l'Ange gardien* (1863) and *Le Général Dourakine* (1863)

The tone of these two volumes is energetic, the pace relentless, and there is a good dose of love and romance, along with some terrifying violence in the scenes set in Russia. *L'Auberge de l'ange gardien* opens with a dramatic scene of two young boys who have been abandoned in a forest. This is no picaresque adventure story however. Within a few pages the boys are rescued by a handsome Zouave, called Moutier. The story is set around the welcoming Guardian Angel Inn, run by the widow Madame Blidot and her sister Elfy. The two sisters soon adopt the boys, and our attention is instead turned towards Moutier, the Crimean War and the mysterious Russian gentleman (General Dourakine) he befriends. The book then charts the Russian General's misadventures in France. Finally, the fantastically wealthy General Dourakine engineers the weddings between Moutier and Elfy, and that of Madame Blidot with the boys' long lost father, showering "une pluie d'or" as the *Bibliographie Catholique* put it, over the village. *Le Général Dourakine*, its sequel, follows Dourakine back to

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<sup>338</sup> *Oeuvres*, 2:324-5

<sup>339</sup> Letter from the comtesse to Olga de Pitray, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1861

Russia where he intends to organise his affairs to secure his permanent residence in France. Here we met an array of villainous characters, most memorably his niece, Madame Papofski, who is determined to get her hands upon the General's money. Luckily, the General has brought with him the trusted Madame Blidot, now Madame Dérigny, along with her husband and sons. They protect the General, as does his other niece. Madame Papofski is outwitted, and the General and his entourage return to France. They all convert to Catholicism and live happily ever after.

With these two books, Ségur was to create one of her most memorable characters, the doddering General Dourakine. He was a flagrantly irreverent homage to her father and fatherland. A fairy godfather of Rabelaisian appetite, the highpoint of *L'Auberge* is when he arranges an enormous wedding feast for the recipients of his charity. All thoughts of suffering are banished by Dourakine's infectious generosity. Even the troubles of unhappy marriage are the subject of buffoonery. As he is arranging Moutier's marriage, Dourakine warns his young friend: "j'ai été marié aussi, moi! Une femme adorable, douce, bonne! ... Quel démon, sapristi! Si j'avais pu me démarier un an après, j'aurais sauté par-dessus mon clocher dans ma joie."<sup>340</sup> He delighted contemporaries. Veillot was charmed, responding to a dinner invitation thus, "j'arriverai avec un appétit de l'immortel Dourakine. Quel beau portrait et quel tour de force: un goinfre charmant..."<sup>341</sup> Gustave Robert's review of *L'Auberge de l'ange gardien* for the *Bibliographie Catholique* reassured readers that this book was highly moral, and then launched into rapturous praise for the General. "A son entrée en scène, le vieux général prend le premier rôle et ne le quitte plus. C'est une vraie tête russe,

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<sup>340</sup> *Oeuvres* 2:541

<sup>341</sup> Letter from Louis Veillot to the comtesse, 1<sup>st</sup> February 1864, Veillot, *Correspondance*, 8, pp 47-8



une de ces têtes dont parle Joseph de Maistre, capables de faire sauter une citadelle. En revanche, quel cœur! Oncques puissant seigneur ne fut plus magnifique.”<sup>342</sup> As Robert noted, these books taught children the values of Christian charity and the importance of a strict social hierarchy in a most attractive manner, by bringing her happy endings to a wildly joyous climax through General Dourakine’s generosity.

This period also saw Ségur write a series of ‘anti-school stories’, beginning with her *Deux Nigands*. Part of the story is set in a Parisian boarding school, the *Pension des Jeunes savants*. In this godless institution the masters exercise little control over its inmates, and the law of the jungle rules. The boy Innocent is beaten to within an inch of his life. Ségur was deeply suspicious of schools, partly because she had resented her husband’s insistence on sending their sons to boarding school at a young age. Anatole de Ségur’s biography of his brother underlined the cruelty of this act, by reprinting the young Gaston’s tearful letters to his mother. Anatole blamed Gaston’s unhappy experiences partly on the “funeste” lack of proper religious teaching in the school.<sup>343</sup> However, the comtesse’s lampooning of schools bordered on disrespect for authority. Previously the *Bibliographie Catholique* had sniffed in disapproval at one character in *Les bons enfants* exclaiming, “au collège, pauvre Léonce! que vas-tu devenir *avec ces méchants maîtres* [reviewer’s italics] qui ne cesseront de te gronder et de te punir?”<sup>344</sup> Hachette’s correctors removed references in *Les deux nigands* to the lack of religion in the school, toned down her vivid language, and the exuberant violence of her set pieces. In one instance, Innocent’s complaints that his tormentors left him with his back bleeding

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<sup>342</sup> Review of *L’Auberge de l’ange gardien* and *Pauvre Blaise*, by Gustave Robert, *Bibliographie Catholique*, 33, April 1865

<sup>343</sup> Anatole de Ségur, *Mgr de Ségur*, 1, Chapter 1

<sup>344</sup> Review of *Les bons enfants* by V. Postel, *Bibliographie Catholique*, 32, November 1864

become simply ‘they hurt me’.<sup>345</sup> Later, Templier rebuked her for daring to suggest again that boarding schools in France were nightmarish hell-holes in her comedy *Un Bon petit diable*.

Crucially, this criticism of the schooling system received the endorsement of her family. Mgr de Ségur had given the manuscript of *Un Bon petit diable* his wholehearted approval, and said it would be “un grand succès de rire, surtout dans les collèges”<sup>346</sup>. Despite Gaston de Ségur’s role as chaplain at the major Catholic school in Paris, the Lycée Stanislas, he, his mother, and brother all remained deeply suspicious of the school system. Gaston de Ségur’s biographer concludes her chapter on his work at Stanislas, and notably his lack of enthusiasm for the post, with his quote “la charité [est] le moyen d’éducation par excellence”<sup>347</sup>. His brother Anatole’s thoughts on education minister, Victor Duruy, ran in the same vein: “Seigneur, donnez-nous un peu plus de cloîtres et un peu moins de lycées; un peu plus de capucins et beaucoup moins de professeurs; donnez-nous des préfets qui ne détruisent pas les villes et des ministres qui ne détruisent pas des âmes.”<sup>348</sup> The Ségurs appeared to reject even Catholic institutions. Not only did Gaston prove lukewarm in his support for Stanislas, but Anatole de Ségur also withdrew his two sons from the Jesuit school at Vaugirard. He confided to his diary that their harsh discipline was not necessary in the schooling of such obedient children.<sup>349</sup> Like their good friend Louis Veillot they were unable to be reconciled to

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<sup>345</sup> According to Gabriel Aymé’s study of her original manuscript in *Grand Album comtesse de Ségur*, pp 237-45

<sup>346</sup> Letter to Templier, 12 May 1864, in *Oeuvres* 1:XCVI

<sup>347</sup> Hédouville, *Mgr de Ségur*, pp 376-383

<sup>348</sup> Anatole de Ségur, *Souvenirs à mes enfants*, NAF 11401, entry 16<sup>th</sup> April 1866

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid*, entry 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1866

schools still subject to the authority of the University<sup>350</sup>. In light of their ferocious rejection of the French education system, the Ségurs would never produce an equivalent to the English muscular Christian school story. This did not go unnoticed across the channel. Henry Kingsley, (brother of the famous muscular Christian, Charles Kingsley) wrote, “Heaven help a weak English boy in a French school. Read that very charming and able book, *Les deux nigands* by the comtesse de Ségur, and say if the art of torture is lost in France.”<sup>351</sup> For the comtesse, domestic education which focused upon religion, charity and obedience was far more important. In her oeuvre she portrayed schools as a sort of borstal to which parents of delinquents (of all classes) had to have recourse.

The Empire was now liberalising, and Victor Duruy was appointed minister for education in 1863. His reforms aimed to broaden access to education. Anatole’s comments above illustrate well the Ségur’s family’s opinion of Duruy. The development of the schooling system over the course of the century would affect experiences of childhood dramatically, by lengthening it, and giving children expectations which could exceed those of their parents. Needless to say, the comtesse looked on with suspicion, and considered ways in which Catholics could respond to changes. Her view of childhood was darkening, as her fears for the direction society was taking increased.

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<sup>350</sup> Robert Anderson, *The Conflict in Education: Catholic Secondary Schools (1850-70) A Reappraisal*, Theodore Zeldin (ed) *Conflicts in French Society: Anticlericalism, Education & Morals in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1970)

<sup>351</sup> Henry Kingsley, *Mademoiselle Mathilde* (1867)

#### IV. Juvenile Delinquents

Contemporary critics often designate her later works as Ségur's 'dark' phase. As she explained to Templier in 1863, personal tragedy meant she was not in the mood for writing the sort of "niaiseries" that filled her books.<sup>352</sup> She had just recently lost her husband, followed shortly afterwards by the death of one of her youngest granddaughters. Her daughter Sabine, "la fille qui s'est volontairement chargée d'une lourde croix",<sup>353</sup> was slowly dying from tuberculosis in a nunnery. While her protestations were something of an exaggeration, for the books she had written while her husband was dying had been manic comedies, however the mood of her books did become more sombre subsequently. This is also referred to as her 'social' phase, as the comtesse addressed more gritty issues (often drawing on Gaston and Anatole's works, see chapter four). She expressed far less hope for humanity in general. Her previously exuberant happy endings became more muted. A much more overtly intransigent Catholic vision of society comes to the fore, perhaps unsurprisingly, as she was also engaged in writing her Grandmother's Bible series from 1865 onwards. Correspondence suggests that she was increasingly turning to her eldest son, Mgr de Ségur, for support and advice. While these books found little favour with her young audience, in 1972 Marc Soriano noted that they were much more ambitious, and he labelled this her "Balzac" cycle.<sup>354</sup> In his view they are bad children's books, but adult masterpieces.

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<sup>352</sup> Letter to Templier, 27<sup>th</sup> September 1863, *Oeuvres* 1:XC

<sup>353</sup> Letter to Olga de Pitray, 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1860

<sup>354</sup> Marc Soriano, 'Bibliothèque Rose ou série noire?' introductory essay to *La Fortune de Gaspard* (Paris, Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1972), pp ix-lxiii

Madame de Ségur experienced more and more trouble in according salvation to all children. Where early characters like Sophie were naughty and rebellious, they had their reasons, and had good hearts underneath it all. While she had always enjoyed punishing villains, Ségur now increasingly introduced into her oeuvre main characters who appeared to be beyond redemption. Maurice de Sibran in *François le bossu* (1864) was the first unsympathetic character to die a terrible yet edifying death. His precedents had been allowed happy endings once they recognised the error of their ways, but here no such operation was possible. In a metaphor dear to Christian exemplary literature, his death was caused by fire.<sup>355</sup> Ségur refrained from the full hellfire and brimstone approach adopted in Anglophone evangelical literature, and did not depict her reprobate being consumed by flames. However, she explained to her editor that the one thing she could not do was “la résurrection de Maurice que je n’ai pu opérer et qui eût été aussi laborieuse et difficile que celle de Lazare par Mr Renan. J’ai adouci ses souffrances, j’ai diminué ses blessures; mais, le sauver était trop difficile; j’ai dû le laisser mourir”<sup>356</sup> [her emphasis]. Similarly, the two poor peasant boys in *Jean qui grogne et Jean qui rit* are a diametric little pair, and, unlike in previous stories, Ségur offers little explanation for one cousin’s good behaviour and the other’s bad behaviour. Grumbling Jean was not beaten by his guardian like Sophie. His wickedness, and laughing Jean’s saintliness, can only be attributed to God’s will. One is innocent and saintly, the other is evil incarnate, and beyond redemption. This was partially due to the intervention of Mgr de Ségur, who felt his mother was too lenient at times. Referring to the ending of her *Mauvais génie*, he wrote “espérons néanmoins que celui-là ne finira pas, comme tous les autres coquins, ses frères aînés, par se convertir, être très heureux en ménage et avoir beaucoup

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<sup>355</sup> Maria Tatar, *Off with their Heads! Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood*, (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1992) pp 6-15

<sup>356</sup> Letter to Templier, February 10th 1864, *Oeuvres*, 1:XCIV

d'enfants. Il faut rendre à César ce qui est à César et, de temps en temps, du moins, pendre les coquins."<sup>357</sup> He enforced a tedious re-writing of *Jean qui rit*, so much work was involved that she was obliged to shut herself in the house until the job was done.<sup>358</sup>

Another factor which darkened her vision of childhood in this later phase was that her grandchildren were growing older, and so accordingly were her fictitious characters. Their average age was now early to mid-teens. The adult world was encroaching upon Ségur's moral universe and destabilising it. Maurice de Sibrin in *François le bossu* for example dies as a result of a fire started by his cigarette – smoking was one of the signs of entering manhood in the nineteenth century. As a devoted follower of Louis Veillot and intransigent Catholicism, she was deeply suspicious of the influences of modern society. Outside the family, in the wide world, was a society dominated by capitalism, industry, and materialist values. Those whose resolve was not strengthened by religion risked perdition. Thus, in *La Fortune de Gaspard* (1866) she depicts the transition from childhood to adulthood as posing serious risks for lower-class boys who might be tempted by the new promise of riches. Similarly, the main crime of Alcide in *Mauvais Génie* (1867) is greed. The arrival of a wealthy industrialist in the village leads to an escalation of his gold lust. However, capitalist society does not just corrupt the lower orders, or indeed boys. Proud aristocrat Félicie in *Diloy le chemineau* (1868) is led astray by the local *nouveaux riches* who encourage her selfish snobbery, while in *Quel amour d'enfant!* (1866) the spoiled Giselle makes a disastrous marriage in her desire for untold wealth.

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<sup>357</sup> Letter from Mgr de Ségur to Olga de Pitray, 17<sup>th</sup> December 1866, published in the appendix to Olga's *Mon bon Gaston*

<sup>358</sup> Letter to Olga, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1865

*La Fortune de Gaspard* (1866)

“Je deviendrai savant; je ferai des machines, des livres; je gagnerai beaucoup d’argent, j’aurai des ouvriers, je vivrai comme un prince.”<sup>359</sup>

Such are the feverish ambitions announced by Gaspard, the prince “en sabots et en blouse”<sup>360</sup>, anti-hero of this novel. The most talented pupil in his village school, he is desperate to hoist himself out of the grind of agricultural labour, and make his fortune in industry. This is the only work in her oeuvre, as far as we know, where her editor suggested the subject “qui est l’avantage de l’instruction pour le peuple.”<sup>361</sup> No doubt he wanted to bring the *Bibliothèque Rose* in line with the current liberal mood of the Empire. For an author who had such a deeply hostile view of the education system, tackling such a subject was never going to be easy. Nevertheless, Madame de Ségur attacked it with customary brio, twisting and turning around the subject, until her usual black and white moral system became muddied. The resulting book is unrelentingly bleak. Marc Soriano calls it “une oeuvre noire, d’une rare férocité.”<sup>362</sup> Soriano also notes how strange it is that Templier accepted the manuscript, adding only minor corrections, when the whole thrust of the book goes against his wishes<sup>363</sup>.

One of her most ambitious serious fictions, *Gaspard* was not a success in comparison with her earlier works. However, in the twentieth century it has attracted much critical acclaim,

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<sup>359</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:201

<sup>360</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:201

<sup>361</sup> Letter to Templier, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1865, *Oeuvres* 1: CX

<sup>362</sup> Soriano, ‘Bibliothèque Rose ou série noire?’ p xxii

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid*, p xxiii

notably from Marc Soriano's preface to the Jean-Jacques Pauvert edition of 1972<sup>364</sup>, which 'rediscovered' the comtesse as a great author of the nineteenth century. Marc Soriano's preface caused a quite a stir in 1970's France, and generated a resurgence of interest in the novel<sup>365</sup>. He showed that the comtesse did not just write sweet little stories about aristocratic children. Rather, she described with great cynicism the effects of the industrial revolution on the countryside. This was a society in painful transition, where young peasant boys see schools and factories as passports out of their poverty, but at the risk of being perverted by their ambitions.

Gaspard's life as a peasant presents nothing attractive to the reader. His father, le père Thomas, is a brute. He and his brother receive regular beatings. Due to his lack of interest in 'real work', the 'delicate' and scholarly Gaspard is viciously beaten at home by his father, until his mother can no longer stand to hear her son's pitiful screams. Le père Thomas then later beats his younger son for his inability to do maths properly. The violence continues at school, where Gaspard's little brother Lucas gets thrashings because he prefers working in the field to learning to read and write. By the end of the third chapter, the reader is bewildered by the violence meted out to the boys. They are caught between two different worldviews – two value systems that appear to clash – and both suffer for it. Finally, it is the father who emerges as the real casualty. His traditional role<sup>366</sup> has been completely undermined. The intervention of school means that he no longer transmits his skills to his sons, for even Lucas can read better than his father. The comtesse was observing a new

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<sup>364</sup> Marc Soriano, 'Bibliothèque Rose ou série noire?' introductory essay to *La Fortune de Gaspard* (Paris, Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1972), pp ix-lxiii

<sup>365</sup> Hachette 'Services de Presse' 1973, IMEC

<sup>366</sup> Heywood, *Growing up in France*, chapter 7



family drama that was playing out over the course of the nineteenth century, as the growth of urban industrial society threatened the old certainty that sons would do the same job as their fathers.<sup>367</sup> In *Gaspard* both sons learn skills at school that their father cannot teach them, and so become superior to him. Lucas excites the admiration of their neighbour, who tells le père Thomas “quel brave garçon! Et comme il est entendu pour les travaux de la terre! Savez-vous bien que votre ferme a doublé de valeur, par la manière dont il la cultive? Car c’est lui qui dirige tout maintenant?”<sup>368</sup> Le père Thomas is doubly emasculated when he is then rejected by his eldest son, who prefers to be adopted by the factory owner, symbolically discarding his father’s name.

The future that Ségur envisaged was unwelcoming. Human relations in this book are perverted by ambition and money. Gaspard cheats his father, and deserts his family. Once in the factory he flatters Monsieur Féréor, the factory owner, in order to insinuate himself into the boardroom. Such is this toady’s desire to please his master Féréor that he finishes by falling truly in love with this idol he has created. With savage irony, Ségur paints Gaspard’s relationship with the factory owner using the language of a romantic novel. Their love story begins when Gaspard asks for Féréor’s help in his plan to swindle his father, to which Féréor’s tender expression of thanks is “d’une voix presque douce que Gaspard ne lui avait jamais entendue.”<sup>369</sup> Once the deal has been concluded, “M. Féréor leva les yeux sur Gaspard; son regard était presque affectueux. . . . M. Féréor alla s’asseoir dans son bosquet de houx. Il repassa dans sa mémoire les services que lui avait rendus Gaspard, l’attachement constant qu’il avait témoigné, l’entente parfait de leurs idées; il sentait naître dans son coeur,

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<sup>367</sup> *Ibid*, pp 151-2

<sup>368</sup> *Oeuvres* 3: 319

<sup>369</sup> *Oeuvres* 3: 284

toujours sec et muet, un commencement d'affection et de confiance qui le surprit et le réjouit.<sup>370</sup> Once Gaspard reaches his twenty-fifth birthday, he becomes Féréor's adopted son, in a grand ceremony. Ségur subtly underlines the odd nature of this union, "M. Féréor ouvrit les bras: Gaspard y précipita et y fut longtemps retenu par son père adoptif. Après cette étreinte, M. Féréor le prit par la main et le conduisit dans tous les rangs des ouvriers qui applaudissaient, qui battaient des mains et qui riaient en dessous de l'exhibition théâtrale que subissait Gaspard."<sup>371</sup> The happy adoptive son tells his father, "vous remplacerez la femme que je n'aimerai pas, et l'usine remplacera les enfants que je n'aurai pas, j'espère."<sup>372</sup>

In this book Ségur was also adding to a growing body of literature in the 1860's decrying the current regime's unwillingness to protect children against exploitation in industrial labour.<sup>373</sup> Victor Hugo's *Misérables* (1862), and Alphonse Daudet's *Le petit chose* (1868) denounced the abuses that were rife. This also included Catholics; the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul, Mathilde Bourdon, and Mgr de Ségur were all considering the problem. The comtesse was also thinking about it, and had at one stage envisaged writing a story about a chimney-sweep. The question in her mind was not the exploitation of children *per se*, rather the risk they ran of becoming corrupted in factories. In *Diloy le chemineau* a nobleman advises a father in desperate financial straits not to let his children work in the local factory, "tu perdras tes enfants; ils n'auront aucune religion, aucune instruction; ils seront chétifs et malingres."<sup>374</sup> Ségur's main objection was that the hours were too long to permit them to

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<sup>370</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:294

<sup>371</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:318

<sup>372</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:333

<sup>373</sup> Serge Chassagne, 'Le travail des enfants aux XVIII<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles', Becchi and Julia (eds) *Histoire de l'enfance en Occident*, 2: 239-288, especially pp 271-3

<sup>374</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:810

attend catechism lessons, and that the employers were heathens who allowed their workers to become debauched. Indeed, the dominant Catholic interpretation of capitalism was that it was a Protestant or Jewish aberration.<sup>375</sup> Accordingly, the industrialists in *Gaspard* are referred to derisively by the locals as Jews and Arabs, and one, Frölichlein, is clearly a foreigner, probably Protestant. She agreed that the ideal solution was healthy, agricultural labour. However, the answer that Ségur presents in *Gaspard* was not to turn back the clock. Instead, she introduces a female, Catholic element into this masculine union of money and ambition. As was generally the case in nineteenth century businesses, expansion was achieved through marital alliances. And so Gaspard agrees to marry the daughter of their factory's main competitor, Frölichlein. Happily, the young girl turns out to be a veritable saint. What follows is reminiscent of the domestic novels of the period.<sup>376</sup> Ségur sees Mina work her charms on these venal brutes, and convert them into paragons of virtue. "M. Féréor, amélioré par l'exemple et la tendresse de son fils et de sa fille, devint la providence du pays après en avoir été l'oppresseur."<sup>377</sup>

*Après la pluie, le beau temps* (1871)

While the comtesse was writing this book in 1869, Garibaldi's redshirts were getting ever closer to seizing Rome and dislodging the Pope from his centre of temporal power. (The publication of the book was interrupted by the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune, which meant that it only appeared in print in 1871). As with several of the

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<sup>375</sup> Jean Baubérot and Valentine Zuber, *Une Haine oubliée: l'antiprotestantisme avant le "pacte laïque"* (1870-1905) (Paris, Albin Michel, 2000)

<sup>376</sup> Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class*, chapter 8

<sup>377</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:388

preceding works, we follow the child protagonists to a much older age, charting their growth into adults. Set against the background of the Roman question, there was only one possible career for her heroes. Jacques, who has just left school, announces “le devoir doit passer avant le bonheur: Rome est plus menacée que jamais par les bandits qui veulent détruire le trône de notre Roi, notre père en Dieu, le saint pape Pie IX... Je me suis engagé dans les zouaves pontificaux.” To which his future wife Genevieve replies, “C’est à Rome que tu vas! Oh bonheur! Mon Dieu, je vous remercie, Jacques, Jacques; moi aussi, je vais à Rome. Nous partirons avec toi. Je ne te quitterai pas. Je serai près de toi.”<sup>378</sup> It was fitting that in this, her swansong, the ultramontane comtesse de Ségur set her happy ending in Rome, with her children grown up and their lives dedicated to defending the Pope.

## Conclusion

The main question that this chapter set out to answer was whether the comtesse de Ségur’s construction of childhood and approach to writing for children can be considered to have been influenced by wider changes in attitudes, notably the new respect for the child that had stemmed from Enlightenment ideas. This chapter has argued that Catholics have wrongly been labelled ‘backwards’ in this field, for, although Catholic discourse was essentially conservative and reactionary, they proved to be far from immobile and adapted swiftly and effectively to the problem of what should be suitable reading material for the steadily growing young audience. Their reviews took great interest in the comtesse de Ségur, and she incorporated their new ideas on childhood into her writing.

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<sup>378</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:1039. The section “par les bandits... Pie IX” was censored by Hachette’s correctors

This chapter and the previous one both emphasise that Ségur was conscious of new ideas concerning children and childrearing, and that concerns for their welfare as she saw it were central to her writing. We can see this in the narrative techniques that she used, even the very layout of her books. Likewise, the emphasis on both the physical as well as spiritual wellbeing of children, and their agency in this, is testimony to Ségur's respect for her readers. Moreover, her early works demonstrate a great interest and respect for the state of childhood. She told her editor, "dans un petit enfant, tout est admirable; le fond et la forme; l'innocence, la grâce, le développement constant de l'esprit, des idées, de l'intelligence. Comment ne pas admirer et chérir ce composé charmant de tout ce qui est aimable et admirable."<sup>379</sup> Her little protagonists are allowed to revel in childish amusements that do not prefigure their destiny. The most obvious example of this is Sophie's play with her doll: it is an inanimate object that she destroys, rather than a pretend baby to teach her to be a good mother. It is only in her later works that the comtesse begins to consider their adult destinies very seriously.

In *On ne prend pas les mouches avec du vinaigre* Ségur made it very clear that her views were considered by her peers to be 'modern', and this she connected with her religious beliefs. The short story suggests that the older, aristocratic model of parenting went hand in hand with a form of religion that the ultramontanes of mid-century rejected. Ségur argued that the new respect for children goes hand in hand with the emergence of the 'God of love'. Such an idea was not wholly accepted by her milieu. This was the direction that the liberal Bishop Dupanloup was heading in, but Louis Veuillot was a hardliner, and criticised Ségur for her

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<sup>379</sup> Letter to Templier, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1872, *Oeuvres* 1:CXLVI

views on corporal punishment, and suggested she “loved children a little too much”. Gaston de Ségur was also concerned that his mother was at times “too indulgent”. The comtesse was therefore at pains in her works to emphasise that her ‘gentle’ methods did not preclude discipline. In her later fictions Ségur responded to her milieu’s concerns, by admitting that some children were indeed beyond redemption.

We have identified three main models of childhood that Ségur constructed in her oeuvre. Firstly, there were her ‘noble’ children, who really dominate her work. These were the creations that Robert de Montesquiou called “les insupportables petits-enfants de Mme de Ségur.”<sup>380</sup> They are written from life, so they can be violent and disobedient, as well as behaving properly. Neither wholly innocent nor wholly evil, these aristocratic youngsters are instead ‘model’ children, designed to inspire readers to imitate their behaviour. They reflect the concerns of the comtesse’s social class, so they learn to assume the responsibilities of *noblesse oblige*, and of course, to respect the good Lord. This last lesson is so obvious it almost goes without saying: noble children who are identified with the Ségur family are Catholic children. Still, not all children, (or indeed adults), are religious, even those from the upper classes. In this case they fall into two categories – either they will be saved by a redemptive child, or they will become the third type, ‘delinquent’ children.

These redemptive children form a second category, of ‘saintly’ children. Childhood could represent innocence in an age many Catholics felt was impious. Her saintly children tend to be from lower-class backgrounds, (Pauvre Blaise and Jean qui rit) although not exclusively (Roger de Grignan). They inspire religious sentiments in all those who come into contact

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<sup>380</sup> Montesquiou, *Les Roseaux Pensants*, p 19

with them. Although their self-immolation can be so extreme as to make the contemporary reader grind their teeth, it should be pointed out that such sentimentalism was not only common in ultramontane rhetoric, but can also be found in the work of Dickens or Hugo.

Finally, as Ségur and her grandchildren grew older, so did her characters. The entire mood of her oeuvre grew increasingly sombre, and peopled with ‘delinquent’ children. Some are innately ‘evil’, but most are still creations of adult society in some way. One of the dominant messages of Ségur’s oeuvre is that parental abuse lies at heart of children’s behavioural problems. Such abuse took many forms: violence, neglect, but also laxity. In the comtesse’s view, weak parents were just as culpable as excessively cruel ones. When the parents are not at fault, it is often the temptations of the adult world that corrupt children.

The next step is to ask whether the shift in Catholic sensibilities was as forward thinking on the question of child protection. Their secular counterparts like Victor Hugo not only wrote about child abuse, but also campaigned vociferously on children’s behalf. The ‘romantic’ child is credited with ushering in important reforms in work and health care. Certainly there were Catholic voices included in the chorus against the excesses of industrial child labour.<sup>381</sup> However, did the comtesse’s pleas for parents to stop beating their children, and to take care of little girls’ health make any impact? This is a question that is difficult to answer, for it touches upon taboo subjects of violence and neglect not easily traced in letters and memoirs. Still, she was adding her prestigious name to the list of protesters, and she was certainly daring to suggest that such abuses were taking place not just in the lower classes, but also in the homes of the aristocrats and *grands bourgeois*. Whether the social elite took any notice is

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<sup>381</sup> Chassagne, ‘Le travail des enfants’, p 271-2

another matter. Both Yvonne Knibiehler and Eric Mension-Rigau emphasise the continued resistance to change in approaches to parenting in the upper echelons of French society.<sup>382</sup> Moreover, if Freud's comments in *A Child is being beaten* (1919) are anything to go by, we might ask whether her medicine may have been nearly as harmful as the illness: "though in the higher forms at school the children were no longer being beaten, the influence of such occasions was replaced and more than replaced by the effects of reading, of which the importance was soon to be felt."<sup>383</sup> He recorded that Ségur's depiction of birchings and horsewhippings haunted the imaginations of troubled young children. One wonders whether Simone de Beauvoir's was the only mother who delayed giving Ségur's books to her daughter for fear of giving her nightmares?<sup>384</sup> Chapter five will look at further ways in which her books might have impacted upon her little readers. However, there remains a good deal of research to be done on the Catholic experience of childhood<sup>385</sup> in this century of revival, which is beyond the reaches of this project.

This chapter has emphasised that the most important feature of the comtesse's writing is the skill with which she combines religious concerns with the art of storytelling. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, Ségur's work is complex, varied and it is not easy to make

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<sup>382</sup> Knibiehler, *Histoire des mères*, p 188; Eric Mension-Rigau, *L'enfance au château. L'éducation familiale des élites françaises au vingtième siècle* (Rivages, Paris, 1990)

<sup>383</sup> Freud, 'A Child is being Beaten', p 180

<sup>384</sup> Beauvoir, *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, p 29

<sup>385</sup> Outside of schooling experiences that is, which has produced much interesting research, for example Sarah A. Curtis, *Educating the Faithful. Religion, Schooling, and Society in Nineteenth-Century France* (Illinois, Northern Illinois University Press, 2000); Robert Anderson, 'The Conflict in Education. Catholic Secondary Schools (1850-70) A Reappraisal', Theodore Zeldin (ed) *Conflicts in French Society. Anticlericalism, Education & Morals in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1970) pp 51-92. Still, the global impact of the various missionary initiatives remains to be discussed. James F McMillan's 'Priest Hits Girl: On the Front Line of the War of the Two Frances' would suggest that the impact on children's lives could indeed be dramatic



broad generalisations about her writing. This chapter has selected one aspect – her constructions of religious childhood – to form the main focus. This necessarily imposes omissions, and, in particular, does not make full use of the enormous body of literary scholarship on her work. However, what this examination of her works’ religious concerns has brought to the fore is the primacy she accorded to making her moral message palatable. To this end she employed comic episodes, fairy tale characters, and a great variety of ogres and villainesses. She explodes the myth that edifying literature is dull. Her social views may be reactionary, her anti-Semitism deeply objectionable, and her saintly children priggish (if not frankly masochistic), but overall her books are deeply seductive. Indeed, the Marxist critic Marc Soriano objected to the comtesse precisely because he was such a great admirer of her literary talents. Historian Margaret Lavinia Anderson suggests that ultramontane willingness to exploit the ‘discovery’ of the child in mission work demonstrates their “entrepreneurial spirit.”<sup>386</sup> This seems a felicitous phrase to apply to the case of the comtesse and her circle of ultramontane writers. The next chapter will now go on to dissect the comtesse’s sense of how to appeal to her market. This new interest in the child would have further implications for ultramontane culture, as we shall see in chapter four, which develops the notion of ultramontane ‘entrepreneurialism’ further. Appealing to the current ‘bourgeois’ conception of childhood was an important part of communicating with families.

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<sup>386</sup> Margaret Lavinia Anderson ‘The Divisions of the Pope: the Catholic Revival and the Transition to Democracy’, Austen Ivereigh (ed) *The Politics of Religion in an Age of Revival* (London, Institute of Latin American Studies, 2000) 22-42, see p 31

## Chapter 3

### The Tribulations of an Author:

### Writing, Censorship and the Reading Public under the Second Empire

Under Louis-Napoleon's authoritarian rule, even fifty-six year old grandmothers came under suspicion. When the comtesse de Ségur signed her contract with publisher Hachette, on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 1855, she was immediately subject to the tight strictures that were placed upon the public sphere in this period. Excessive as it may seem, Ségur's tales of talking donkeys and model little girls were scrutinised with the same rigour as suspected seditious political tracts and pornography. Before they were allowed to go into print, her manuscripts were read by a series of censors, culminating in the Ministry of Police.<sup>387</sup> Entire sections were amputated from the comtesse's books without her prior consent or knowledge. One happy ending where the hero and heroine married prompted her editors to reach for the scissors, sternly condemning the work as "une lecture peu convenable pour des petites filles."<sup>388</sup> The rich correspondence concerning the comtesse, preserved at the Hachette archives, provides a window onto the concerns and difficulties an author faced in Second Empire France.

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<sup>387</sup> Jean-Yves Mollier, 'Éditer la comtesse de Ségur ou les ruses de la raison policière' *Cahiers Robinson*, 9 (2001) 14-22; Marcoin, *Librairie de jeunesse et littérature industrielle*, notes an edition of Lamartine's *Graziella* from the Bibliothèque des chemins de fer bears the Police chief's stamp from, p 430

<sup>388</sup> Internal memo, undated circa March/April 1863, *Oeuvres* 1:LXXXVII

She wrote her stories in exciting times in the history of print culture. The 1850's proved a period of great economic and industrial dynamism. The Second Empire saw the inauguration of the democratic age of mass consumerism in France. The first sector to really expand and access a greatly enlarged consumer base was the publishing industry. Advances in printing technology allowed books, magazines, and pamphlets to be produced in greater numbers and at a far lower cost, while the new rail networks made possible the distribution and speedy communication of books and ideas across the country, into Europe and beyond. This, coupled with the education reforms of 1833 and 1850 ensuring a further increase in literacy, meant the printed word was in the hands of more people than ever before. Even little girls were officially encouraged to read, as thanks to the Falloux Law of 1850, communes were obliged to provide schools specifically for girls. The size and nature of the public sphere were undergoing a drastic transformation. Contemporaries were only too aware of this phenomenon. All sides were keen to exploit the new possibilities for communication, but were also fearful of the enormity and potential threat to the established order the new readership represented.

This was compounded by the political situation, which was far from conducive to a liberal public sphere. The collapse of the July Monarchy and the bloody aftermath of the 1848 Revolution had provoked a sharp swing to the right. The Second Republic, now dominated by the Party of Order, promoted a return to the traditional values of family, order, property, and religion. Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte took advantage of the unstable atmosphere to seize power through the *coup d'état* of 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1851. To protect his position, he swiftly instigated a repressive authoritarian regime. This regime was particularly keen to regulate the

burgeoning publishing industry, seen as one of the primary culprits in the spread of radical ideas.<sup>389</sup> The restrictions on freedom of speech were not simply government imposed however. Fear of the pernicious effects of ‘bad’ reading on society was one of the all-pervading neuroses of the period. Editors, libraries, writers, the Church, and social reformers, all had their view of what the general public ought to be reading. Ségur was part of a wave of authors and editors conscious that they could access a large-scale audience. The problems she encountered, and ambitions she had for her readers, illustrate well the ambivalence with which contemporaries viewed the dynamic new phase of the reading revolution they had entered.

The question of what was to be culture for the masses, of new opportunities coupled with paranoia and censorship lies at the heart of this chapter, which explores the extent to which the comtesse clashed with the censor and her publisher Hachette over the suitability of her works for a new, young (and especially female) reading public. The censorship of the comtesse de Ségur has occupied many scholars, as it has had serious implications for how Ségur is perceived as an author today. Jean-Yves Mollier, leading historian of the publishing industry, has written a series of articles on the comtesse<sup>390</sup>. According to Mollier, Madame de Ségur’s reputation as a reactionary is not wholly deserved, as she had no choice but to comply with the norms of the period. He characterises the whole publishing process as a “calvary”, and casts Ségur as a victim of the excesses of Napoleon III’s regime. Similarly,

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<sup>389</sup> Roger Price, *The French Second Empire. An Anatomy of Political Power* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001) chapter six

<sup>390</sup> ‘La comtesse de Ségur et la Bibliothèque Rose’, *L’auteur et son éditeur, à travers les collections de l’institut mémoires de l’édition contemporaine* (Caen, IMEC, 1998) pp 15-26; ‘Éditer la comtesse de Ségur ou les ruses de la raison policière’, *Louis Hachette (1800-1864) Le fondateur d’un empire*, (Paris, Fayard, 1999) pp 374-6

Ségur's most recent editor, Claudine Beaussant, refers to the moral "straightjacket" placed upon the comtesse. She suggests the comtesse's ideas transcended the strictures of her time<sup>391</sup>. However, these arguments risk glossing over the deeply conservative views the comtesse de Ségur expressed (freely) in her private correspondence. In contrast to Beaussant and Mollier, Rémi Saudray suggests the comtesse de Ségur's editor at Hachette doctored her work to make it conform to the publishing house's emphasis on popular education.<sup>392</sup> This happened later in her oeuvre. By this date, Napoleon III's regime was liberalising. As Ségur's work more or less spans the Second Empire, this problem of ideological shifting sands is perhaps not surprising. The moral pressures of the 'public sphere' placed upon the comtesse de Ségur and her colleagues were multiform. In light of these apparent contradictions, this chapter will consider the work of historians' excellent work on the publishing history of the period<sup>393</sup>, but also take Madame de Ségur's oeuvre as a whole, to try to tease out the complexities of the comtesse's relationship with Hachette, and her public.

The major source that has been used to study the comtesse de Ségur's relationship with Hachette is the letters she sent to her editor, preserved in the publisher's archives<sup>394</sup>. They detail her objections to being censored, discussions concerning his suggested modifications,

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<sup>391</sup> See Beaussant's annotations to the Hachette correspondence in *Oeuvres*, 1, as well as her comments in Volume 1: 829-31; also Marie-France Doray, *La revue des livres pour enfants*, 131-132 (1990)

<sup>392</sup> Rémi Saudray, 'La fortune du texte', *Cahiers Séguriens*, 3 (2002) 97-104

<sup>393</sup> Along with Mollier's biography of Louis Hachette, this chapter draws principally on volume 3 of Martin, Chartier, and Vivet's *HEF*; as well as Élisabeth Parinet, *Une histoire de l'édition à l'époque contemporaine*; Jean Mistler, *La librairie Hachette de 1826 à nos jours*, (Paris, Hachette, 1964); Marielle Mouranche, *Les livres pour l'enfance et la jeunesse de 1870 à 1914* École Nationale des Chartes, Thèse pour l'obtention du diplôme d'archiviste paléographe, 1986

<sup>394</sup> 166 letters, consulted at the IMEC publishing archives at Caen. They have been reprinted (with only the occasional omission of the editor's annotations) in Ségur, *Oeuvres* 1:LXI-CXLVI

as well as her suggestions for the marketing of her books, and financial negotiations. Literary scholars of the comtesse de Ségur, such as Laura Kreyder, Claudine Beaussant, Marie-José Strich, and Cécile Petit, have all underlined the comtesse's surprising skill in dealings with her editor.<sup>395</sup> Using the Hachette correspondence, they trace Ségur's efforts to establish herself as a modern author, keenly involved in all stages of the publishing process. Some even make the case for a kind of feminism. Madame de Ségur did not humbly submit to editorial browbeating. Furthermore, while it is possible to argue that the comtesse was to a certain extent a victim of her editor's zeal to conform to Government diktat, in other respects she managed to capitalise on her elevated position in society. Her aristocratic status had market appeal, which translated into profit, and this gave Ségur leverage with an editor concerned above all with revenue. However, there is no contesting that it was her editor, rather than the comtesse who enjoyed the bulk of the profits.

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, scholars have neglected how her books were received under the Second Empire. And yet, contemporary perceptions of her constructed image were crucial, as press endorsement formed the core advertising strategy of the book trade at this time<sup>396</sup>. They have also hitherto ignored the observations on the popularity of the comtesse de Ségur and the children's collection, written in 1868 by Alphonse Langlois, an Hachette employee. Hidden inside a series of old Hachette catalogues is the weird and

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<sup>395</sup> Kreyder, *L'enfance des saints et des autres*, pp 40-49; Beaussant's annotations, *Oeuvres* 1; Strich uses them in conjunction with manuscripts, 'Critique génétique d'un manuscrit: La Bible d'une grand-mère (1869)', *Cahiers Robinson*, 9 (2001) 183-192; Cécile Petit, *La Comtesse de Ségur et l'édition: Étude de sa correspondance avec Emile Templier, son éditeur* (Mémoire de DEA, Université Paris IV-Sorbonne, dirigé par M. le Professeur Jacques Noiray, Unpublished)

<sup>396</sup> Frédéric Barbier, 'Libraires et colporteurs', *HEF* 3:231; Colette Becker on Emile Zola's job in the Hachette advertising department provides valuable insights, *Les apprentissages de Zola, du poète romantique au romancier naturaliste 1840-1867*, (Paris, PUF, 1993), pp 97-100

wonderful work of Monsieur Langlois. Langlois had worked all of his life as an accounts clerk at Hachette, and in the late 1860's he undertook the task of writing a history of the company. It was never published. Instead Langlois bound up his work inside old copies of trade catalogues, along with tables of sales, statistics, relevant newspaper clippings and other Hachette ephemera<sup>397</sup>. While Mollier and Hachette historian, Jean Mistler, have both used this precious source in their histories of Hachette, neither have looked at Langlois' comments on the comtesse. They are revelatory. In order to trace how the comtesse negotiated the difficult task of writing children's books in an age of nascent democracy, censorship and politico-religious culture wars, all aspects of the production process need to be examined.

## I.

### **M.M.L. Hachette & C<sup>o</sup>**

#### **The construction of an Empire**

The story of the comtesse de Ségur in the public sphere is in many ways the story of her relationship with her publishers, M.M.L. Hachette & C<sup>o</sup>.<sup>398</sup> They published all of her storybooks in the Hachette *Bibliothèque Rose* children's library, and it is to this collection that she owes her enduring fame. The comtesse de Ségur and the *Bibliothèque Rose* are virtually synonymous in the French imagination. Ségur's books enjoyed almost immediate success,

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<sup>397</sup> The full set of catalogues can be consulted at the IMEC. Volumes 15, 17, 28, and 30 contain Langlois' work. Volume 15, 1868 catalogue is the most interesting for research on the comtesse de Ségur, as it contains Langlois' *Notice historique et statistique sur l'origine, la formation et le développement de la librairie de MM. Hachette 1828-1868*. I would like to thank archivist André Derval for his constant support and advice in my research for this chapter.

<sup>398</sup> This section on Hachette is chiefly indebted to Mollier, *Louis Hachette*; Mistler, *La Librairie Hachette*.

and by the twentieth century were a publishing phenomenon. The *Bibliothèque Rose* was one of Hachette's most successful ventures, due in no small measure to the popularity of Madame de Ségur.<sup>399</sup> Theirs was to be a highly lucrative association for M.M.L. Hachette & C<sup>o</sup>, while providing the comtesse with the financial independence she craved. It was also to prove a highly tense collaboration. Hachette was commercially minded, with one eye on the censor, and the comtesse often found her artistic and religious agenda came into conflict with her publisher's interests. M.M.L. Hachette & C<sup>o</sup> was to play a significant role in shaping the final product.

The comtesse de Ségur was one of the new authors recruited by Louis Hachette as he was just beginning to construct his publishing empire. Louis Hachette had originally trained as a teacher, but when he graduated in 1822 he was barred from the profession by the Grand Maître de l'Université, under the stipulations of the Restoration monarchy. His passion for education led him to publishing. He made his fortune under the July Monarchy, after securing a contract with the education ministry to supply the new state schools with textbooks. With the advent of Louis Napoleon's prosperous and rapidly industrialising France, he saw the opportunity for his business to grow. Inspired by W.H. Smith's success in England, Hachette began to prepare his bid for a monopoly on trading in train stations. As well as entering into negotiations in 1852-4 with the heads of the respective rail companies, he also began to construct an entire new catalogue of books destined to be sold in these new kiosks. Hachette needed a new and exciting 'leisure' catalogue to sell to passengers to amuse them on their journeys. With this aim in mind he bought out editors specialising in novels,

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<sup>399</sup> Mistler, *La Librairie Hachette*, p 136; 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Bibliothèque Rose press pack, Hachette 2006



travel guides, advice manuals, as well as re-editing authors whose works were already in the public domain. He also set up new collections, designed to exploit profitable developing markets, including children's literature. It was during these negotiations that he met the president of the Eastern Rail Company, the comte Eugène de Ségur, who suggested his wife as a possible author for their new children's collection.

## **II. Money & Morality: The Hachette Editorial Policy**

The tense circumstances surrounding Hachette's train station monopoly were to have important implications for their subsequent editorial policy. His bold move ruffled the feathers of competitors. They accused Hachette of trying to secure an illegal monopoly, and worse still, of contravening the existing legislation on bookselling, which stated booksellers were only permitted one premises (which the initiative flagrantly flouted). The Chief of Police rectified the situation by decreeing that Hachette train station kiosks were not technically bookshops; rather they were to be considered to have the same legal status as book hawkers (*colporteurs*). In this case, all publications destined for sale in these spaces would be required to obtain the notorious 'blue stamp' of approval from the *Commission de Colportage* before being allowed to go to the presses. The law was designed ostensibly to try to regulate pamphlets sold by itinerant book hawkers who had proved to be the most effective method for the dissemination of political ideas during the revolutions of 1830 and 1848. However, as Mollier points out, the new legislation regulating booksellers clamped down hard on anyone who attempted to sell publications on a grand scale. This was the paranoid response of the authorities to the dramatic new opportunities offered by the ever-

growing rail network for diffusion of books, and general expansion of the book trade beyond its traditional bounds.

The implications for the publisher and his authors were clear. In 1853, they explained to Alphonse de Lamartine “la publication de la Bibliothèque des Chemins de fer peut être entravée par le gouvernement, elle peut échouer par son mauvais vouloir – nous savons qu’il s’en est déjà préoccupé – nous devons donc prendre un soin extrême de n’éveiller en rien ses susceptibilités et nous vous serons reconnaissants si vous voulez bien autoriser le retranchement, dans l’édition que nous allons publier de votre livre, de deux passages qui ne sont pas indispensables au récit et qui pourrait devenir pour nous une source de difficultés.”<sup>400</sup> The offending passage concerned a discussion of Bonaparte, which could well have upset his nephew. It was not just political references that were considered sensitive. In the moral backlash of the Second Empire, Hachette’s new collections promised that they would banish: “toutes les publications qui pourraient exciter ou entretenir les passions politiques, ainsi que les écrits contraires à la morale.”<sup>401</sup> Even the slightest deviation from the holy trinity of property, family, and religion was considered a danger to public decency. Moreover, in this atmosphere, writing children’s (not to mention little girl’s) books was a delicate business. As it came under the umbrella of education, the ecclesiastical authorities, notably via the organ *Bibliographie Catholique*, watched this book production like hawks. The big Catholic publishers dominated children’s literature until the 1880’s, when school reforms began to squeeze them out. Their grip only really loosened following the 1905 separation of

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<sup>400</sup> Letter from Templier to Lamartine, 18<sup>th</sup> August 1853, quoted in Mistler, *La Librairie Hachette*, p 143

<sup>401</sup> Brochure from 1<sup>st</sup> April 1852. Quoted in Mollier, *Louis Hachette*, p 305

Church and State, which lost them all their valuable schools custom<sup>402</sup>. Thus for most of the nineteenth century, the Catholic publishers set the tone for the market. In practise, this meant that Hachette's team of "correctors" had to ensure they followed the type of editorial policy found at Mame, who was currently the market leader: "une commission de censure prend entre ses mains tous les manuscrits envoyés à M. Mame et les soumet à un long examen critique où les doctrines de l'auteur et la forme de son oeuvre sont l'objet d'une attention délicate et d'un jugement sévère. Deux rapports contradictoires sont rédigés sur chacun de ses manuscrits."<sup>403</sup> Competitors had little choice but to comply. Hachette often imported authors for the *Bibliothèque Rose* from Catholic publishers.<sup>404</sup>

Unlike Lamartine, the comtesse did not receive a polite request for her permission. Her editor despatched a letter concerning the conditions for the second edition, informing the comtesse that M.M. Hachette et C<sup>ie</sup> reserved the right to make any changes or adjustments as they saw fit. This evidently piqued her aristocratic pride, for her response expresses shock at the authoritarian tone she felt she detected in the letter, "en dépit de la modestie qui aurait dû m'interdire cette prévision, je désirerais me réserver la faculté de changemens [sic], additions, suppressions ou publications partielles. Mais, puisque vous tenez si absolument à exercer un pouvoir absolu et unique sur mes *Petites Filles modèles*, que votre volonté soit faite et non la mienne."<sup>405</sup> She discovered the true meaning of these conditions when she received the printer's proofs of *Petites Filles modèles*. Words had been changed or removed, and several lines, in some places whole episodes, had been mysteriously deleted without her consent.

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<sup>402</sup> Parinet, *Une histoire de l'édition*, pp 88-91

<sup>403</sup> *La Maison Mame, le passé, le présent, l'oeuvre*, Tours, Mame, 1878 p 28, quoted in Mouranche, *Les livres pour l'enfance et la jeunesse*, p 171

<sup>404</sup> Francis Marcoin, 'Autour de la comtesse', *Cahiers Robinson*, 9 (2001) pp 32-33

<sup>405</sup> Letter to Templier, 12 October 1857, *Oeuvres*, 1:LXII

“L’amour-propre d’Auteur a sans doute sévi sur moi, Monsieur; je m’étais révoltée d’abord de ce que deux épisodes *entièrement historiques* aient été jugés impossibles, ensuite, de la manière inusitée et cavalière dont avait usé votre correcteur. L’Auteur étant homme, peut faillir; le droit de remontrance est sans doute acquis à l’Editeur qui règne en despote sur ses Auteurs; mais le droit de retranchement sans consentement d’Auteur, me semble être tout nouveau et pas encore passé en usage. C’est l’avis de la demi-douzaine d’Auteurs que je connais particulièrement. Au reste, le bon Dieu ne m’ayant pas entachée d’entêtement, je baisse pavillon devant vous... Je renvoie donc à l’impression l’épreuve, revue, endommagée et diminuée et j’attends les suivantes dans l’humble attitude d’un ballon crevé.”<sup>406</sup> Ségur’s response rendered her evident fury in colourful, witty prose. She underlined that she may have been a newcomer to the profession, but that she knew several old hands, and would not stand to be made a fool of. By fashioning herself as the “Author”, Madame de Ségur was assuming a professional, masculine persona. She had won her contract thanks to her husband’s position, but Ségur did not want her editor to imagine that she was therefore simply writing for pin money, and as such would care little if he doctored her work to suit Hachette’s needs. This glittering display of literary prowess was therefore a serious challenge to any such misunderstandings: Ségur was daring Templier not to take her seriously as an “Author”.

It would be interesting to know how her editor reacted to this outburst. The letter’s recipient, Émile Templier, was a partner in the Hachette business, a contract sealed by his marriage to Louis Hachette’s daughter. Templier was in charge of the Railway collections,

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<sup>406</sup> Letter to Templier, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1858, *Oeuvres* 1:LXVI-LXVII

and in this capacity he was to act as the comtesse de Ségur's editor throughout her career at Hachette. Described by one obituary as having an almost military air, Templier was a serious, quiet man, known for his traditionalism and piety. He was also an astute businessman, which was the perfect combination in the moral, and prosperous Second Empire. "Tous ceux qui l'ont vu de près se souviendront de lui comme d'un représentant de cette vieille bourgeoisie française, respectueuse des traditions et en même temps ouverte aux idées nouvelles."<sup>407</sup>

Their correspondence provides an insight into the relations between an author working in what was considered a minor literary genre, and a publishing house concerned with running an industrial production line to compete within a dynamic market. This was also the first time that the comtesse entered into the professional, public sphere. We can see that she was assuming her new role of businesswoman. Only the comtesse's letters remain, but they often contain references to his missives. These are usually in the form of indignant outbursts from the comtesse, although a friendship developed and later on they clearly enjoyed discussing the progress of Templier's young grandson. The original manuscript copies of Ségur's letters also show that Templier sometimes annotated her letters with his initial response. There was a lively dialogue, with the comtesse acting the part of the "Author", keen to defend her precious work from the scissors of the correctors, while the more reserved Templier worked to rein her in, to keep the spirit of the collection strictly within the bounds of his keen sense of moral decency and that of the government. His letters were no doubt often brief and presumably a little curt, judging from the defensive tone the comtesse's replies often adopt. The obituary which appeared in the magazine he directed for several decades noted that Templier was a man who disliked fuss in such matters, "en affaires il allait droit au but, réfléchissait un moment, décidait avec une singulière netteté, toujours appuyant sa décision,

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<sup>407</sup> *Monsieur Émile Templier 1821-1891*, (Paris, Imprimerie D. Dumoulin et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1892), pp 20-22

favorable ou défavorable, de quelques mots d'explication qui laissaient deviner à l'interlocuteur attentive la préoccupation à laquelle il avait obéi.<sup>408</sup>

However, were Hachette's correctors not right to detect a hint of subversion in the book? *Petites Filles modèles* is not all it seems<sup>409</sup>. The title promises an education story for girls. But, three chapters into the story, a terrifyingly evil stepmother rips her way into the pages, and upsets the genteel education manual structure by snatching her young stepdaughter and giving her a good thrashing. The reader, along with the model little girls of the tale, is shocked. (But also, as the comtesse intended, instantly hooked). Needless to say, Hachette's correctors were also less than pleased. From her letter on this censorship, quoted above, with its alternating indignation and humility, it seems likely that she was responding to a letter from Templier upbraiding her for providing her vulnerable young readership with a bad example. She mentions that two episodes had been "jugés impossibles", which could well be quoting from Templier's letter. She goes on to concede that she will remove everything that shocked the corrector, but insists "je le repète", that "ces deux épisodes qui ont choqué votre correcteur sont *historiques*, avec la variante que ce n'était pas une belle-mère mais une mère qui élevait ainsi sa fille et que j'en aurais pu citer d'autres plus cruels encore."<sup>410</sup> Clearly then, the two scenes featured Madame Fichini, the evil step-mother, inflicting cruel punishments on her stepdaughter Sophie, and the complaint arose from her portrayal of a brutal mother figure. Her defence rested on the notion that this wicked woman was based on true life: she had not invented this immoral behaviour. Such arguments proved futile. Madame Fichini flew in the face of the nineteenth century cult of the loving

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<sup>408</sup> Extrait du *Tour du Monde*, by Fr. Schrader, quoted in *Monsieur Émile Templier*, pp 33-4

<sup>409</sup> Doray, *La comtesse de Ségur*, chapter 2

<sup>410</sup> Letter to Templier, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1858

mother. Moreover, the book's sequel, *Les Vacances*, takes the reader further into Madame Fichini's psyche, and, oddly enough, made it into the bookshops more or less untouched by the censor. The reader learns that she beats her stepdaughter with such malignant force in revenge for the horsewhipping she had received from the girl's dead father. Mathilde Bourdon noticed the clouds on the horizon, "nous ne ferons à deux de ces bons et jolis livres qu'un seul reproche, c'est d'avoir mis en scène, et sans nécessité, une femme, une marâtre à la fois méchante et ridicule, et aussi d'avoir placé sous les yeux des enfants une scène de brutalité conjugale (*Les Vacances*), qui, en gâtant un tableau charmant, pourrait bien troubler quelque peu les notions de justice et de morale qui découlent si naturellement de la plume de l'auteur."<sup>411</sup> This episode calls into question the comtesse de Ségur's reputation as an author with solely didactic aims. As discussed in chapter one, the impulse to revisit her childhood led the comtesse to abandon the strict education manual structure. Memory was also the excuse she used to justify her inclusion of scenes of brutality in *Petites Filles modèles*. That she continued to depict Madame Fichini in *Les Vacances* suggests that Ségur preferred to risk her moral reputation and profits rather than compromise the character she had created.

The comtesse appears to have 'got away with it'. Bourdon's concerns were not universally shared. Where later critics delighted in analysing the dark psychological issues being played out in this book, not all contemporaries picked up on the violence in *Petites Filles modèles* as being out of the ordinary or sadistic. The idea that children's books ought to protect their young readers from the realities of violence and death is a twentieth century invention. Maria Tatar, for example, notes the levels of excessive punishment meted out in 'improving'

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<sup>411</sup> Review of Ségur's early works by Mathilde Bourdon, *Journal des demoiselles*

literature, “the numbers of children who go up in flames in nineteenth-century story books is nothing short of extraordinary.”<sup>412</sup> Indeed, when Catholic journalist Louis Veillot objected to the portrayal of violence in the comtesse’s book, it was because he felt she was arguing against corporal punishment, in contradiction to teachings in Scriptures<sup>413</sup>. Meanwhile the glowing review in *Bibliographie Catholique* does not make any mention of impropriety. Rather, the reviewer read the book as the comtesse suggests they should, “L’auteur déclare, dans sa courte préface, que les types principaux de son livre, *Camille et Madeleine*, sont des portraits. Il n’y a plus qu’à former un vœu, c’est que ces portraits inspirent beaucoup de copies.”<sup>414</sup>

It was not just Madame de Ségur’s girls’ stories that attracted moral censure. The next book to cause a stir was her *Mémoires d’un Âne*, which featured a disobedient donkey who wreaks revenge upon various owners who have mistreated him. This disorderly protagonist was considered, not unreasonably, by her editor to again provide a bad example for children. He complained that not only did the donkey behave in a vengeful manner towards a young boy, but that his new owners never condemned him for such behaviour, and therefore shared in his blame<sup>415</sup>. Similarly, Mgr de Ségur refused to distribute this book amongst the poor, preferring her Fleurville trilogy instead.<sup>416</sup> Her response to criticisms this time was more jocular. Perhaps she sensed that her donkey was a little subversive, “je vous ferai seulement observer que je n’ai pas voulu créer un Âne chrétien, mais un Âne tel que vous le qualifiez, âne avant tout.”<sup>417</sup> Nevertheless, she conceded and re-wrote the ending so that the naughty

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<sup>412</sup> Tatar, *Off with their Heads!* pp 6-15

<sup>413</sup> Veillot, ‘Les contes de Madame de Ségur’; section one in chapter one of this thesis

<sup>414</sup> Review of *Petites Filles modèles*, *Bibliographie Catholique*, 18, February 1859

<sup>415</sup> According to Olga de Pitray, *Mon bon Gaston*, p 161

<sup>416</sup> Letter to Templier, 16<sup>th</sup> February, 1859, *Oeuvres* 1:LXXII

<sup>417</sup> Letter to Templier, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1859, *Oeuvres* 1:LXXI



donkey learned to repent his sins. Veillot, whose newspaper had just been suppressed by Napoleon III for criticising foreign policy, loved the donkey's rebellious spirit, and humorously suggested that he should go into politics. He understood that Ségur's fable was about rejecting corrupt authority, not all authority.

The comtesse did not always comply so easily. The most violent objections to Ségur's work were raised once more over the question of the suitability of her books for a female audience. This next episode illustrates just how onerous the task of writing books for girls under the Second Empire could be. Templier received complaints about *Les Malheurs de Sophie*, although what his correspondents objected to remains a mystery. Suffice it to say that the comtesse told him to ignore them.<sup>418</sup> Matters came to a head when she dared to centre one of her novels on the theme of marriage. As discussed in the previous chapter, Dourakine's views on marriage were far from complementary. Worse still, the beautiful heroine Elfy jokes that she would have proposed to her suitor if he had not got there first. Such scenes were bound to cause trouble. The most vehement reaction had been from the bi-weekly children's magazine, *La Semaine des enfants*. Hachette collaborated with this journal as a publicity exercise, for they pre-serialised *Bibliothèque Rose* books. Its editors adhered to an even more strict editorial policy, perhaps because at 15 centimes a copy it reached a potentially wider audience. Théodore Barrau, a long time Hachette collaborator, and author of many official school manuals, wrote to the comtesse directly. He asked her to dilute her love story, explaining that readers regularly asked him to avoid any mention of what he rather prudishly called sentiments that "lead to marriage."<sup>419</sup> Outraged, Ségur accused him of

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<sup>418</sup> Letter to Templier, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1859, *Oeuvres* 1:LXXI

<sup>419</sup> Letter from Barrau to the Comtesse de Ségur, March 1863, *Oeuvres* 1:LXXXVI

having a dirty mind, and that several of her entourage that she had consulted were in agreement with her<sup>420</sup>. The underlying message of her response was that she was the comtesse de Ségur, an author whose books they had hitherto been happy to publish, and moreover, mother of a highly respected priest and author. How could she possibly be capable of writing anything untoward? Again, we can see her using her wider circle of influence as a bargaining tool with Templier. By this time, 1863, the Comtesse had produced a string of bestselling books for the *Bibliothèque Rose*, and she was in a much better position to bargain. The situation reached a stalemate, as the comtesse steadfastly refused to give in to what she felt were ridiculous demands. Privately Barrau complained to the journal's director, Charles Lahure, that he was exasperated by Ségur's behaviour, "elle n'a rien modifié, rien changé; elle n'a pas supprimé une seule joyeuseté, pas même le passage où son héros jette une jeune fille dans les bras d'un garçon, ni celui où la fille dit au garçon "Si vous n'aviez pas demandé ma main, je vous l'aurais offerte." Et en vérité un père même qui embrasserait sa fille aussi souvent que ce bonhomme embrasse ces deux femmes, se ferait rappeler aux convenances....Je persiste à croire que c'est là une lecture peu convenable pour des petites filles."<sup>421</sup> Barrau gave in and agreed to publish the story, but explained this was only because Lahure's common business interests with Hachette meant that he felt obliged to concede. This was a none too subtle hint that he felt the venal interests at Hachette led to the editor forgetting his duty, and simply let the public be duped by their faith in the comtesse's name.

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<sup>420</sup> Letter to Templier, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1863, *Oeuvres* 1:LXXXVI

<sup>421</sup> Internal memo to Charles Lahure, undated, (anonymous, but we can infer from its discussion of editorial policy of *La Semaine des enfants* that it was written by Barrau, or certainly another member of the publication's editorial board) *Oeuvres* 1:LXXXVII

Her story made it into the collection intact. Paradoxically the notoriously gimlet eyed *Bibliographie Catholique* missed any suggestion of immorality in the book. Their review was even filled with praise for “the piquant and virtuous Elfy.”<sup>422</sup> Indeed, the Comtesse advised Templier, “si Mr Barrau écoute tous les gens qui lui donnent des avis sur sa *Semaine des enfans* [sic], il risque de ne contenter personne comme dans la fable du Meunier, son fils, et l’âne.” In other words, if Barrau listened to the complaints of a few busybodies, rather than considering his wider audience, he risked making his product tiresome and losing its readership.<sup>423</sup> She clearly understood the market better than Barrau, and it appears that some at Hachette secretly recognised this. In 1868, Alphonse Langlois wrote that *La Semaine des enfans* had enjoyed immense success at the beginning, but failed to live up to its promise. He estimated that the publication “dut en grande partie son très grand succès à la collaboration si morale et aimée de Mme la comtesse de Ségur”, but that the project was mismanaged, as they didn’t manage to capitalise on the New Year peak time sales, and over-expanded too quickly. (Traditionally New Year, not Christmas, was the time in France when presents were exchanged). He predicted that the business would fail soon.<sup>424</sup> (The publication folded immediately after the comtesse’s death.) Madame de Ségur’s moral reputation served her well. She knew it, and her editors knew it. The perceived morality of the name on her books for girls mattered more than the inexact science of determining what was “suitable” for them.

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<sup>422</sup> Review of *L’Auberge de l’ange gardien* and *Pauvre Blaise*, by Gustave Robert, *Bibliographie Catholique*, 33, April 1865

<sup>423</sup> Letter to Templier, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1863, *Oeuvres* 1:XCII

<sup>424</sup> Langlois, *Notice historique*, ff 152-3

As a *Bibliothèque Rose* author, the Comtesse had to walk a tightrope between money and morals. She was very conscious of the importance of writing what she called “Hachette” books, or “niaiseries”<sup>425</sup>. What did she mean by that? What indeed was a “Hachette” book? Editorial policy was clear – to follow the governments’ directives as closely as possible. Most importantly for the Comtesse however, was that the *Bibliothèque Rose* was aimed at the middle-class, leisured market. Their children’s books were beautifully packaged in red and pink, inlaid with gold lettering, and sold for two francs each. In this sense, Ségur had to satisfy two potentially conflicting briefs. She was paid to write fun books for children, but also to ensure the moral tone of the collection was maintained. This she accomplished with prodigious skill. While her editors had to be seen to preserve public decency, or risk losing their license, Émile Templier soon recognised that the Comtesse de Ségur was fast becoming a trusted brand name. Her exuberant and sometimes excessive fictions may have risked offending the correctors’ sense of decency, but they sold well. Moreover, as we have seen, venerable Catholic critics did not always share the opinions of her editors and correctors. Thus, in 1868, Alphonse Langlois delivered his assessment of the *Bibliothèque Rose*’s success. He attributed it above all to Madame the Comtesse de Ségur’s books, “qui donnèrent à cette charmante bibliothèque un cachet d’ouvrages de bon goût, d’une grande moralité et surtout d’un bon marché extrême.”<sup>426</sup> Langlois, whom Mollier describes as an intransigent Catholic and committed royalist<sup>427</sup>, was therefore predisposed to find Madame de Ségur “très morale”, as she espoused his cause. Nevertheless, his comment encapsulates all that was ambiguous in the Hachette house morality.

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<sup>425</sup> See letters to Templier dated 27<sup>th</sup> September 1863, and 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1864, *Oeuvres* 1:XC and XCVI.

<sup>426</sup> Langlois, *Notice historique*, f° 73

<sup>427</sup> Mollier, *Louis Hachette*, p 440

Ségur certainly, in the eyes of the public, had excellent moral credentials. For a start, she was the mother of leading prelate, Mgr de Ségur. The so-called blind apostle, he was at the forefront of religious revivalism in France in this period, and had achieved fame as the author of the best-selling *Réponses courtes et familières aux objections les plus répandues contre la religion* (1851)<sup>428</sup>. His celebrity at this point eclipsed that of his mother, and so gave an added lustre of piety to her product. The concerns that motivated the discerning bourgeois mother when she selected a book for her precious infant were overwhelmingly religious in mid-nineteenth century France. Women were encouraged by the clergy to act as “priests in the home”, charged with reviving their husband’s all too often flagging piety, and bringing up their children to be good Catholics.<sup>429</sup> A mother who bought the Comtesse de Ségur’s fictions could certainly feel reassured that she was fulfilling her sacred duty of teaching her children Catholic values. Ségur’s books had received endorsement from the clerical establishment via *Bibliographie catholique* and the influential Veillot in *L’Univers*. This was important for any editor with his eye on sales figures, as Catholic editors dominated the children’s market. Second, her aristocratic pedigree was central to the Comtesse’s appeal. Unlike many other women authors of the nineteenth century she did not mask her identity or create her own independent public identity by using a pseudonym.<sup>430</sup> Thus she was able to exploit in full the profitability of the Ségur name. For her readers, the gold lettering on her book covers that spelled out LA COMTESSE DE SÉGUR, evoked the impossibly exclusive upper echelons of the French nobility, the proud vestiges of *ancien régime* France. Her books

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<sup>428</sup> See chapter four

<sup>429</sup> See di Giorgio ‘La Bonne Catholique’

<sup>430</sup> Christine Planté, *La petite soeur de Balzac. Essai sur la femme auteur*, (Paris, Seuil, 1989) pp 30-

promised the genuine aristocratic education, at a rather plebeian price. Langlois had noted that her books gave the collection a cachet of class, that they could then sell cheaply, and at great profit. Théodore Barrau had also noticed the reluctance at Hachette to rein in their golden goose, as he remarked cynically during the *Auberge de l'ange gardien* debacle, “celui-ci d'ailleurs a pour notre public, une protection suffisante dans le nom de son auteur.”<sup>431</sup>

Developing this “name” was absolutely crucial to the comtesse’s sales, and her negotiations with Hachette. However, this did not mean that they saw eye to eye over the nature of the image she ought to cultivate. M.M.L. Hachette & C<sup>o</sup> also had a strong house ethos, stemming from Hachette’s background in education. Mistler notes how Louis Hachette had not forgotten his dismissal from the teaching profession under the Restoration for political reasons. When the same thing happened to a new generation of student teachers under Louis Napoleon, his publishing house became a refuge for them<sup>432</sup>. Education remained a central concern. Furthermore, Hachette maintained a neutral stance over religion and politics. This meant that any references to the sort of combative religion of the Comtesse’s milieu was anathema. The *Bibliothèque Rose* book should not be confused with the ultramontane product. As we shall see below, the comtesse’s politico-religious agenda sometimes led to potentially destructive tensions between author and editor. The following section highlights how the situation was then compounded by the production process of *Bibliothèque Rose* books, which followed Hachette’s entrepreneurial approach to publishing.

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<sup>431</sup> Internal memo, circa March/April 1863, *Oeuvres* 1:LXXXVII

<sup>432</sup> Mistler, *La librairie Hachette*, pp 183-4

### III. The Author in the ‘Age of the Publisher’

Writing for Hachette meant the Comtesse was from a distinct stable. As an editor, publisher, and bookseller all at once, Hachette exercised a great deal of control over his authors. This was the ‘Age of the Publisher’<sup>433</sup>, who came to the fore as the expanding publishing industry looked to create new markets, and entice new readers. One important innovation was the ‘collection’. Books were sold together under a theme, which was the ideal way to create a recognisable brand that could sell in bulk. Hachette contracts therefore often specified the style, content, tone, and even length of the commissioned work. This was culture as standardised product. However, the Comtesse de Ségur also had very definite ideas about the production and marketing of children’s books. Her forceful personality and creativity likewise defined the collection. Through her success she became the first flagship author of the *Bibliothèque Rose*, and contributed to its distinctive reputation. This was not a creation process that was easy – the strong personalities, differing political agendas, and business interests involved ensured that it could often involve much wrangling.

Mollier explains how Hachette created what he calls the “logic of supply”. More than simply responding to demand, the publisher sought to create products that would seduce the customer. He commissioned books, and made many stipulations about their content.<sup>434</sup> There are several indications which suggest that the comtesse de Ségur’s books could well have been designed to conform to the *Bibliothèque Rose* collection. Although (as far as we know) Templier only asked her to write on a subject of his choosing once, we have already

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<sup>433</sup> This is the title of the volume of *Histoire de l’édition française* on the nineteenth century

<sup>434</sup> Mollier, *Louis Hachette*, ch xiii

seen that he regularly demanded cuts and extensive re-writes of her books. The length of Ségur's books and their illustrations were also prescribed by her editor. In the first letter to her editor she informs him she is sending the first half of the "long awaited" manuscript, which she promises will be "at least 300 pages."<sup>435</sup> Ségur had been instructed to write a book of a specified length. This process was applied to all of her subsequent works. Letters to her daughter often refer to her writing in terms of page numbers, and only having a certain number of pages to go before the work is completed: "j'ai fait hier 20 pages de *Pauvre Blaise*; j'en suis à 275 et j'approche du dénouement. J'espère avoir fini cette semaine"... "j'ai si bien avancé mon *Blaise* que j'en suis à 296 et que je le finirai aujourd'hui."<sup>436</sup> If he considered that a book was too short, Monsieur Templier would complain<sup>437</sup>. Ségur warned him this insistence on length hampered her ability to write the number of books he wanted, "*Jean qui rit* m'ennuie aussi, mais il se lira à peu près de même. Et moi qui croyais vous rendre service en grossissant mes livres de quelques dizaines de pages!"<sup>438</sup> She was expected to produce several books for the collection in the year. As Alphonse Langlois explains, the success of the children's collection placed even more pressure on the authors to produce enough books to satisfy demand, "le succès et le débit immenses, surtout à l'époque du jour de l'an, engage les auteurs et les éditeurs à écrire et publier un grand nombre de volumes, beaucoup de ces charmants ouvrages furent réimprimés aussi, jusqu'à 4 ou 6 fois, surtout ceux de M<sup>me</sup> la comtesse de Ségur."<sup>439</sup> As their prize author, the comtesse certainly felt under pressure. She responded to Templier's request for more books with a certain weary frustration, accusing him of seeing in the author only a machine that "manufactured" books: "vous avez l'air de

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<sup>435</sup> Letter to Templier, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1855, *Oeuvres* 1:LXI

<sup>436</sup> Letters to Olga de Pitray, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> November 1860

<sup>437</sup> See for example letter to Templier 24<sup>th</sup> January 1859, *Oeuvres* 1:LXXI

<sup>438</sup> Letter to Templier 8<sup>th</sup> December 1865, *Oeuvres* 1:CXI

<sup>439</sup> Langlois, *Notice historique* f° 73



trouver dans votre lettre que je ne fournis pas assez de manuscrits à votre Bibliothèque Rose. Il me serait difficile d'en faire davantage, mais si une fois vous avez besoin d'un troisième volume dans l'année, je tâcherais de vous le fabriquer."<sup>440</sup> Such pressure laid on authors was common. They were expected to respond to the new thirst for books at an industrial rate. The Catholic houses could be just as demanding as their secular counterparts, who were supposedly more commercial-minded. Zenaïde Fleuriot lamented the fact that she could never get the endings of books quite right, because her editors were always "harassing her" to hand in manuscripts before they were ready.<sup>441</sup>

Despite her complaints about Hachette's insatiable thirst for more books, Ségur was more than willing to produce hack material. There was definitely a mercenary aspect to her vocation as a writer. In addition to her storybooks, the comtesse also sold unfinished, or rejected manuscripts to Hachette, who then published them under a pseudonym in the *Semaine des Enfants*<sup>442</sup>. Furthermore, Mgr de Ségur, observed in a somewhat caustic tone, "merci, ma chère Olga, de me donner des nouvelles de la chère maman, pendant qu'elle voyage en express sur la route des Nouettes [her country château] à Hachette. Le jeu vaut bien la chandelle. Dix francs la page, cent ou cent cinquante francs par jour: je souhaite toutes sortes de bénédictions à cette mauvaise génie. [the title of the book she was working on]."<sup>443</sup> Evidently the comtesse counted the amount that each page would earn her as she went on with her writing. While ten francs per page corresponds with the price Hachette

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<sup>440</sup> Letter to Templier, 11<sup>th</sup> May 1863, *Oeuvres* 1:LXXXIX

<sup>441</sup> Letter from the Princess de Sayn-Wittgenstein to Zenaïde Fleuriot, 25<sup>th</sup> August 1873, quoted in Fleuriot-Kerinou, *Zenaïde Fleuriot*, pp 405-6

<sup>442</sup> Letter to Templier, 4 April 1859, *Oeuvres* 1:LXXXVI. Claudine Beaussant first identified this, see her analysis *Oeuvres* 1:976-7

<sup>443</sup> Letter from Gaston de Ségur to Olga de Pitray, 17<sup>th</sup> December 1866, published in Pitray, *Mon bon Gaston*

paid for her manuscripts, it is highly likely that the comtesse also earned money when her books were pre-published in the *Semaine des enfants*. This was part of the package that Zenaïde Fleuriot was offered when she joined the *Bibliothèque Rose* in 1873.<sup>444</sup> Earlier, Ségur had tried to negotiate a similar arrangement for her daughter, but it would appear the *Semaine des enfants* was not interested in her works.<sup>445</sup> These transactions were not usually recorded, and the comtesse did not have any contract with the publication. However, Marielle Mouranche notes that this was common procedure. She may well have received between 10 and 15c per line, in addition to the payment for the manuscript. So, Madame de Ségur's earnings, depending on how many books she wrote in a year, could vary from 1,500 fr if she only wrote one, although she raised her price to 3,000 fr in the 1860's, to 3,000 fr, then 6,000 fr if she wrote two, which was her average. If the *Semaine des enfants* did pay her for the pre-publication of her stories, she could expect to double this sum. Thus, she might well have earned between 6,000 and 12,000 fr per year, and this not including her extra, anonymous work. According to Ségur's own calculations in her fictions, 10,000 fr per year provided a comfortable revenue for a bourgeois family.<sup>446</sup> Such a tidy sum was presumably stimulus enough to keep on the production line, and manufacture the requisite number of pages.

Nevertheless, the comtesse was determined not to let the industrial nature of the enterprise spoil the creations that bore her name. Madame de Ségur did not have the sort of personality suited to being treated in the 'modern' way, as she told Templier right away when his correctors modified her *Petites Filles modèles*. Similarly, when she felt that the product was

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<sup>444</sup> Mouranche, *Les livres pour l'enfance et la jeunesse*, p 274

<sup>445</sup> Letter to Templier, 25<sup>th</sup> April 1866, *Oeuvres* 1: CXIV

<sup>446</sup> Compiled by Pierre Bleton, *La vie sociale sous le Second Empire. Un étonnant témoignage de la comtesse de Ségur* (Paris, Éditions Ouvrières, 1963) chapter VI, annex F

being compromised, she sharpened her claws and went into battle. For example, the comtesse took great care over the corrections to the manuscripts she sent in, and scrutinised the published copy. Any typesetting errors sent her into fits of rage. Her daughter Olga details how the comtesse would go to the printing factory herself. If true, this testifies to the intensity of her feeling, as Hachette printers Lahure and Crété had both decamped to the suburbs where land was cheap – hardly the sort of place a *grande dame* like the comtesse would normally deign to visit.

“Ma mère attachait une grande importance aux corrections des *épreuves* de ses livres et prenait au tragique les erreurs commises parfois par les protes. En pareil cas, lorsqu’elle était à Paris, elle allait elle-même faire ses observations et s’adressait à un pauvre invalide qui n’en pouvait mais et qui l’avait dans une sainte terreur, paraît-il! “cette dame a des yeux comme des pistolets!” disait-il après une visite faite à l’imprimerie par la descendante indignée de Gengis-Khan.”<sup>447</sup>

Judging from the tone of her letters on the subject to Templier, the description of her eyes flashing with fury was no exaggeration. She became so exasperated by the inferior quality of Monsieur Crété’s printing of her Bible that she took to referring to him as “ce vilain Monsieur Crété”, or in one missive, “Monsieur Crétin”. Templier’s response must have been sharp, as she soon apologised for her “error”.<sup>448</sup>

The real bone of contention proved to be the illustrations. This was the area where she had to struggle the hardest, caught between her concerns as an author, her editor’s commercial interests, and her milieu’s religious ideals. She was frustrated at every turn. The main selling

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<sup>447</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Ma chère maman*, p 128

<sup>448</sup> See *Oeuvres* 1:CXXXI-CXXXVI

point of the *Bibliothèque Rose* collection was that it was illustrated. The catalogue announcing the launch of the collection emphasised its artist, rather than its authors, “les enfants ont leurs livres: livres amusants où ils trouveront beaucoup d’images. Ces images leur plairont d’autant plus qu’elles seront toutes, à l’avenir, dues au crayon de Bertall, notre spirituel dessinateur. Il est bon de tenir ces petits voyageurs tranquillement occupés.”<sup>449</sup> Templier was also something of an art enthusiast, and took great pride in his aesthetic taste. He specialised in editing illustrated albums.<sup>450</sup> Ségur’s first book, *Nouveaux contes de fées* was accompanied by drawings by Gustave Doré. This was an honour for a first book by an unknown author, as Doré already had established quite a reputation by 1855.<sup>451</sup> The Comtesse however was not pleased with the results.<sup>452</sup> This was understandable, as it was fairly obvious Doré and his artists had not read her tales very attentively. One protagonist, “little Henri”, described in the text as a “poor child of seven years”, appears in some of the plates to be an attractive, muscular youth, and completely undermines the pathos of her narrative. She was even less impressed with the in-house artist, Bertall. Following the illustrations Bertall produced for *Petites Filles modèles*, she asked Templier not to use him again.<sup>453</sup> Looking through the book it becomes clear that Bertall took very little interest in the young heroines of the book: out of twenty plates, the girls feature in only five. Instead, this artist who had made his name in caricature, exercised his talents in drawing snooty local dignitaries, doctors, sailors, and servants, despite the fact that many of these characters are only mentioned fleetingly. Furthermore, the incongruity of using an artist who had been heavily involved in revolution

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<sup>449</sup> Librairie de L. Hachette et C<sup>ie</sup>, Catalogue May 1855–March 1856

<sup>450</sup> *Monsieur Émile Templier 1821-1891*

<sup>451</sup> *La comtesse de Ségur et ses illustrateurs. Bibliothèque Municipale de Rennes, exposition 3 septembre – 30 octobre 1999*, Catalogue edited by Isabelle Nières-Chevrel, p 40

<sup>452</sup> Letter to Templier, 24<sup>th</sup> June 1859, *Oeuvres* 1:LXXIV

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.*

– producing political caricatures in 1848 – to draw Ségur’s model little girls did not escape Veillot’s attention. He felt that they ran contrary to the ethos of Ségur’s text, “M. Bertall a trouvé bon de jeter dans ces pages si douces et si pures, particulièrement dans les *Petites Filles modèles*, certaines figures qui ont toute la grossièreté et souvent tout le vénin de la caricature politique. Vrais serpents parmi ces fruits et ces fleurs.”<sup>454</sup> Bertall may have offended the Comtesse’s and Veillot’s sensibilities, but it is precisely one of his drawings for *Petites Filles modèles* that has come to symbolise her work – a particularly dramatic rendering of the scene where the evil Madame Fichini whips little Sophie. This striking image of a tiny, knickerless Sophie, trapped in the grip of this monster in huge crinolines, probably contributed to the accusations of sadism and perversion Ségur has faced over the years. Madame Fichini’s image has become confused with the Comtesse herself, the so-called ‘Genghis Khan in crinolines.’<sup>455</sup>

Ségur never managed to gain control over the images accompanying her books. This was not for lack of trying. For example, when it came to *Les Malheurs de Sophie*, Ségur asked “puis-je indiquer les sujets de mes gravures?”<sup>456</sup> It appears that the request was ignored, as she continued to write to complain about certain plates whenever a book came out, suggesting that she did not get to preview the illustrations. Fortunately for the sanity of all involved, her new illustrator Horace Castellì proved to be much more to the comtesse’s taste. Once their friendship was established, he would come and visit her, to discuss the next book that they

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<sup>454</sup> ‘Les contes de Madame de Ségur’

<sup>455</sup> It appears for example on the front cover of the first volume of the Robert Laffont collected works of the Comtesse de Ségur

<sup>456</sup> Letter to Templier, 29<sup>th</sup> April 1858, *Oeuvres* 1:LXIX

would work on together.<sup>457</sup> Still, since the collection's main selling point was its illustrations, the comtesse was not permitted to choose her illustrator. Castelli was not always selected by Templier for the task.

The problem flared up once more over the question of the illustrations for her *Évangile*. Nowhere did the clash of interests become so bitter as over her Bible series. This was a battle she was never going to win. Templier considered the publication in 1873 of “les *Évangiles*, avec les simples et nobles gravures de Bida et les ornements de Rossigneux” to be one of his major achievements.<sup>458</sup> This was an immensely ambitious project begun in 1860 by Louis Hachette, which Templier had taken over following Hachette's death in 1864. The house had invested vast sums of money in Bida, even sending him to Palestine to draw inspiration from the Holy Land.<sup>459</sup> Templier had very clear ideas on the subject, and considered himself to be a specialist. This was a relatively new area for Hachette. Although they had always published religious education manuals, the publishers had refused to consider printing the type of religious works that the comtesse and her milieu wanted to produce. However, in the early 1860's, when religious publishing was experiencing a boom, the proposition began to look attractive to the company. Templier agreed to take her Grandmother's Bible project on.

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<sup>457</sup> See for example letter to Olga de Pitray, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1861

<sup>458</sup> *Monsieur Émile Templier 1821-1891*, p 27

<sup>459</sup> Mollier, *Louis Hachette*, pp 426-8

It got off to a bad start. Templier reacted badly when her son, Anatole de Ségur, an adept of Rio's ideas on ultramontane art<sup>460</sup>, suggested that Templier's choice of illustrations for the first edition of the comtesse's *Évangile* were 'anti-Christian', and disfigured the book. The comtesse was concerned that the Bishops would threaten to withdraw their patronage unless the illustrations were changed.<sup>461</sup> The cardinal Donnet's endorsement of her *Évangile* had indeed specified, "vous cherchez aussi, Madame, à parler aux yeux de l'enfant par ces gravures ou images qui représenteront les faits dont le souvenir ne s'effacera jamais de sa mémoire."<sup>462</sup> Moreover, the *Bibliographie Catholique*'s review complained that the illustrations undermined the book's intentions: "les figures nombreuses, destinées à mieux graver l'instruction par les yeux, n'atteindront pas toujours leur but, nous le craignons; elles sont assez faibles de composition."<sup>463</sup> The comtesse therefore demanded to have the final say for the rest of her apologetic series, because "les illustrations ont fait beaucoup de tort à la vente de l'Évangile."<sup>464</sup> Templier took offence, as her next letter refers to how "vous trouvez que j'augmente tous les jours mes prétensions." This must have stung the comtesse. She went on to explain to him that, "un livre religieux ne peut pas se traiter comme *Jean qui rit* ou autre niaserie de ce genre; il faut que l'image soit en harmonie avec le texte; et pour en juger, il faut être animé d'un sentiment religieux que tout le monde n'a pas le bonheur de posséder, faute de quoi on risque de blesser les croyances des Catholiques fervens [sic]."<sup>465</sup> Her inference that his choice of illustrations showed his lack of religious sentiment went too far, as

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<sup>460</sup> On Rio, and ultramontane ideas on art, see Michael Driskel, *Representing Belief: Religion, Art and Society in Nineteenth-Century France* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992)

<sup>461</sup> Letter to Templier, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1866, *Oeuvres* 1: CXIV

<sup>462</sup> Letter of approbation from Cardinal Donnet, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1865, published in Ségur, *Évangile d'une grand'mère*

<sup>463</sup> Review of *Évangile d'une grand'mère* by V. Postel, *Bibliographie Catholique*, 35, April 1866

<sup>464</sup> Letter to Templier, 20<sup>th</sup> July 1866, *Oeuvres* 1: CXVI

<sup>465</sup> Letter to Templier, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1866, *Oeuvres* 1: CXVII

Templier was a pious man, and as we have seen above, already involved in a highly ambitious illustrated Bible project. The letter is covered with his indignant annotations, indicating that he would not concede. He had been deeply insulted. Her next few letters tried humbly to make up for her mistake, “mon bon Monsieur Templier, je suis bien fâchée de vous avoir causé la tristesse dont vous me parlez”. When she received a reply not from Templier, but another Hachette employee, this further heightened her concern, “veuillez croire, Monsieur, que je n’ai pas le moindre désir d’interrompre nos relations dont j’ai toujours eu à me louer. J’espère que ce n’est pas une cause de santé qui a motivé l’absence de Mr Templier.”<sup>466</sup> A compromise was eventually reached, and this proved to be the worst argument that they had, but it proved just how tense things could get when her sons and the ecclesiastical authorities became involved.

In fact, the whole *Évangile d’une grand’mère* episode was a mess. Madame de Ségur and her editor had two conflicting ideas of what she was going to produce. Templier evidently had it in mind to produce a children’s version of the Bida project, as this was a new area of business that the publisher was hoping to enter<sup>467</sup>. He therefore marketed the final product in the luxury ‘illustrated albums’ section. Ségur on the other hand had hoped to produce a religious book for the masses. The comtesse was not happy with the price Hachette was charging for the book (10fr). She told Templier that her follow-ups would be published elsewhere, “qui aura pour destination modeste d’être répandue dans les campagnes, dans les écoles du peuple; c’est ce que j’avais rêvé pour *L’Évangile*; le rêve s’est évanoui; il se vend très

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<sup>466</sup> Letter to unknown recipient, 7<sup>th</sup> August 1866, *Oeuvres* 1: CXVIII-CXIX

<sup>467</sup> Mollier, *Louis Hachette*, pp 424-429



peu; il n'est pas à la portée des fortunes modestes.”<sup>468</sup> After more negotiations, she got her way on the question of price, and a cheap version, at 1fr50 a copy, shorn of its engravings was also produced<sup>469</sup>. However, it was still advertised in the luxury albums section, which probably undermined her efforts.<sup>470</sup>

Finally, the question of the ecclesiastical approbations, which she felt were so important to the books' sales, also proved complicated. Her *Évangile* appeared complete with the endorsement of seven Bishops and Archbishops, and a Cardinal. This was mildly surprising, as their comments were far removed from Hachette's policy of neutrality in matters of religion and politics. Cardinal Donnet's letter of approval commended the comtesse for providing religious instruction when the government's education system was failing children. As we shall see below, this was precisely the type of sentiment that would be systematically removed from the comtesse's *Bibliothèque Rose* volumes. In 1865, when the liberal Victor Duruy was in charge of education policy, it was also a pointed remark about the direction the government was taking in general, and insulting to her publisher, as Duruy was a prized contributor to Hachette's collections. Subsequent books in Ségur's apologetic series were published without such troublesome endorsement, despite her best efforts. The publisher claimed to have mislaid the approbations for her *Bible d'une grand'mère*, which were from Mgr Pie, Bishop of Poitiers, Mgr de La Tour d'Auvergne Archbishop of Bourges, and Mgr Rousselet, Bishop of Séez, “ceux avec lesquels je suis le plus liée.”<sup>471</sup> She protested that the lack of ecclesiastical support meant her Bible was not selling well, but, unsurprisingly, the

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<sup>468</sup> Letter to Templier 8<sup>th</sup> September 1866, *Oeuvres* 1: CXIX

<sup>469</sup> Hachette Contracts 1866, f<sup>o</sup> 165, IMEC

<sup>470</sup> Hachette Catalogues, IMEC

<sup>471</sup> Letter to Templier, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1871, *Oeuvres* 1: CXLI

letters never materialised. Despite her struggle to control the illustrations and distribution of her books, so crucial to the spread of her religious message, the comtesse did not succeed. The conflict was particularly fierce over the Bible series as the comtesse was conscious that she was writing books to satisfy her religious brief. These were not ‘frivolous’ Hachette books. In this way the tension between money and morals became too great.

This was taking place in the mid 1860’s, as the Empire was liberalising, and Hachette were under far less pressure to enforce the moral tone of their collections. In particular the fall-out between Catholics and the Emperor over the Italian wars meant that religious morality was not the primary concern it once had been. In this freer atmosphere, Templier suggested in 1865 to the comtesse that she write a book on “l’avantage de l’instruction pour le peuple”<sup>472</sup>. This had always been the pet project of Louis Hachette, who wanted to gently reduce the influence of the ‘clericals’ who had nearly ruined his career.<sup>473</sup> His resolution on being forced to leave the teaching profession was *Sic quoque docebo*, [I too shall teach] which became the house motto. The result of Templier’s commission was *La Fortune de Gaspard*, which was a very strange, dark book, because the comtesse was suspicious of the notion of education for the people and evidently found it difficult to answer her editor’s brief. Rémi Saudray’s article on the production of *Gaspard*<sup>474</sup> shows how Hachette handed over her manuscript to the *Semaine des enfants* without even reading it. No doubt they were keen to hurry the serialisation along. Again, we get an idea of how much more relaxed the censorship

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<sup>472</sup> Letter to Templier, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1865, *Oeuvres* 1: CX

<sup>473</sup> For example he became involved in establishing libraries for the people, supplying suitable books at low prices. See ephemera c. 1865-66 bound up inside *Catalogues: Notices et Prospectus*

1852-1863, IMEC

<sup>474</sup> *Cahiers Séguriens*, 3 (2002) 97-104

process had become. The version published in *Semaine des enfants* appeared several months before there is any evidence that Templier had consulted the manuscript. The differences between the text serialised in the *Semaine des enfants* and the book which appeared in the *Bibliothèque Rose* reveal the exact episodes that Templier objected to. According to the moral of Ségur's story, there are only very limited benefits to instructing the people. She contrasts the illiterate peasant father, whose ignorance allows others to get the better of him, with his two sons who go to school. The youngest son, Lucas, learns enough to get by, and understand his catechism, while the other, Gaspard, becomes thoroughly corrupted by his talents. He even uses his superior skills to swindle his father. Saudray notes how Templier went so far as to re-write several passages of the book, in order to dilute the underhand behaviour of Gaspard. The comtesse accepted this new procedure, presumably because she was keen to placate him following the disagreement over the illustrations for her *Évangile*.<sup>475</sup>

This was not the first time that the comtesse and her editor had disagreed over their ideas on education, and how it should be portrayed in her books. Certainly, as already noted in chapter two, Ségur was no great believer in the school system. Earlier, in 1862, correctors had edited out sectarian religious references in *Les deux nigauds*. The offending passages are placed in italics, “ses amis profitèrent de ses aveux pour lui donner de bons conseils; (*ils étaient fort religieux*) ils lui firent voir combien sa conduite avait été coupable.” “Je serai... aussi studieux que j'étais parasiteux (*et aussi religieux que j'étais indifférent*).”<sup>476</sup> Similarly, her 1865 boarding school comedy, *Un bon petit diable*, which depicted a young boy making fools of his evil masters, before escaping and finding true enlightenment in religion, got a hostile

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<sup>475</sup> *Cahiers Séguriens*, 3 (2002) p 101

<sup>476</sup> Gabriel Aymé, ‘Sophie conforme’ traces the editing of the original manuscripts, in *Grand Album Comtesse de Ségur*, (Paris, Hachette, 1983), pp 237-245

reception from Templier. He objected fiercely to Ségur's critique of such a proud national institution, and told her the book contravened the Civil Code. She responded by transferring the action to Scotland, "où tout est permis".<sup>477</sup> Both cases illustrate the clash between the beliefs of the Comtesse and the politics of her publishers.

Religion was to prove the major sticking point. Hachette did not publish her children's *Livre de messe* (1858), as she noted, "il n'est pas de votre ressort."<sup>478</sup> Later Ségur was nervous that they would not publish her first pious storybook, *Pauvre Blaise* (1860): "M. Hachette trouvera peut-être qu'il est trop pieux et qu'il prie trop", although her worries proved unfounded.<sup>479</sup> Her Bible project with them had proven a tense affair, to say the least. Her final, and most overtly militant fictional work, *Après la pluie, le beau temps* also caused a few difficulties, mainly because she dared to present an overtly ultramontane bias against the revolutionary armies in Italy. "J'ai supprimé toute dénomination et épithètes qui auraient pu choquer le vertueux Garibaldi et ses non moins vertueux suppôts (c'est entre nous)".<sup>480</sup> Despite the changes that Templier had demanded, the whole thrust of the book remains deeply pro-Papal. The happy ending is played out close to the battlefield of Mentana: site of a great Catholic victory over Garibaldi's army. The comtesse continued to press her agenda to the last, and Hachette continued to happily profit from her works, whose content ran counter to the house ethos.

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<sup>477</sup> Letter to Templier, 30<sup>th</sup> June 1864, *Oeuvres* 1:XCVIII

<sup>478</sup> Letter to Templier, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1857, *Oeuvres* 1:LXIII

<sup>479</sup> See letters to Olga de Pitray, 26<sup>th</sup> November 1860, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1860, and 6<sup>th</sup> December 1860

<sup>480</sup> Letter to Templier, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1870, *Oeuvres* 1:CXXXVII

In her last letter to her editor the amicable tone indicates the strong friendship that had developed between editor and author, this was in spite of the often confrontational nature of their dealings over the past fifteen years. By 1870 Madame de Ségur was 71 years of age and had retired, while Monsieur Templier had become a grandfather. Their relations were now friendly as well as professional. She concludes the letter, “si vous avez un moment à perdre, un jour ou l’autre, venez me voir.” Several references indicate that she had met Templier for business, but she now also spoke of her friendship with Madame Templier. She enjoyed asking for news about his family, and giving her opinion on his grandson’s latest misdemeanours.

“On désire me voir remplacer la comtesse de Ségur, qui a passionné toute une génération, avec ses ouvrages pleins de verve.”<sup>481</sup>

Such was the comtesse’s centrality to the *Bibliothèque Rose* collection, that once she had stopped writing Templier began looking for her replacement. He approached Zenaïde Fleuriot, by then an already well-established author. Fleuriot initially had reservations about joining “le roi des libraires.”<sup>482</sup> Fleuriot’s Catholic disdain for modern capitalism meant that she rejected the society his mighty book empire symbolised. However, like Ségur, she was not immune to the temptation of Hachette’s money and power. She also approached her new job with trepidation, as she was being asked to emulate the style of her famous predecessor. Émile Templier had greatly admired the comtesse’s dynamic writing style that

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<sup>481</sup> Letter from Zenaïde Fleuriot to the Princess de Sayn-Wittgenstein, 26<sup>th</sup> December 1873, reproduced in Francis Fleuriot-Kerinou, *Zenaïde Fleuriot: sa vie, ses oeuvres, sa correspondance*, (Paris, Hachette, 1897), pp 419-20

<sup>482</sup> Letter from Emile Templier to Zenaïde Fleuriot 28<sup>th</sup> January 1873, Fleuriot-Kerinou, *Zenaïde Fleuriot*, p 395

combined a sense of freedom and energy with a talent for narrative that ensured readers were gripped. He had once remarked to Olga de Pitray, “Madame votre mère a un sentiment du dramatique tel, qu’il lui arrive de faire, en se jouant, des tours de force littéraires! Elle écrit ce qui lui vient à l’esprit, mais de telle façon que tout paraît coordonné et l’intérêt va toujours en croissant.”<sup>483</sup> Following a discussion with her new editor on what sort of books he wanted her to write for the *Bibliothèque Rose*, Fleuriot worried that her version would not please audiences in the same way as the comtesse de Ségur’s books had: “je crains de paraître fade auprès d’elle. Son style aux libres allures ne s’embarrassait de rien.”<sup>484</sup> Fleuriot’s remark is ambiguous, because her private intention in writing for Hachette was to try to “purify” French childhood. As we have seen, the comtesse struggled hard against the idea that children could not read about violence, or marriage, or sometimes even violent marriage, and one senses that Fleuriot was not keen to follow Ségur’s lead. Templier warned her not to choose overly serious subjects, or to speak over their heads. Evidently he hoped to maintain the energy of the collection created by the comtesse de Ségur. Moreover, in choosing the overtly militant Fleuriot, Templier had also ensured that Ségur’s combative Catholic agenda would continue, and develop further in Fleuriot’s hands. Their correspondence has not been preserved, but it would be interesting to speculate as to whether she faced a similar struggle to her predecessor.

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<sup>483</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Mon bon Gaston*, p 160

<sup>484</sup> Letter from Zenaïde Fleuriot to the Princess de Sayn-Wittgenstein, 26<sup>th</sup> December 1873, Fleuriot-Kerinou, *Zenaïde Fleuriot*, p 420

## Conclusion

When Madame de Ségur became an author, she entered into the masculine public sphere of the publishing industry. She was immediately confronted with the problems that faced all who wished to produce printed material for the public in this period. With the new opportunities for publishers and writers to reach a relatively large readership in the 1850's came the harsh restrictions placed by Napoleon III's regime upon any organisation that dared to seek new audiences, or expand the distribution of the printed word in any way. Her indignant letters to Émile Templier at Hachette illustrate just how invasive the censorship could be, even in the case of innocuous sounding books about educating little aristocratic girls. However, it was precisely because her subjects and her projected readership were little girls that Ségur's manuscripts were scrutinised in such surprising detail. The comtesse's approach to writing was, as Zenaïde Fleuriot put it, rather free, and she did not shy away from portraying scenes of a violent or disturbing nature. Little girls were considered to be the most vulnerable readership, and therefore Ségur's books regularly fell foul of the censors.

Ségur proved adept at negotiating such structures. She fashioned an imposing professional persona for herself in her letters to Templier, referring to herself in the third person, as "the Author". The tone of her letters was by turn sarcastic, playful, or humble, but they were always carefully composed, and so designed to impress upon her editor that he was dealing with a skilled writer; not an amateur. Templier was a serious, upright man, and did not hesitate to rebuke the comtesse when he felt her manuscripts contained passages that were inappropriate for her readers. But he was also a businessman. Following the success of her first few books, their relations became a little easier. Although various correctors and

editorial committees continued to find problems with her works, their concerns about questions of morality were often outweighed by her positive reception, coupled with the public's faith in Ségur as a trusted name and eagerness to buy her books. The comtesse used her reputation to great effect in wrangles with Templier and associates. Internal memos at Hachette indicate that many were aware of what was happening, and not all were happy that her stories were often making it to press without important amendment.

The problems did not end here however. There were to be further issues concerning the increasingly ultramontane tone of her writings. Her growing militantism was in part a response to the liberalisation of the regime, which circumstance in fact made matters worse, for in this new climate publishers were no longer under such pressure to censor their authors. Ségur often found herself in conflict with Templier's idea of the direction the children's collection should take, and her own desire to spread the militant Catholic message to her young readers. These tensions came to a head over the comtesse's apologetic series. Still, it should be emphasised that, overall, their collaboration proved to be very fruitful. Ségur was a prolific author, who was more than willing to respond to the demands placed upon her as the star author of the *Bibliothèque Rose*. Furthermore, she managed to successfully accomplish the unenviable task of creating books that appealed to children, but that did not offend the sensibilities of the State, the Chief of Police, a whole series of editorial boards, and finally, parents. That this delicate balance finally began to wobble slightly when she tried to satisfy her own Catholic agenda and that of her milieu is hardly surprising.

The tribulations of the comtesse de Ségur as an author illustrate the efforts of a Catholic woman to respond to the new, ever-growing market of young readers. Her struggles with her



editor reveal an author with a keen sense of her public, passionately involved in the publishing process. Although Ségur's efforts to maintain control over her creations were often frustrated, her books soon came to define the Hachette children's collection. Mollier is correct to argue that is unsatisfactory to label the comtesse a 'reactionary', with all its attendant connotations of backwardness, and alienation from modernity. However, this does not mean that we ought to brush aside her religious agenda in the process. Recent scholars of religion have argued convincingly against the rigid association of secularism with modernity<sup>485</sup>. The case of the comtesse should in turn make us reassess the burgeoning children's market, dominated by women, and their contribution to Catholic culture in an age of nascent democracy. The next two chapters will develop this question in more detail.

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<sup>485</sup> In particular Clark, 'The New Catholicism and the European culture wars'

## Chapter 4

### The Comtesse and the Culture Wars

“La comtesse de Ségur est tout simplement un des plus puissants inventeurs littéraires de ce temps....

... Elle est devenue la grand'mere conteuse de tous les enfants de France, parmi lesquels je suis témoin qu'il y a nombre de barbons, et ce ne sont pas ceux qui l'écoutent avec moins de plaisir et de ravissement. Enfin, ses deux fils, Mgr l'abbé de Ségur et le comte Anatole de Ségur, voués chacun à leur côté au service public, ont pris une large part de surcroît dans ce travail de l'apostolat qui peut si utilement s'exercer par la plume.”

Louis Veillot, ‘Les Fables, par Anatole de Ségur’, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1865, *Revue du Monde catholique*<sup>486</sup>

Louis Veillot was a fervent supporter of the literary efforts of the Ségur family. A great admirer of the comtesse, he counted himself among the “old fogies” who listened to her tales with just as much, if not more delight than the children did. He added his heavy, gout-ridden figure to the children sitting at *grand'mère's* feet, listening to her telling stories.

“Maman Ségur”, as Veillot called her, was matriarch of a literary dynasty in Second Empire France. Her eldest son, the prelate Mgr Gaston de Ségur, was the best-selling contemporary religious author of the period; this at the time when religious publishing peaked at twenty per

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<sup>486</sup> Louis Veillot, *Mélanges*, 8, p 588

cent of the market. His *Réponses courtes et familières aux objections les plus répandues contre la religion* (1851) proved to be the runaway success of the period, as Veillot remarked by 1859, “on ne compte plus les éditions”<sup>487</sup>. The second son Anatole de Ségur was also a prolific author and journalist, as well as a politician. “Frère Louis”, as the Ségurs called Louis Veillot, was a journalist, author, and international Catholic celebrity. Together they formed a literary group, all dedicated to the “apostolat de la plume”, with Veillot also playing the crucial role of publicist. All members of the “family” had been converted to Catholicism as adults. This shared discovery of religious faith bound them together, and gave them a common mission: to revive the faith in modern France.

In order to understand the specific pressures that helped shape the comtesse’s work, both as mother, and an author, it is necessary to situate her in the religious context of the period, in which her family and intimate circle were so involved. The nineteenth century witnessed heated conflicts between Catholics and anti-clericals over the place of religion in society, and the comtesse was positioned in close proximity to some of the key players in the particular turn the drama took mid-century. The Revolution of 1789 had shown that a nation without God was possible, creating an enormous rift within French society. Bloody civil war ensued between monarchists and Catholics ranged on one side, and anti-clerical republicans on the other. This ‘war of the two Frances’ simmered over the century, flaring into violence sporadically over the course of the century that followed, but a sense of embattlement persisted on both sides throughout. Furthermore, this was a time of great spiritual renewal.

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<sup>487</sup> Louis Veillot, ‘Atticisme Protestant’, review of Gaston’s *Causeries familières sur le Protestantisme*, 9<sup>th</sup> December 1859, *L’Univers, Mélanges*, 8:402-405; according to the BN Opale catalogue, *Réponses*, which was published in 1851, was in its 45<sup>th</sup> edition in 1858, Lecoffre edition, while the Tolra & Haton edition was in its 63<sup>rd</sup> edition by 1864

The French Catholic Church had set about repairing the damage done by the Revolution. By the 1840's, the religious revival had gathered momentum, becoming a movement of great missionary zeal and renewed piety, notably in terms of congregations, new devotions, and charitable oeuvres.<sup>488</sup> An important innovation of the Catholic Revival was the intensity of devotion to the Pope. Increasingly, Catholics in Europe looked 'over the mountains' to the Pope. He was championed by intellectuals such as Joseph de Maistre and Lamennais (in his early years) as the divinely ordained authority that would restore order in this revolutionary age.<sup>489</sup> This question became acute following the two revolutions of 1830 and 1848. Mid-century, the comtesse's close circle, notably her eldest son Mgr de Ségur, and her friend Louis Veillot, emerged as two of the leading lights of a new, more aggressive form of ultramontanism that was beginning to take shape.

The 1850's proved a turbulent time for the Catholic Church in France.<sup>490</sup> The ultramontanes were engaged in a fratricidal war of words. The liberal branch, headed by men like the comte de Falloux, and comte de Montalembert, wanted to reconcile the Church with parliamentary politics. But for the more intransigent, 1848 simply proved that any compromise with liberalism was the first step on a slippery slope towards Revolution. The intransigents' vision, as expounded by Louis Veillot and Mgr Gaston de Ségur, argued against any compromise with a system they saw as having sprung out of the Revolution, and therefore stemming from the diabolic lineage of rebellion that could be traced back to Satan's refusal to serve. Concurrent with this spat was the ongoing struggle between the

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<sup>488</sup> Cholvy and Hilaire, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine*; Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism*; Clark, 'The New Catholicism and the European Culture Wars'

<sup>489</sup> Horaist, *La dévotion au pape*

<sup>490</sup> On this period see Gough, *Paris and Rome*; Jacques-Olivier Boudon, *Paris capitale religieuse sous le Second Empire*, (Paris, Les Editions du Cerf, 2001)

ecclesiastical hierarchy of the French Catholic Church, and the centralising efforts from Rome. Pope Pius IX launched a vigorous campaign to strengthen the Papacy, which he perceived to be threatened by the growth of liberal nation states. 1848, when the revolutionary armies had succeeded in capturing Rome and forced the Pope into exile, his views on the dangers of liberalism were confirmed. Pius IX's centralising reforms once more set the Papacy on a collision course with the French ecclesiastical hierarchy. The impetus for the French Catholic Church to retain a large degree of national authority, known as gallicanism, has a long history. In the period that concerns this study, the gallicans were still a large force to be contended with. A series of strong-willed archbishops of Paris, along with other outspoken bishops such as Dupanloup of Orléans, proved a bulwark of fierce resistance to papal initiatives. These men became engaged in a series of heated polemics with Louis Veuillot, whose newspaper had become the unofficial mouthpiece of the pro-Papal camp. Meanwhile, from Rome, Gaston de Ségur wrote secret letters encouraging Veuillot, telling him that the Pope was firmly on his side. Gaston de Ségur was heavily involved in the power struggle between Paris and Rome; as between the crucial years of 1852-1856 he held the high-level diplomatic post of auditor of the rote. This essentially meant that he acted as go-between for the Emperor Napoleon III and Pope Pius IX. The Ségur/ Veuillot "family" was intensely animated by a sense of battle.

These conflicts that regularly flared up between the various political and religious groupings over the place of religion in modern society are referred to collectively as the "culture wars"<sup>491</sup>. For the Ségur family, the relationship of religion to the State and society was absolutely central to their identity. Like many aristocratic families of the nineteenth century,

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<sup>491</sup> Clark and Kaiser, *Culture Wars*

they felt the lax morals of their ancestors in the previous century had been partially to blame for the Revolution of 1789. This new generation embraced the religious revival, and set to repenting for their predecessors' sins. What was needed was a reformulation of the aristocracy, according to the principles of the revival, and in response to the new challenges posed by modern, industrial society. If the old hierarchies that were fundamental to Christian society were to be preserved, then they had to be regenerated. The Ségur family, under the aegis of Gaston de Ségur, assumed an important representative function: to incarnate the new, militantly Catholic aristocracy that would one day regain the reins of power and bring France back into the fold. This idea permeates their books, which is not surprising, as they often worked together, referring to each other in their book, borrowing phrases, ideas, and subject matter from one another. "Frère Louis" then championed their books, as well as this idea of the new era of the Ségur family, in the pages of his newspaper. The comtesse de Ségur assumed the role of matriarch. Much of their action was centred upon education. Children were specifically targeted by the revival. Thus, the comtesse's books, as we shall see in Veillot's publicity, were not mere "niaseries" – they were part of this cultural surge that was to regenerate society. Her uncanny ability to captivate the interest of children was of no small importance when the ultramontane propaganda campaign was desperate to appeal to these "petits missionnaires de l'intérieur" as Gaston called them.<sup>492</sup>

This chapter will look at the religious ferment of the Second Empire through the optic of the relationship between the Ségurs and the Veillots. Such an approach risks being reductive. Both Louis Veillot and Gaston de Ségur were engaged in vast activities. As men who were engaged in a fight for ideological supremacy, mobilising wide support was

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<sup>492</sup> Quoted in Chaumont, *Monseigneur de Ségur*, p 407

imperative<sup>493</sup>. Both worked hard to develop channels through which they could spread their vision. In light of this, choosing to isolate only a few actors risks distorting their relative importance. However, a narrow focus allows us to gain an insight into the workings of such ideological networks, and how their development influenced the thought and production of those involved. Owing to her sex, the comtesse de Ségur was relegated to the peripheries of the action for most of the time. Biographies of Veillot either underline her role as a charming hostess, or refer to her only in her capacity as the mother of young Olga, with whom Veillot was allegedly in love<sup>494</sup>. However, through the examination of letters, articles, and memoirs, we can trace her involvement in the culture wars of the time, particularly in the more informal sociable forms of action to which ultramontanes were often forced to have recourse. While lacking in ecclesiastical or political authority, she was nevertheless engaged in the “combat”, firstly, as a hostess, and matriarch of the Ségur family, and then slowly gaining their respect as a fellow writer. So, by looking at the comtesse de Ségur in the context of her relationship to the Ségur/ Veillot literary powerhouse, we can shed some light on such women’s interaction with the masculine Catholic establishment. Finally, this narrow focus can be justified by the fact that the “Séгур Family” was almost a concept developed together by Mgr de Ségur and Louis Veillot, ably helped by the comtesse and her son Anatole, and her daughter Olga de Pitray. By isolating this one idea, and looking at how and why the group went about developing this notion of the “family”, we have a case study

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<sup>493</sup> On Veillot’s networks, see James F McMillan, ‘Louis Veillot, *L’Univers* and the ultramontane network in nineteenth-century France’, in David Bates and Véronique Gazeau, (eds) *Liens personnels, réseaux, solidarités en France et dans les îles Britanniques (XI<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles)* (Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2006) On Mgr de Ségur, see Hédouville, *Mgr de Ségur*; Boudon’s chapter, ‘L’archevêché de Paris face au Saint-Siège’, *Paris capitale religieuse* also gives a good overview

<sup>494</sup> For the former interpretation, Eugène Veillot, *Louis Veillot*, and the latter, Pierrard, *Louis Veillot*, p 14

of how the family could play an important role in the politics of identity in Second Empire France.

## I. The New Catholic Era of the Ségur Family

A striking theme that emerges from the Ségur family papers preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale is the militant design of Gaston de Ségur, aided by his grandmother Catherine Rostopchine, to convert the family into a Catholic powerhouse<sup>495</sup>. Gaston envisaged a new “Catholic Era” for the noble house of Ségur, symbolised by the baptism of the first male in the next generation, “le nom de Pierre marquerait l’ère Catholique de notre famille, que cet enfant serait chargé de continuer et de développer.”<sup>496</sup> Pierre’s uncle had his sights set on the creation of an ultramontane dynasty, which would have an important cultural and political role to play in the religious revival.

Madame de Ségur had an incredibly close relationship with her eldest son, Mgr Gaston de Ségur. He occupies a central role in the family biographies, while her husband is relegated to a very minor role. Olga de Pitray, Ségur’s youngest daughter, produced two biographies of her mother and eldest brother, *Ma chère maman*, and *Mon bon Gaston*. She claims their lives were so closely enmeshed, that each book contains biographical details pertaining to the other subject, as if a biography of one could not exclude the life of the other: “Maman c’était

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<sup>495</sup> Their correspondence is in the Rostopchine Papers NAF 22834, an expurgated version is reproduced in Anatole de Ségur, *Mgr de Ségur*, volume 1. Also useful is Hélène Jaulmes, ‘Les lettres de Catherine Rostopchine à Gaston de Ségur (1840-1855)’, in *Cahiers Séguriens*, 2 (2001), 17-22

<sup>496</sup> See letters from Mgr Gaston de Ségur to Anatole de Ségur, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1852, NAF 22830, f<sup>o</sup> 158, and 4<sup>th</sup> December 1852, f<sup>o</sup> 159



Gaston, et Gaston c'était Maman.”<sup>497</sup> She hints that due to the strained relations with her husband, the comtesse found solace in her son. Gaston and his father could not stand each other. Gaston de Ségur had been an effete young boy, with a predilection for dressing up in his mother's clothes, “mon frère, tout enfant, aimait extrêmement la toilette et son grand plaisir était de se promener gravement dans la chambre de ma mère, affublé d'une de ses robes de cour dont l'immense queue balayait le plancher derrière lui et dont il regardait *la traîne* avec bonheur! Il couvrait sa tête blonde d'une coiffure ornée de plumes et chargeait ses petits bras de vieux turbans, en guise de bracelets!”<sup>498</sup> Olga relates how the comtesse was distraught when Eugène de Ségur sent his son off to boarding school at the tender of six. There were further arguments over Gaston's evident lack of talent for riding and hunting.<sup>499</sup> His talents lay elsewhere. It became apparent that Gaston was a gifted artist, and a glittering future beckoned when renowned artist Paul Delaroche took him on in his studio. Highly displeased, Eugène de Ségur wanted Gaston to abandon this career path for a far more respectable diplomatic post. A self-portrait dated 15<sup>th</sup> June 1836 features Gaston, his hair gathered in a chignon and adorned with a garland of roses, wearing a large pair of earrings and gaudy women's clothing, staring angrily at the pompous red face of the Maréchal Philippe Henri de Ségur (1724-1801).<sup>500</sup> This famous warrior had been Minister of War under Louis XVI, and represented the pinnacle of masculinity and Ségur family glory.

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<sup>497</sup> *Ma chère maman*, p 169

<sup>498</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Mon bon Gaston*, p 2

<sup>499</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Mon bon Gaston*, chapter 1

<sup>500</sup> This portrait, along with many of Gaston's early paintings, are reproduced in Paul Loyrette & Marie-José Strich, *Sur les pas de la comtesse de Ségur. Le voyage en Russie de Louis-Gaston de Ségur*, (Paris, Gallimard, 2005), see p 55

Gaston de Ségur discovered the extreme faith which was to become his life's work, in September 1838, aged eighteen.<sup>501</sup> Following a visit from his grandmother Rostopchine, and intense discussions with his cousin, Augustin Galitzin, he embraced Roman Catholicism wholeheartedly. His brother Anatole recounts how Gaston embarked on a strict regime of fasting and violent self-flagellation. According to Anatole, this was because he was so ashamed of his previous impiety (and transvestism?) that he had to purify himself while he prepared to take Holy Communion as a true Catholic for the first time. The family looked on with "une sorte de respect mêlé d'effroi"<sup>502</sup>. The ultramontane Catholicism of the period, a religion of ruined catacombs, and naïve rustic piety, appealed to his romantic sensibilities as an artist. Gaston's diary, produced during his visit to his grandmother in Russia in the summer of 1841, bears the imprint of the generation inspired by Chateaubriand and Lamennais. He painted beautiful, delicate watercolours of *moujiks* praying, and recorded that "la négligence et l'ignorance des prêtres russes sont une chose d'autant plus déplorable que le peuple est bon, foncièrement bon. Il est plein de foi, puisque celle-ci va même jusqu'à la superstition; il ne demanderait qu'à être éclairé et bien dirigé."<sup>503</sup> Horrified by what he was told of the ignorance and drunkenness of the Russian priests (and of course their refusal to accept the truths of Roman Catholicism) he concluded that the people were being betrayed by the sophistry of their leaders. This was an idea typical of the new current of thought in young French clergy, and was to inform his interpretation of the social responsibilities of French Catholicism as well.<sup>504</sup> A large part of the visit was spent engrossed in discussions on religion with his grandmother, whom he called "ma bonne et sainte mère, livre vivant où

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<sup>501</sup> Anatole de Ségur, *Mgr de Ségur*, 1:15-18

<sup>502</sup> Anatole de Ségur, *Mgr de Ségur*, 1:17-18

<sup>503</sup> Gaston de Ségur, *Diary and sketchbook 1841*, Loyrette and Strich, *Sur les pas de la comtesse de Ségur*, p 115

<sup>504</sup> Gough, *Paris and Rome*, Chapter 4

j'aimerais bien lire souvent mes devoirs et chercher des conseils.”<sup>505</sup> She was a respected religious scholar, and had been an enthusiastic devotee of the salon of Joseph de Maistre in St Peterburg at the beginning of the century.<sup>506</sup> Gaston de Ségur returned to France with his religious convictions strengthened. In December 1842, he made a vow of chastity in Rome, and then announced to his family his intention to enter the orders. His mother was distraught, sending him reams of “tear-stained” letters, imploring her son to renounce his plans<sup>507</sup>. This was not the destiny his parents had planned for their eldest son.

But once he became a priest, Gaston de Ségur’s relationship with his mother altered significantly. A family friend recorded how he became for his mother “un Père, un guide, son plus grand honneur, et son intime consolateur.”<sup>508</sup> As her main spiritual advisor, their roles had effectively been reversed, and it was now the son who exercised the moral authority over the mother. He was seconded in this by the comtesse’s mother, Catherine Rostopchine. Gaston wrote reports to her on his mother’s inattention to Christian morality, shocking the comtesse Rostopchine with tales of Anatole and Edgar being allowed to attend their grandmother Ségur’s *comédies*, or their sisters going to balls<sup>509</sup>. Meanwhile, ‘grand-mère Rostopchine’ reinforced Gaston’s efforts in her letters to her daughter, and reported to him, “ta mère m’a écrit que si elle se portait mieux, elle viendrait me voir cet été. J’ai répondu à cela en lui conseillant de fortifier son corps par des communions plus fréquentes et très fréquentes, afin que l’Auteur de la santé en étant reçu d’elle lui communiquât sa force et sa

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<sup>505</sup> Gaston de Ségur, *Diary and sketchbook 1841*, Loyrette and Strich, *Sur les pas de la comtesse de Ségur*, p 132

<sup>506</sup> Narichkine, *1812*, pp 227-8

<sup>507</sup> Anatole de Ségur, *Mgr de Ségur*, 1:52-3, Mgr de Ségur, *Ma mère*, p 31

<sup>508</sup> Anatole de Ségur, *Mgr de Ségur*, 2: Appendix I

<sup>509</sup> See letter, undated, to the comtesse Rostopchine, NAF 22834

vie. Je crois avoir en cela suivi tes intentions, et avoir saisi l'occasion par les cheveux, car les occasions de dire les choses sont rares, il y faut à propos."<sup>510</sup> Their concerted efforts were eventually rewarded, and the comtesse began to take communion more frequently.

Moreover, it was not just Gaston's relationship with his mother that changed. In his capacity as a man of the Church, Gaston de Ségur assumed the spiritual headship of the family.

Correspondence between Gaston and the older generations indicates a new deference to the eldest son. Further, Gaston's determination to save his family's soul ensured the far more liberal comte de Ségur found himself increasingly marginalised.

A family friend records how at family gatherings Gaston appeared strangely aloof from their worldly concerns. It was as if he was on a higher spiritual plain. His religious charisma worked its charms: along with his mother, most of his brothers and sisters wholeheartedly embraced his faith. The comtesse Rostopchine received news of their conversions with delight, "ce que tu me dis sur la piété d'Anatole m'est plus qu'agréable."<sup>511</sup> The family papers even contain letters from the adulterous comtesse Octave de Ségur, promising her grandson Gaston that she would engage in charitable acts. He convinced her to see the Jesuit Father Ravnigan and repent for fifty years worth of sins and rejection of the Church.<sup>512</sup> As already mentioned, the first grandson, Pierre, symbolised the hope Gaston placed in the family. In 1860, aged seven, Pierre de Ségur wrote to the Pope a letter which gives us a small insight into the nature of the education the Ségur children received, "je m'appelle Pierre, parce que c'est Saint Pierre le premier Pape, et j'ai reçu dès ma naissance une médaille d'or que vous

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<sup>510</sup> Letter from the comtesse Rostopchine to Gaston de Ségur, February c. 1848, NAF 22834

<sup>511</sup> Letter from the comtesse Rostopchine to Gaston de Ségur, 1845, NAF 22834

<sup>512</sup> Declaration of faith, Paris, 5<sup>th</sup> September 1848, NAF 22833, f<sup>o</sup>168; Anatole de Ségur, *Mgr de Ségur*, 1:143

avez bénié; ainsi vous voyez que je dois vous aimer beaucoup.”<sup>513</sup> Gaston cherished hopes that at least one of his nephews would continue his work and join the priesthood. However, his chosen favourite, Louis de Pitray, died young<sup>514</sup>. Only Madeleine de Malaret fulfilled his wish, by entering a convent, les Filles de Saint François de Sales, the saint upon whom Gaston modelled himself.

The main member of the family who resisted Gaston was his father. Charles Baille, who worked briefly as Gaston’s secretary and remained a friend of the family, describes a typical family scene, “le vieux comte, qui voyait dans l’opposition de ses fils une sorte d’ingratitude envers l’Empereur qui, prétendait-il, les avait comblés, disait, “Sur Anatole, je passe condamnation, c’est un fanatique; mais que toi, Gaston, un prêtre; qu’Edgard, un homme politique, vous en arriviez à de tels excès de passion, voilà ce qui m’indigne!” Monseigneur essaya de faire comprendre à son père que ce qu’il pouvait devoir à l’Empereur ne saurait enchaîner sa conscience, ni l’affranchir de ce qu’il considérait comme son devoir envers l’Église; son père, suffoqué, l’interrompit: “Gaston, je t’interdis la parole! – Le respect que je vous dois, mon père, m’oblige à me taire, mais ce respect ne saurait m’imposer le sacrifice de mes convictions.”<sup>515</sup> The comte watched on, powerless, as his progeny were turned one by one into religious “fanatics”. They were transforming his name into something very different. In 1866, Anatole wrote to his sons, “jusqu’ici, notre famille avait été illustre dans le métier des armes, dans la diplomatie, dans les lettres, dans toutes les gloires du monde, mais mon frère est le premier qui lui ait donné la seule gloire qui lui manquait et la seule véritable,

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<sup>513</sup> Letter 6<sup>th</sup> February 1860, reproduced in Horaist, *La dévotion au pape*, p 366

<sup>514</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Mon bon Gaston*, p 115

<sup>515</sup> Baille, *Souvenirs sur Mgr de Ségur*, pp 33-4

la gloire de la sainteté!”<sup>516</sup> We can see how the conception of family honour passed on to the next generation had been altered.

As Baille’s anecdote makes explicit, this new religious direction was inseparable from politics. Gaston’s convictions led him to remodel the family, and this new version involved rejecting the family’s current Bonapartist sympathies. The Ségurs in the early nineteenth century had distinguished themselves in their military service to Napoleon I. Eugène de Ségur had even rejected his right to the title of Marquis, in favour of that of comte, which had been awarded his family by Napoleon. By contrast, Gaston had only embraced the regime of his nephew, Napoleon III, because in the aftermath of 1848 he was convinced that above all France needed to be governed by a strong hand. He wrote to Veillot in December 1851 advising the journalist “continuez à combattre *ferme* pour le Président. C’est le salut de la France et celui du Pape, ni plus, ni moins - je ne conçois pas les récriminations dont je vous sais l’objet de la part des légitimistes. Je le suis comme vous; et c’est précisément pour cela que je vote pour Napoléon – il *macadamise* la route pour Henri V, si toutefois nous devenons jamais capables d’un vrai roi; ce qui ne me paraît pas évident.”<sup>517</sup> While he ardently wished to see monarchy restored to France, Gaston de Ségur had little faith in his fellow countrymen, “la France n’est pas Chrétienne; comment pourrait elle supporter un Gouvernement Chrétien?”<sup>518</sup>

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<sup>516</sup> Anatole de Ségur, *Souvenirs à mes enfants*, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1866, NAF 11401

<sup>517</sup> Letter from abbé Gaston de Ségur to Louis Veillot, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1851, in NAF 24633, f<sup>o</sup> 248

<sup>518</sup> Letter from abbé Gaston de Ségur to Anatole de Ségur, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1851, NAF 22830, f<sup>o</sup> 153

Gaston's lukewarm support soon transformed into outward hostility, as he became increasingly concerned by Napoleon III's Italian policy. From 1855-1856 a group of French and Roman prelates met regularly at Mgr de Ségur's apartments in Rome to discuss such matters, "sans y apporter, paraît il, beaucoup de modération."<sup>519</sup> In a letter to Chambord, in 1871<sup>520</sup>, Gaston explained that his book *Vive le Roi!* a declaration of adherence to throne and altar, was not only expedient politically, but "j'y ai tenu d'autant plus, que cet acte de foi est, en même temps, un acte de justice et de réparation." In his view, the Ségur family had fallen victim to Voltaire and the errors of the eighteenth century. Consequently, not only had they lost their faith, but they had also lost their way politically. The Ségurs had been cut adrift from centuries of tradition, and so they vacillated between Bonapartism, Orleanism, and once more Bonapartism. Gaston felt that his declaration of faith in public went some way to restoring his family to its former glory, and setting an important example. "Chef de cette famille, j'ai le bonheur d'avoir retrouvé, dans la foi religieuse, les vieilles traditions monarchiques de mes ancêtres, et, en déposant aux pieds de Monseigneur cet humble hommage d'une fidélité reconquise, je viens lui demander pardon de cette longue apostasie, involontaire sans doute, dans plusieurs des nôtres, mais néanmoins infiniment regrettable. J'ai le bonheur de voir mes deux frères, le comte de Ségur, conseiller d'État, et le comte de Ségur-Lamoignon, ancien diplomate et ex-député, partager pleinement mes sentiments." This concept of the family's place in society was very far from the "milieu libéral" in which Gaston de Ségur had been brought up by his father. He had assumed the headship of the family, and was determined to ensure the next generation rejected liberalism as well.

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<sup>519</sup> Roger Aubert, 'Mgr de Mérode, ministre de la guerre', *Revue générale belge* 15<sup>th</sup> May 1956, p 1109

<sup>520</sup> Letter from Mgr de Ségur to the comte de Chambord, 29<sup>th</sup> June 1871, reproduced in M. le marquis de Moussac, *Mgr de Ségur* (Paris, Librairie des Saints-Pères, 1906), pp 102-105

By converting family members, Gaston was not only saving their souls from eternal damnation; he was also creating a formidable political force. There were Ségurs at court, in parliament, in diplomatic circles, and in the Emperor's household. Jean Maurain notes "les catholiques étaient nombreux dans la maison de l'empereur et dans celle de l'impératrice, qui avaient été recrutées autant que possible dans l'ancienne noblesse" and a footnote adds "leur action pouvait se combiner avec celle des diplomats; par exemple, Mme de Malaret, dame d'honneur de l'impératrice, était la soeur de Mgr de Ségur et d'Edgar de Ségur."<sup>521</sup> When government policy ran counter to Catholic interests, the family mobilised all its channels of influence. For example, when Veillot's *L'Univers* was threatened with closure, letters from Edgar de Ségur, now posted in Constantinople, were sent to Veillot via the family network. They assured Veillot and the French clergy that Catholics in the East appreciated *L'Univers* and did not want to see "this valuable organ of communication" shut down. He and Gaston advised Veillot on the appropriate diplomatic line to take in his articles on the subject<sup>522</sup>. However, Mgr de Ségur's militant agenda could also prove a hindrance for the advancement of his siblings' careers. Gaston coached his younger brother Edgar so well that he lost his diplomatic post during the Italian Question<sup>523</sup>. Similarly, gossips whispered that the family of Edgar's wife could not stand him. They regarded the new husband and his ostentatious piety as something of an embarrassment, "le crédit des Reiset est en baisse depuis le mariage de leur fille avec le comte de Ségur... un dévot à regard de crocodile... à l'église il a l'attitude de ce bon M. Tartufe"<sup>524</sup>. Laura Kreyder has suggested that Anatole de Ségur's failure to get

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<sup>521</sup> Maurain, *La politique ecclésiastique du Second Empire*, p 114

<sup>522</sup> See for example letters in NAF 24226, ff° 657, 669-671

<sup>523</sup> Maurain, *La politique ecclésiastique du Second Empire*, p 114

<sup>524</sup> Horace de Viel Castel, *Mémoires*, p 280



elected to the Académie Française in 1869 should also be attributed to the violent dislike generated by Gaston's campaign for the Pope's infallibility<sup>525</sup>. This sense of living in a hostile age in many ways defined their identity.

The picture that emerges of Gaston de Ségur is of a deeply divisive figure. Who was this beloved son and devoted brother, who led his family back into the fold? Gaston was considered by many Catholics to be a saint. His ardent desire to spread the word of God (as the intransigents saw it) as widely as possible led him to dispense with subtleties, "il fallait être simple, mais très fidèle"<sup>526</sup>. In the eyes of those who viewed him from a more dispassionate perspective, he appeared a troublesome figure. The French ambassador to Rome, Alphonse de Rayneval, remarked "j'ai de l'affection pour Mgr de Ségur, mon vieux camarade, mais c'est un de ces esprits qui ne doutent de rien et qui ne se doutent de rien."<sup>527</sup> For freethinkers and liberals of all hues – liberal Catholics included – he was the enemy incarnate, a dangerous fanatic who personified of all that was ridiculous and terrifying in their time. While Pierre Larousse's *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* described the comtesse as a charming and cultivated woman of letters, the entry for her son Gaston unleashed a torrent of invectives. His vast oeuvre is dismissed as being "d'une complète insignifiance... ces élucubrations vénimeuses, aussi grotesques par le fond que par la forme, l'auteur, à qui il ne faut demander ni discussion sérieuse, ni esprit de justice, remplace les raisons par des injures, et n'hésite point, s'il le juge utile, à recourir à la diffamation... ce maladroit disciple de M. Veillot se livre à un dévergondage de plume tout à fait étourdissant

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<sup>525</sup> Kreyder, *L'enfance des saints et des autres* p 232

<sup>526</sup> Quoted in Anatole de Ségur, *Mgr de Ségur*, 1: appendix I

<sup>527</sup> Letter from Rayneval to Thouvenel, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1853, quoted in Maurain, *La politique ecclésiastique du Second Empire*, p 47

et d'un ridicule achevé.<sup>528</sup> Similarly, Flaubert saw in Mgr Gaston de Ségur the pinnacle of the era's stupidity. He drew upon Gaston's books in his research for *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, and in his correspondence he referred to this research, "je lis des choses supides ou plutôt stupidifiantes: les brochures religieuses de Mgr de Ségur, les élucubrations du Père Huguet, jésuite... La religion moderne est quelque chose d'ineffable... Ces gens-là se croient au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle."<sup>529</sup> Nonetheless, in spite of his reputation, he is a complex character. Modern historians agree that Mgr de Ségur's influence on the French religious imagination should not be underestimated. According to Jacques-Olivier Boudon, Gaston de Ségur played a pivotal role in establishing the ultramontane Party in France.<sup>530</sup> In Jean-Baptiste Duroselle's view, he was vital in the construction of Social Catholicism in France<sup>531</sup>. Guillaume Cuchet's thesis, which looks at the transformation of purgatory in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, underlines the important role played by Gaston de Ségur's opuscles in disseminating new devotions nationwide<sup>532</sup>. Émile Poulat calls him "cette sorte d'évêque sans diocèse qui exerce son magistère populaire sur la France entière"<sup>533</sup>.

In the early stages of the Second Empire he had obtained an influential position as auditor of the Rote in Rome. In practical terms, his role was to act as the Emperor's spiritual ambassador to the Pope. However, Gaston de Ségur's heart really lay in mission work

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<sup>528</sup> Pierre Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, français, historique, géographique, mythologique, bibliographique* (Paris, Administration du grand Dictionnaire universel, 1866-1877), tome 14 (1876), p 487

<sup>529</sup> Letter to Madame Roger des Genettes, October 1879; letter to George Sand, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1873, Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance, 1867-1880*, consulted online at [www.europeana.fr](http://www.europeana.fr)

<sup>530</sup> Boudon, *Paris capitale religieuse*, pp 457-465

<sup>531</sup> Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *Les débuts du catholicisme social en France (1822-1870)*, (Paris, PUF, 1951), p 611

<sup>532</sup> Guillaume Cuchet, *Le crépuscule du purgatoire*, (Armand Colin, Paris, 2005), p 111

<sup>533</sup> Poulat, and Laurant, *L'antimaçonisme catholique*, p 113

amongst soldiers, and urban working-class men and boys. The cheaply produced pamphlets, which made him famous, were designed to teach the public about Catholicism and so formed the complement to this work. This was one of the areas of action of the new social Catholicism, that had its roots in the establishment of charitable oeuvres like the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. His cousin introduced him to this society. Once ordained, Gaston became a military chaplain in 1848, and so began a long fascination with converting soldiers. Such work remained his real passion. In private correspondence, Gaston dismissed any ambition to scale the Church hierarchy<sup>534</sup>. Later he referred to his diplomatic responsibilities as “insipid”, and complained that they prevented him from engaging in his pastoral work amongst the soldiers posted in Rome<sup>535</sup>. He preferred to play down his exalted birth, and live a simple existence, “pour prêcher l’Évangile de JÉSUS-CHRIST aux pauvres et aux ouvriers, une des premières conditions est de ne pas vivre en gros bourgeois ou en grand seigneurs.”<sup>536</sup> Gaston strove to embody the ethos of social Catholicism, which fulminated against the worship of individual glory and wealth in this bourgeois century<sup>537</sup>.

In all his various incarnations, Mgr de Ségur was always positioned on the frontline of the ‘culture wars’. Emile Poulat reminds us that the Ségur must be situated in the ‘guerre des deux France’, the long fault-line dividing French society following the Revolution<sup>538</sup>. As he explains, Gaston de Ségur was a “maximalist”, who eschewed complexities for maximum

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<sup>534</sup> Letter from Gaston de Ségur to Anatole de Ségur, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1851 NAF 22830, f<sup>o</sup> 153

<sup>535</sup> Letter from Gaston de Ségur to Louis Veillot, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1854, ICFV Carton 16, Envelope S

<sup>536</sup> Anatole de Ségur, *Mgr de Ségur*, 1:70

<sup>537</sup> Mayeur, ‘Catholicisme intransigeant, catholicisme social, démocratie chrétienne’, *Annales ESC*, (1972) 483-99, p 486

<sup>538</sup> Poulat, *L’antimaçonnisme catholique*, p 106

impact upon his reader. His approach was entirely suited to a situation of ideological warfare. Either you loved Jesus, or you were a revolutionary. He styled himself on Saint François de la Salle, the Genevan prelate, who penned many polemics denouncing the Protestant Reformation. Gaston de Ségur became enthusiastically embroiled in the struggles between liberal and intransigent ultramontane Catholics, between liberal Catholics and intransigent Catholics, between Catholics and anti-clericals, and finally he proved extremely adroit at fanning the flames of hatred between Catholics and Protestants, Freemasons and all freethinkers.

The question remains as to the extent of Gaston's influence over his mother. Certainly he had a close relationship with the comtesse, and succeeded in converting her to Catholicism. However, although it has been argued that Mgr de Ségur "fashioned" his mother into a humble, pious grandmother,<sup>539</sup> this is rather difficult to measure, and it is inaccurate to suggest that he was the only figure to inspire her.

## II. Frère Louis

Mgr de Ségur tells us that a visit to Rome in the winter of 1852-3 contributed greatly to his mother's increasing piety.<sup>540</sup> Gaston emphasises the role played by the "Christian atmosphere" of the holy city. He fails to mention a far more important detail however, namely that it was during this trip that the comtesse met Louis Veuillot. The journalist was to have a profound influence upon her religious beliefs, almost equal to that of Gaston.

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<sup>539</sup> Loyrette and Strich, *Sur les pas de la comtesse de Ségur*, pp 12-13

<sup>540</sup> Mgr de Ségur, *Ma mère*, p 38

Madame de Ségur embraced immediately and vehemently the intransigent politico-religious creed known as *Veillotisme*. This was the vision of a rigidly hierarchical society, whereby France, and eventually Christendom, would become a theocracy totally subservient to the authority of the Pope, which Louis Veillot expounded tirelessly in his newspaper *L'Univers*. Veillot had been friends with Gaston de Ségur for a while, through their activities in the promotion of Rome's cause over the interests of gallicanism. In the mid-1850's, the two families became very close. Veillot and his sister Élise were also included in the new Catholic era of the Ségur family. In keeping with the ideals of social Catholicism, the Ségurs and the Veillots very pointedly brushed aside class considerations and called each other brother and sister (the Veillots were of solid working-class origins – their father had been a barrel-maker). “Frère Louis” addressed Madame la comtesse de Ségur, née Rostopchine as “maman Ségur”. There was a religious friendship, and thus articulated in the language of scripture, where all men are brothers. The comtesse, naturally, assumed the role of matriarch.

Their meeting in Rome was the beginning of a long friendship and correspondence between the comtesse and Veillot.<sup>541</sup> By this time he was already a well-known journalist, feted in Rome and the Catholic world. The comtesse was not only his friend, but also a great admirer of his work. According to Olga, “ma mère considérait Louis Veillot comme une

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<sup>541</sup> Olga de Pitray published a selection of the comtesse's letters to Veillot in the appendix to her biography of her mother, which have been reprinted in Marie-José Strich's collection of Ségur's correspondence. There are also three letters from the comtesse to Louis Veillot and two addressed to Eugène Veillot contained in the catalogued collection at the Institut Catholique, Fonds Veillot, (ICFV) Carton 16, Enveloppe S. No doubt the cartons yet to be catalogued contain several more, as Carton 16 only concerns letters considered for publication or used by Eugène and François Veillot when writing his biography. Louis Veillot's replies can be found in his *Correspondance*, 4-9, edited by Eugène and François Veillot

sorte de génie chrétien qu'elle aimait et qu'elle admirait avec un enthousiasme et une persévérance touchants à constater."<sup>542</sup> Ségur read *L'Univers* avidly, and asked family members to save copies she had not managed to obtain. She was particularly interested in Veuillot's articles, and appreciated his choice of subjects "dans deux ou trois jours, *L'Univers* contiendra un article de lui [Veuillot] sur Voltaire. Il entreprend la tâche ardue de prouver que Voltaire était *bête*; garde-moi les *Univers*, il y a des articles que je veux lire."<sup>543</sup> She was keen not to miss a single utterance of the great man.

Veuillot, even more so than Gaston de Ségur, was a notorious figure. His pugilistic stance had earned him the respect of many beleaguered clerics, and provincial nobles. He was a self-styled *condottiere* of the pen. At the point when the two families met, Veuillot was embroiled in a particularly heated dispute with his fellow Catholics Falloux and Montalembert, as well as gallican Bishops such as Dupanloup and Sibour, who wanted to prevent the distribution of *L'Univers* in their respective dioceses. The fallout with Falloux and the more liberal branch of the ultramontanes was over the question of whether to compromise with the State, in order to push through education legislation favourable to Catholics. For Veuillot this was unacceptable. This argument was also played out in the Ségur household, as the comtesse's son in law, Armand Fresneau was a close associate of the comte de Falloux, and had been involved in drafting the law. Ségur often referred to Veuillot as a "lion" in her correspondence, and she admired his combative spirit. Opposition to all those who attacked *L'Univers* animates the correspondence between Veuillot and the comtesse. In one colourful letter, following a recent warning issued to the paper, she

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<sup>542</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Ma mère*, p 144

<sup>543</sup> This, dated 21<sup>st</sup> August 1858, is one of several letters to Olga asking her to save *L'Univers* for her

imagines Dupanloup, Falloux, and various members of the Government, attacking Veillot with their horns, cloven hoofs, and forks, “le cachet de leur fabricant”. But, the comtesse writes, such diabolical enemies cannot harm Veillot and *L’Univers*, who laugh in their face and emerge triumphant.<sup>544</sup> To which Veillot replied, “Madame et très chère amie, si le vaillant et triomphant La Guéronnière [government minister] pouvait lire votre lettre, je serais bien vengé de son avertissement.”<sup>545</sup> In their correspondence the comtesse reveals herself to be a passionate *Veillotiste*, who, like her hero, relishes a good fight.

The correspondence that the comtesse kept up with Louis Veillot is unique among the examples of her writing available in the public domain. These are carefully crafted pieces of writing. She reveals a defiantly intellectual side that does not appear in her letters to her family or (overtly) in her published books. Writing to the journalist provided her with a soundboard for her political ideas. The tone she adopts in her letters to Veillot is ironic, caustic even. The first letter in particular plays upon her acceptance of the role of admirer writing to the great man. “Ah! Vous croyez, tyran grognon, qu’on vous obéira, qu’on se taira au commandement, qu’on vous laissera grogner sans faire chut! Je parlerai, je veux parler”, and then backs down, admitting she is challenging the writer whose words she venerates “moi pygmée contre le géant.”<sup>546</sup> She adopted a figurative religious and military vocabulary in homage to Veillot’s style, which she greatly admired. Thus, in one letter, where she apologises profusely for her slow response to a missive from him, Ségur beats her chest and intonates a litany of reproaches.<sup>547</sup> Her prose is peppered with metaphorical gunshots, and

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<sup>544</sup> Letter from the comtesse de Ségur to Louis Veillot, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1859

<sup>545</sup> Letter from Louis Veillot to the comtesse de Ségur, July 1859

<sup>546</sup> Letter from the comtesse to Louis Veillot, 21<sup>st</sup> August 1856

<sup>547</sup> Letter from the comtesse to Louis Veillot, 15<sup>th</sup> October 1866

impregnated with the odours of sulphur and incense. Similarly, Veuillot was a past master at wordplay, a skill the comtesse appreciated (her father had also been a great comic wordsmith). Falloux's name for example provided a great source of amusement. Veuillot played with "Falloux-Fallax" (fallax in Latin meaning deceitful), and used the adjective *Fallouxieux*, *Fallouxienne*, or even *à la Falloute* to express disdain for something. The comtesse de Ségur denied ferociously any suggestion that she was a "falloutine" (reminiscent of the French word 'falote', meaning dull, or 'fallacieuse', also meaning deceitful). At one stage she even considered writing a children's version of one of Veuillot's books, *Ça et là*. Veuillot would have considerable influence not only on her political ideas and religious beliefs, but also over the development of her oeuvre.

Their interaction was not one-sided. The Great Veuillot evidently appreciated the letters he received from his friend, "qu'elles sont charmantes et bonnes, et je me sais gré d'être un de vos correspondants!"<sup>548</sup> He accorded her the great honour of reviewing her work – a particularly proud moment for her, as Olga puts it her books "eurent la gloire d'être célébrés par Louis Veuillot dans un délicieux article du grave *Univers*"<sup>549</sup>. While Pierrard points out that this article was not without ambiguities,<sup>550</sup> notably on the subject of her views on corporal punishment, we should not conclude as Pierrard does that Veuillot remained suspicious of his friend's talents. Rather, he appears to have grown to appreciate the comtesse's work more and more as her oeuvre progressed. In 1866, a good few years after his article on the comtesse had been published, Veuillot wrote, "c'est maintenant que j'apprécie l'art prodigieux de maman Ségur, et je vois bien quels chefs d'oeuvre sont les

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<sup>548</sup> Letter from Louis Veuillot to the comtesse de Ségur, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1859

<sup>549</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Mon Bon Gaston*, p 174

<sup>550</sup> Pierrard, *Louis Veuillot*, p 22



*Mémoires d'un âne, les Malheurs de Sophie, Le Général Dourakine et les autres.*"<sup>551</sup> The praise he lavished on her work, in an article ostensibly dedicated to her son Anatole's *Fables* (cited at beginning of this chapter), made his admiration absolutely clear.

### III. "*Les Bacquois*"

#### An Ultramontane Network

Every Thursday evening, the comte Eugène de Ségur attended his weekly business dinner in his capacity as director of the *Compagnie du chemin de fer de l'est*. The comtesse de Ségur took this opportunity to hold a dinner for the Veuillots and their circle. According to Charles Baille, the "très autoritaire" Eugène de Ségur detested Veuillot, and could not stand to have him in the house. The comtesse could only usher the journalist in once her husband was out.<sup>552</sup> Once they were free to talk, these dinners swiftly turned into loud, clamorous affairs, where they hotly debated the latest issues of the day. The important role such social gatherings played should not be underestimated. From 1856 onwards, Eugène Veuillot notes, they became one of the principal channels of political action for Louis Veuillot, "on y causait bien et l'on s'y engageait à bien faire. Ces conversations de table, où règne l'abandon, où se produit la confiance, déterminent généralement les neutres à se prononcer et changent souvent les indécis en hommes d'action. J'en ai vu des exemples."<sup>553</sup> Dinners at the Veuillot household were established as a regular meeting place for Catholics from all over France, or

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<sup>551</sup> Letter from Louis Veuillot to Olga de Pitray, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1866, Veuillot, *Correspondance*, 9:104

<sup>552</sup> Baille, *Mes souvenirs sur Mgr de Ségur*, p 7

<sup>553</sup> Eugène Veuillot, *Louis Veuillot*, 3:196

indeed the world, both for conversation, but also as “conseils de guerre”.<sup>554</sup> In 1869, Louis Veuillot noted, “ce soir, dîner chez le prélat Gaston de Ségur avec Poitiers. Haute politique.”<sup>555</sup> Informal network structures were crucial in the transmission of ultramontane ideas, as many Bishops were hostile to the new emphasis on the Pope, and Roman piety. Moreover, as the Italian question became heated, they also faced the increasing hostility of the State. Not only were the Ségurs and the Veuillots spiritually and politically close, but they also lived in proximity to one another. Veuillot dubbed them “les bacquois”, after the rue du Bac in the heart of aristocratic Paris, around which they all lived.<sup>556</sup> This was a little community, defined by an exciting sense of embattlement.

This was not just a Parisian network however. Both Mgr de Ségur and the Veuillots covered a vast amount of ground across France, generating support for their cause. Eugène Veuillot describes the working holidays of Veuillot, where he visited friends. On these visits, priests from each diocese would come to meet the great Veuillot, so they often proved to be mini publicity tours for him. “Au premier rang des fermes amis de ces jours orageux” we find the Ségurs at home in Normandy, along with their fellow friends the d’Esgrignys, amongst others. Often the whole Veuillot family, brother, sister, and two little daughters, would decamp for the summer. The comtesse encouraged their visits to her estate (Les Nouettes), as her husband never went there. Pierre Pierrard however, suggests that Louis Veuillot’s personal friendship with the women in the Ségur family was really due in large part

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<sup>554</sup> Eugène Veuillot, *Louis Veuillot*, 3:454

<sup>555</sup> Letter from Louis Veuillot to Élise Veuillot, 29<sup>th</sup> June 1869, *Correspondance*, 10

<sup>556</sup> See Laura Kreyder’s insightful article, ‘L’évangile selon Sophie de Ségur’, p 61

to his secret love for the youngest daughter, Olga de Pitray.<sup>557</sup> Their correspondence does indeed show there was a real affection between the two; an infatuation of some sort should not be ruled out. It must also be noted however that Olga was a very strange young woman, afflicted with her mother's temper. Veillot increasingly refers to her in private family correspondence in more ambivalent terms, especially concerning her tantrums.<sup>558</sup> It seems likely that their visits to Les Nouettes, and the family apartments in Paris, were motivated by professional concerns as well as by friendship. "Passant des relations ecclésiastiques suivies aux relations mondaines, c'est-à-dire laïques, mais foncièrement catholiques, je signale, au dehors des vieux amis des premiers jours, cette noble, vivante, charmante famille de Ségur, passionnée pour l'Église, passionnée pour les lettres, large en politique."<sup>559</sup> Eugène Veillot lays the emphasis on the Ségurs as loyal ultramontane allies. The family provided not only moral support, but also a useful network of contacts. And, as we shall see from the example of summer 1856 below, in this rather less formal context, the female members were very much involved.

The summer of 1856 Louis Veillot paid a visit to Les Nouettes that became an occasion for roused political passions. The year 1856 had seen particularly violent arguments between Veillot and the liberal Catholics. In July, Veillot had packed his bag and left Paris for the Normandy countryside to visit the Ségur family. He was relaxing with the Ségurs, but also

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<sup>557</sup> Pierrard, *Louis Veillot*, p 14, Laurioz, *Louis Veillot Soldat de Dieu*, p 141. Laurioz claims this was a rumour concocted by Victor Hugo

<sup>558</sup> See for example the letter from Louis Veillot to Élise Veillot, introducing the Ségur women, 19<sup>th</sup> April 1853, NAF 24220, f<sup>o</sup> 290, or later, the letter from Louis Veillot to Eugène Veillot, September 1866, NAF 24221, f<sup>o</sup> 512; in a similar vein are the letters from Louis Veillot to Élise Veillot, 9<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> October 1868, in NAF 24222, and Élise Veillot's replies 10<sup>th</sup> October and 12<sup>th</sup> October 1868, in ICFV, Carton 18, Enveloppe J

<sup>559</sup> Eugène Veillot, *Louis Veillot*, 3:199-200, 457

taking the chance to collect his thoughts, and gather his ammunition. He was about to publish his first series of collected works, *Mélanges*, which would trace his version of the recent ructions with his fellow Catholics, “nous corrigerons les épreuves aux Nouettes, où j’écrirai ma préface”<sup>560</sup>. There was a community of writers and so he took his work with him. However, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July, the newspaper was alerted to the publication of a new gallican book, *L’Univers jugé par lui-même*. An anonymous volume, believed by the Veuillots to be “un produit orléano-parisien”<sup>561</sup> it used quotations from *L’Univers* to denounce the newspaper. As Eugène Veuillot suggests above, the Ségurs provided stout moral support in these “stormy days”. The invitation extended by the comtesse to Eugène Veuillot, for example, had assured him, “vous viendrez aux Nouettes entendre exalter vos amis et pilorer vos ennemis.”<sup>562</sup> On the 25<sup>th</sup> July, as the gravity of the attack became clearer, Veuillot noted “Mme de Ségur est bonne à voir. Elle triomphe pour son compte, et sans ménagement.”<sup>563</sup> Louis Veuillot was obliged to return to Paris, “le sabre au poing”<sup>564</sup>, but Élise Veuillot and his daughters remained, soon joined by brother Eugène to replace him at Les Nouettes.

Over the next few weeks, the château was in a state of great agitation, with flurries of letters communicating news. It was decided at the beginning of August that the newspaper would take the book’s editor to court. The Ségurs and Veuillots at Les Nouettes had been on tenterhooks. “Quand j’ai lu à maman Ségur: Mlle Veuillot veut qu’on plaide ou plaidera, elle

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<sup>560</sup> Letter from Louis Veuillot to Élise Veuillot, July 1856, NAF 24220, f° 489

<sup>561</sup> In other words, from the stable of Bishop Dupanloup, Bishop of Orleans, and Mgr Sibour, Archbishop of Paris, Eugène Veuillot, *Louis Veuillot*, 3:92

<sup>562</sup> Letter from the comtesse de Ségur to Eugène Veuillot, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1856, ICFV, Carton 16, Envelope S

<sup>563</sup> Letter from Louis Veuillot to Eugène Veuillot, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1856, Veuillot *Correspondance*, 5:22

<sup>564</sup> Letter from Louis Veuillot to the comtesse de Montsaunin, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1856, Veuillot *Correspondance*, 5:27

s'est jetée à mon cou et m'embrassant avec plus de tendresse encore que de coutume. Elle m'a dit: Oh que je vous remercie, oh que je suis consolée! Ces gredins vont donc être châtiés, ah Dupanloup!"<sup>565</sup> The Ségurs tried to use their influence to help their friends. The journalist learned from Gaston de Ségur that in his correspondence Falloux had been suggesting that Louis Veillot was in the pay of the Emperor. Élise wrote, "maman Ségur a enfin mis la main sur la lettre de Falloux, elle est en effet bien claire. Mgr l'autorise à la remettre à Mgr Sacconi [the papal nuncio] et aussi à lui dire qu'elle a été adressée il aime même mieux être nommé quoiqu'il désire laisser ignorer à Falloux qu'il a presque trahi. Tu aurais été bien touché Lou, si tu avais vu avec quel zèle et quelle tendresse maman Ségur et Olga cherchaient le moyen d'amener le pauvre Gaston à donner cette lettre."<sup>566</sup> Madame de Ségur's enthusiastic desire to help her friend and to engage in the thrill of a fight meant that she was willing to coax her eldest son to act as well. She was a useful ally for Veillot.

Although a friend of Veillot, Gaston did not necessarily encourage the comtesse de Ségur's involvement in Veillot's affairs. Not least because it meant that she would intervene in her son's business. He was also wary of the passions it roused in his mother, because she was not always as discreet as her son wished. For example, a letter he wrote just following this visit indicates that he was unhappy with their relationship. Veillot and the comtesse had been exchanging an excited correspondence on the struggle between the ultramontanes and the gallicans. One of her letters (now lost) had touched upon the adoption of the Roman liturgy by the French Churches. This question of the liturgy was one of the key issues in the

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<sup>565</sup> Letter from Élise Veillot to Louis Veillot, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1856, ICFV, Carton 18, Envelope G

<sup>566</sup> Letter from Élise Veillot to Louis Veillot, 9<sup>th</sup> August, (no year given, but her subsequent reference to a legal trial would suggest she is referring to the *L'Univers jugé par lui même* affair) ICFV, Carton 18, Envelope G

struggle between the gallicans and ultramontanes, as the gallicans fought to protect the particularities of the French Church, while the Papacy wanted to impose doctrinal unity. The question had stirred the comtesse enough to put her lucrative work for Hachette to one side, and set to writing a Roman missal for children.<sup>567</sup> Following Gaston's successful negotiations with Saint-Sulpice over the question of the seminary adopting the Roman liturgy, it was felt that Veillot's crowing over the victory was destroying any possibility of goodwill between Rome and the seminary. The comtesse's letter to Veillot had been written in this triumphant vein.

Unfortunately for Gaston de Ségur, his mother's letter had made it into the seminary's hands, and ruffled a few feathers. Gaston had to write an apologetic letter explaining "il paraît qu'on a communiqué à M. Icard une lettre de ma mère, adressée à M. Louis Veillot et contenant au sujet des affaires présentes de ce journaliste des paroles fortes blessantes pour Saint-Sulpice. La conséquence que M. Icard tire de ces paroles, c'est que l'opinion de ma mère doit refléter la mienne, et que je suis en conséquence un ennemi occulte de Saint-Sulpice, d'autant plus dangereux qu'il paraît lui être dévoué... Par la grâce de Dieu, cher Monsieur le supérieur, il n'en est rien. Ma mère qui, depuis plusieurs années, connaît personnellement Louis Veillot et sa soeur, a conçu pour eux une affection très vive; et, comme il arrive souvent aux femmes, elle ne juge que par sentiment tout ce qui concerne M. Veillot et ses oeuvres. Une petite visite que celui-ci vient de lui faire à la campagne n'a pas

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<sup>567</sup> Comtesse de Ségur, née Rostopchine, *Livre de messe des petits enfants*, (Paris, Douniol, 1858)

contribué à calmer cette belle ardeur, que je tâche sans cesse de ramener dans de justes bornes.”<sup>568</sup>

The description of the comtesse’s letter as not reflecting his own opinions on the matter was more than a little disingenuous, coming from Gaston de Ségur, whose own letters to Veuillot on this very subject had been no less partisan. In fact, two years previously he had sent information from Rome to Veuillot asking him to publish it in *L’Univers*. This concerned the Papal brief on the adoption of the Roman liturgy by Saint Sulpice. The fear was that the then head of the seminary, Père Carrière, would bury the matter. The Pope hoped to use *L’Univers* to force his hand, and so the letter related the main content of the document. He pleads “pour l’amour de Dieu, ne dites pas d’où vient ce renseignement; c’est ici un quasi-secret de confession.”<sup>569</sup> This particular episode illustrates the importance of keeping their communication clandestine. Letters which fell into the wrong hands could cause embarrassment back in Rome, as Gaston was widely seen to be the Pope’s bishop in Paris. Gaston’s comments on his mother and Veuillot are telling however, as they indicate that he had little control over his mother’s fascination with intransigent ultramontanism.

Owing to the Italian question, the ultramontane community became aware from 1859 onwards that their names were also on government blacklists. The comtesse’s son Anatole had warned her of the mood at the Imperial court, “dis à Élise que je n’ai pas encore eu le temps de lui écrire, mais que je lui ai fait dire par Gaston qu’à *la cour*, *L’Univers* est en disgrâce

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<sup>568</sup> Letter from Gaston de Ségur to M Carrière, Superior at the Saint-Sulpice Seminary, 18<sup>th</sup> September 1856. Quoted in Hédouville, *Mgr de Ségur*, pp 206-7

<sup>569</sup> Letter from Gaston de Segur to Louis Veuillot, 20<sup>th</sup> June 1854, ICFV, Carton 16, Envelope T

complète et qu'on n'attend qu'une occasion pour le supprimer."<sup>570</sup> Agents of the State were certainly monitoring Louis Veillot and Mgr de Ségur. The suppression of *L'Univers* on 29<sup>th</sup> January 1860 had led to the seizure of his papers. This was at exactly the same moment that Gaston de Ségur found his pamphlet *Le Pape* banned by the State. Even the comtesse was convinced that family correspondence was being intercepted. This was one of the principal methods of censorship under the authoritarian regime. Postmasters regularly read mail, and in particular foreign newspapers, confiscating seditious material<sup>571</sup>. After receiving a rather heated missive from her daughter, in which Olga vented her spleen over the suppression of their beloved *L'Univers*, the comtesse warned "prends garde à ce que tu écris, secrets de famille ou autres; on lit beaucoup les lettres et tu sais qu'avec des mots interprétés méchamment, on peut poursuivre et condamner."<sup>572</sup> An anti-English brochure that the comtesse sent to Olga during the Italian question was also confiscated, and she was concerned that other, anti-government pamphlets (which she had hidden inside a package of children's books) had been seized.<sup>573</sup> She waged a veritable war with the local postmaster in Normandy, "notre ancien ennemi"<sup>574</sup>, accusing him of all kinds of misdemeanours, real and imagined. The issue became something of a joke, as in this letter from Louis Veillot to Olga, "Chut! C'est moi. Dérobez votre pâleur et voyez si personne n'entend. Je ne sais pas si ce que j'écris ne va point renverser l'Empire... Vous devez aimer l'Empereur, vous devez lui obéir, vous devez l'adorer. Il est grand, il est sage, il est pieux, et aucun souverain n'a une

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<sup>570</sup> Letter from the comtesse de Ségur to Olga de Pitray, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1859

<sup>571</sup> Price, *The French Second Empire*, p 190

<sup>572</sup> Letter from the comtesse de Ségur to Olga de Pitray, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1860

<sup>573</sup> Letters from the comtesse de Ségur to Olga de Pitray, 24<sup>th</sup> April 1861, 10<sup>th</sup> May 1861, she worries whether her copies of Veillot's *Waterloo* or D'Aumale's open letter to Napoleon III, "Qu'avez vous fait de la France?" and a pamphlet entitled 'Montalembert' have been seized.

<sup>574</sup> Letter from the comtesse de Ségur to Olga de Pitray, 25<sup>th</sup> November 1860



police si attentive. Vive l'Empereur madame, vive l'Empereur.”<sup>575</sup> Indeed, the community celebrated their “outlaw” status, as this dinner invitation from Mgr de Ségur suggests, “le sieur Louis Veuillot, homme infâme, insulteur public, sous le poids d’une accusation capitale, etc... est sommé de se réserver sa soirée du jeudi 8 courant, pour venir dîner à 6 heures précises chez Mgr de Ségur, ultramontain exalté, homme dangereux, exagéré, etc... en compagnie du RP Ventura (de Raulica), écrivain insensé, entièrement dépourvu de modération et de sens pratique, quasi révolutionnaire, etc, de M le Cte de Ségur, “Calvin Catholique” (sic), papiste sans mesure, compromettant les vrais intérêts de la religion, et de M le comte Edgar de Ségur, autre fanatique, appelé par sa majesté elle-même “un jésuite à volée courte duquel il n’y a rien à faire.” Le tout sous les peines sévères, non prévues par les lois.”<sup>576</sup>

Despite the privately expressed reservations on the part of Gaston about Veuillot (and it was not just Gaston, but Anatole de Ségur – Veuillot was certainly aware that “frère” Anatole was not a wholehearted supporter of his. He considered the younger son to be “léger”<sup>577</sup>), and the criticisms of Olga and “maman Ségur” which abound in Élise Veuillot’s letters, this notion of being a “family” had important functions for its members. The Ségurs formed part of a much wider network of vocal support that Veuillot so badly needed in this time of conflict. Also, thanks to their connections they acted as a highly useful source of information. But the relationship was also important for the comtesse. It provided her with

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<sup>575</sup> Letter from Louis Veuillot to Olga de Pitray, 1860, NAF 24631, f° 313

<sup>576</sup> Letter from Mgr de Ségur to Louis Veuillot, 1<sup>st</sup> November, the year is unclear, possibly 1860, in ICFV, Carton 16, envelope T

<sup>577</sup> Letter from Louis Veuillot to Élise Veuillot, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1866, NAF 24221, f° 494 (unsurprisingly, this comment was edited out of the published editions of Veuillot’s correspondence)

the opportunity to engage in the political fray. Moreover, the Ségurs found in Veillot an important mouthpiece for their ideas, and a publicist for their work. “Frère Louis” was crucial to the Ségur family, as it was he who championed the notion of a reformulated, ultramontane house of Ségur in the pages of *L’Univers*. The Veillot/ Ségur “family” was also an ideological construct.

#### IV. “*L’Amour des petits*”

##### The Family Literary Mission

“Voilà, je pense, une famille d’aristocrates à qui la démocratie n’a rien à reprocher. On ne trouverait peut-être pas beaucoup de maisons bourgeoises ni populaires où brûlent plus ardemment l’amour des petits et le zèle pour les faire entrer dans l’aristocratie divine. Longue vie aux Ségur!”<sup>578</sup>

Louis Veillot shared Gaston de Ségur’s view of the importance of the very public return of the Ségur family to Catholicism and monarchism. He promoted their new image in the pages of his newspaper,<sup>579</sup> and in his correspondence. They developed the idea in their books, which he then reviewed, highlighting that the works by individual members of the Ségurs needed to be read as part of a whole family literary production. Having seen how Veillot’s visits could be the occasion of excited discussions – inspiring great emotion in the

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<sup>578</sup> Louis Veillot, ‘Les Fables, par Anatole de Ségur’, p 588

<sup>579</sup> *L’Univers* was suppressed by the government 1860-1867, so I use the term “his newspaper” for brevity, when in reality the articles appeared in *L’Univers* and *Le monde catholique*

comtesse – it remains to examine the ways in which the Ségur/ Veillot family worked together as writers.

The role of the divine aristocracy was to help the “small”, which, according to Anatole de Ségur, meant either “ces petits par l’âge ou par la situation sociale.”<sup>580</sup> Catholic rhetoric often conflated the lower classes and children, as they were both vaunted as being free from the corrupting taint of power and money, and in need of paternalistic guidance. The Ségur family were keen adepts of the emergent ideas known as Social Catholicism, which focused on helping the casualties of modern industrial society, in order to prevent them from turning to socialism instead. Veillot’s eulogy to the Ségur family plays with this idea of the small and mighty. The great, noble Ségurs, who hold power thanks to God’s ordained social hierarchy, take the greatest care over the welfare of the small. He argues that divine order is the true democracy, a far superior beast to the secular parliamentarianism peddled by politicians. This was a typical Veillotism, and it goes some way to explaining why he took such great interest in the Ségur family mission.

In practice, this mission was a shared writing project. The Ségur family produced some of the best-selling religious education material in this period. The very act of publishing religious books was a political gesture of no small importance. As Veillot said of Anatole’s *Témoignages et Souvenirs*, “je le loue d’avoir songé à écrire un pareil livre étant membre du Conseil d’État, et l’ayant écrit, de l’avoir publié. Je me trompe peut-être, mais je crois sentir là une sorte de courage qui n’est pas le plus commun du monde.” This was a public profession of faith by a man of the social and political elite. The book itself was a

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<sup>580</sup> Anatole de Ségur, *Mgr de Ségur*, 1:304

deliberately provocative profession of ultramontane faith, filled with descriptions of stigmata and visionaries. Similarly, Veuillot could not help but approve the comtesse's realist project, beginning with Château Fleurville, and continuing throughout her oeuvre. He had exhorted Anatole "faites le portrait de cette chère maison, où l'on garde les images des ancêtres et où l'on connaît les arbres que les fils ont plantés; décrivez ces sourires qui l'embellissent, depuis le sourire de l'aïeule jusqu'à celui de l'ami; dites comment le ciel sourit à l'hospitalité et à la charité souriantes, et tout ce que sait inventer le cœur d'une mère; et vous aurez dit en même temps tout ce qu'il y a de force et de grandeur dans la bonté." This ideal vision of society needed to be preserved before it was lost forever.<sup>581</sup>

Above all, the Ségurs wrote for children. As John Sharp and Bernard Aspinwall have shown for the case of the British Catholic revival, missionaries became very interested in targeting children.<sup>582</sup> The same was true of the French Catholic revival. In the first half of the nineteenth century, this was led by the missions, and then consolidated within elementary schools.<sup>583</sup> Following the shock of 1848, the 1850 Falloux Law allowed the Church to regain its footing in secondary schools. Furthermore, missions entered a new industrial phase, as Catholic publishers were galvanised into action. Large quantities of books, pamphlets, newspapers, and magazines, were produced, all with the same aim: to spread the good word across all strata of society, and so counter the forces of the 'Revolution'. Their activity was

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<sup>581</sup> Louis Veuillot, 'Témoignages et souvenirs par M. le comte Anatole de Ségur', 25<sup>th</sup> December 1857, *L'Univers*, reproduced in *Mélanges*, 7, 293-298

<sup>582</sup> John Sharp, 'Juvenile Holiness: Catholic Revivalism among Children in Victorian Britain', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 35, (1984), 220-238; Bernard Aspinwall, 'The Child as Maker of the Ultramontane', Diana Wood, (ed) *The Church and Childhood*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994) 427-445

<sup>583</sup> Anderson, 'The Divisions of the Pope', pp 29-31; McMillan, 'Catholic Christianity in France from the Restoration to the Separation of Church and State, 1815-1905', p 219

feverish. With a structure of parish libraries, and ‘oeuvres de bons livres’ already in place, the potential audience they could reach was enviable. It was really Catholics (often in response to Protestants) who spearheaded initiatives to encourage reading mid century. As already discussed in chapter two, much of Catholic publishing was aimed at children.<sup>584</sup> Children also formed the principal target of Gaston de Ségur’s propaganda campaigns. Distribution networks used children to try to get through to their families, as Gaston explained, “bien des conversions se sont opérées et s’opèrent chaque jour grâce à l’influence de ces petits missionnaires de l’intérieure, qui ne se doutent pas qu’ils prêchent lorsqu’ils racontent tout bonnement comment monsieur le curé est bon pur eux.”<sup>585</sup> For example, in 1860 during the Italian Wars, priests handed out over 200,000 copies of Mgr de Ségur’s brochure *Le Pape* in schools and catechism classes up and down the country. They were instructed to take them home and read them to their families.<sup>586</sup> The aim was not only to attract volunteers for the Papal Zouaves, but also to convince their parents of the urgency of the situation. Children, in Gaston’s view, represented the last hope of the Church in these impious times, “dans ce temps-ci surtout, où les ennemis de l’Église avouent hautement leur plan de campagne, qui est de viser à l’enfance pour la façonner à leur guise, il est évident que c’est sur ce terrain que nous devons combattre, nous, les soldats du Christ et les serviteurs de son Église... Dans les pays indifférents, hélas! si nombreux en France, c’est là peut-être l’unique moyen de réveiller la foi engourdie.”<sup>587</sup>

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<sup>584</sup> Savart, *Les catholiques en France au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, pp 440-2

<sup>585</sup> Mgr de Ségur, letter published in *Bulletin de l’Association de Saint François de Sales*, 1864, quoted in Chaumont, *Monseigneur de Ségur*, pp 406-7

<sup>586</sup> See Maurain, *La politique ecclésiastique du Second Empire*, pp 371-375

<sup>587</sup> Mgr de Ségur, letter published in *Bulletin de l’Association de Saint François de Sales*, 1864, quoted in Chaumont, *Mgr de Ségur*, pp 398-99

The main justification for writing, as presented to the public by the various members of the Ségur family, was as an extension of the conversion process. They were devoted to educating their children and grandchildren, and in so doing providing a model for their readers to emulate. Both the comtesse and her son Gaston began writing in earnest around 1855, when he returned from Rome.<sup>588</sup> In her dedications, the comtesse created an image of the young generation of Ségur children as pious models. She rendered tribute in her *Livre de messe des petits enfants* (1857) to Pierre de Ségur, “si doux, si bon, si charitable, et déjà si pieux malgré ta grande jeunesse” (he was four years old!)<sup>589</sup> Around the same time, Gaston published *La religion enseignée aux petits enfants* (1857); a similar book, with the same publisher.<sup>590</sup> It was designed, according to the preface, to help Gaston’s sisters introduce their young children to the rudiments of the Catholic faith. Between 1864 and 1872, Gaston wrote a whole series of opuscles dedicated to the religious instruction of children. Anatole de Ségur also took great interest in writing for children. As well as writing several books for children, in the 1860’s he became a regular contributor to the two main journals for teenage girls, *Journal des Demoiselles* and *Journal des Jeunes Personnes*. Both publications shared a deeply militant Catholic agenda. When his sons went away to boarding school, he began writing a diary of his life and thoughts, in order to continue contributing to their moral education.<sup>591</sup> The family mission therefore translated into a shared writing project, to provide the instruments for teaching their children.

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<sup>588</sup> The comtesse published her *Santé des enfants* in 1855, the same year she signed her contract with Hachette, while Anatole’s biography, *Mgr de Ségur*, 2:119-120, explains that Gaston did not attempt to follow-up *Réponses* until his blindness gave him more time to devote to writing, in 1855

<sup>589</sup> Mme la comtesse de Ségur, née Rostopchine, *Livre de messe des petits enfants*, (Paris, Douniol, 1858)

<sup>590</sup> Mgr de Ségur, *La religion enseignée aux petits enfants*, (Paris, Douniol, 1857)

<sup>591</sup> Anatole de Ségur, *Souvenirs à mes enfants*, (diary 1866-7) NAF 11401

Louis Veillot was also greatly concerned about the need to write for children. For Catholics the destruction of the Church's infrastructure and the persecution of its personnel during the late stages of the Revolution had meant several generations of French children had grown up without any religious education. Veillot, whose father had been one such child, attacked the villainy of the bourgeoisie, who exploited the worker, and whose intellectuals then "deprived him of the religion which might have given his life some meaning."<sup>592</sup> Veillot had at one stage envisioned setting up a children's periodical with his brother Eugène. From 1845 onwards, many of his works were published by Mame in his "Bibliothèque de jeunesse chrétienne."<sup>593</sup> The *Journal des enfants de Marie* along with *La Semaine des familles* re-published his articles, while he reviewed other children's authors. He also therefore took great pleasure in promoting the efforts of the Ségur to reconstruct religious childhood.

"Ma mère, pleine de confiance dans le jugement de mon frère, tenait à lui soumettre les manuscrits de ses livres d'enfants; c'était touchant à voir, cette mère et ce fils, tour à tour graves et souriants, examiner avec soin les haut faits de *Cadichon*, les malices de *Sophie* (c'est-à-dire ma mère enfant), les épreuves de *Blaise*, les frasques de *Simplicie*, les naïvetés de *Gribouille* et les aventures de tant d'autres héros en miniature.

Trois livres furent l'objet d'un examen tout particulier: c'étaient la *Bible d'une grand'mère*, *l'Évangile d'une grand'mère*, et *Les Actes des apôtres*, trois chefs-d'oeuvre bien nécessaires à faire

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<sup>592</sup> Quoted in Gough, *Paris and Rome*, p 89

<sup>593</sup> Marcoin, *La comtesse de Ségur*, pp 291-2

lire aux enfants, surtout par le temps qui court, afin de les instruire et de les *élever* dans le sens chrétien du mot.”<sup>594</sup>

As this quotation from Olga de Pitray’s biography of her brother shows, the notion that they were a family of writers, who worked together to edify the nation’s children, formed an important part of the image the Ségur family projected to their public. Olga certainly laboured this point. A photograph from 1872, taken by family friend Louis Samson, represents the comtesse de Ségur reading a book to her blind son. This is the only photograph in the public domain of the comtesse in her capacity as a woman of letters. Rather surprisingly, there is not a grandchild in sight. Instead she is portrayed as a mother with her son, meditating over a religious book together. Her role is subservient; she is reading to Mgr de Ségur, and in the process learning from him. Gaston used this image to form the frontispiece to his biography of his mother. The picture, coupled with the quote from Olga de Pitray above, suggests the input Mgr Gaston de Ségur is supposed to have had on her writing process.

Gaston was not the only judge to whom she submitted her work. When facing difficulties over the title of one of her books, the comtesse referred to having held a “conseil de famille” to discuss the problem.<sup>595</sup> She asked her children and grandchildren to give their opinion on her stories, and when she finally sent her manuscripts to her editor, it was usually with the recommendation that he ask the opinion of his two daughters before making his final decision. She also then sent her first editions to Veuillot, ostensibly for his daughters to read, but this often coincided with the run-up to Christmas and New Year’s Eve, that is to say the

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<sup>594</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Mon bon Gaston*, p 158

<sup>595</sup> Letter from the comtesse to Templier, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1864, *Oeuvres* 1:XCIV



perfect time for a favourable review which might influence the buying public looking for gifts.

Her son's contribution to Ségur's works, from the evidence we have in her correspondence, was generally to enforce a more rigid and hierarchical view of society. "J'ai fini et je n'ai pas fini! C'est-à-dire qu'ayant lu à Gaston *Jean qui rit*, nous avons trouvé, indépendamment des corrections de langage etc., une réforme générale à faire sur le ton trop familier des domestiques et trop amical des maîtres; ils sont trop *camarades*; c'est tout à revoir deux fois. Peu de pages à récrire, mais une foule de mots, d'expressions à changer. Il faut donc que je lise et corrige matin et soir; je ne sors que pour aller à la messe, je ferme ma porte, je ne vais chez personne."<sup>596</sup> Nevertheless, Gaston de Ségur often proved far less rigorous than her editor in his treatment of his mother's books. Where Gaston judged that *Un bon petit diable* was a fine comedy that would go down especially well in schools,<sup>597</sup> her editor found it highly offensive, and demanded she cut it down by fifty pages.<sup>598</sup> Similarly, her son never objected to the violence in her books. Nor did he see anything wrong in the occasional love story that ended in Christian marriage, as compared to the storm caused at Hachette headquarters by the romance between Elfy and Moutier of *L'Auberge de l'ange gardien*. It was Templier that ordered the re-write of *Mémoires d'un âne*, not Gaston, even though he had also deemed the book's moral to be objectionable. Although we know from the frustrated tone of letters to her editor that Gaston's opinion was not always welcome to his mother, she referred for

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<sup>596</sup> Letter from the comtesse de Ségur to Olga de Pitray, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1865

<sup>597</sup> See letter from the comtesse de Ségur to Templier, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1864, *Oeuvres*, 1:XCVI-XCVII

<sup>598</sup> *Ibid.*

example to his “rigidité désespérante” when going through her Bible manuscript,<sup>599</sup> she did sometimes use his endorsement of a manuscript to counter Templier’s objections. On handing in the manuscript of *Un bon petit diable*, she told Templier “j’avoue que je n’ai pas d’inquiétudes sur votre approbation du manuscrit, ayant déjà celle très complète de mon fils Mgr de Ségur auquel je l’ai lu d’un bout à l’autre.” When Templier did indeed have some serious objections, her subsequent refusal to comply added, “je vous ferai savoir au retour de mon fils ce que nous avons décidé.”<sup>600</sup>

It was really her Biblical works that he was interested in, and this caused the most friction between mother and son. “Mon *Évangile* ne pourra vous être soumis qu’après avoir passé sous le laminoir de mon fils Mgr de Ségur, qui est d’une rigidité désespérante, mais rassurante pour l’orthodoxie de l’ouvrage.” The only other time she used the word ‘laminoir’ (grindstone) in this sense was to describe the censure of her work by the hated Barrau at the *Semaine des enfants*, which is a clue to the strain she was put under by Gaston’s scrutiny of her Bible series. In this case Gaston made it perfectly clear to his mother that she was not to submit to her editor. She wrote to Templier in 1866: “si vous avez des observations à me faire, je ne puis y rien changer sans consulter mon fils qui l’a corrigé avec grand soin et qui m’a bien recommandé de ne faire aucune correction, chaque mot ayant sa valeur dans un ouvrage de ce genre.”<sup>601</sup>

The extent to which Mgr de Ségur actually intervened in his mother’s writing process is difficult to gauge. The most discernible influence he exerted over her was of a spiritual

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<sup>599</sup> Letter to Templier, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1864, *Oeuvres* 1:CI

<sup>600</sup> Letters to Templier, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1864, *Oeuvres* 1:XCVI and 12<sup>th</sup> May, 1864, *Oeuvres* 1:XCVII

<sup>601</sup> Letter to Templier, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1866, *Oeuvres* 1:CXX

order, and in this sense, he influenced the genesis of her ideas. We have a more detailed knowledge of Gaston's initial involvement in his brother Anatole's writing, thanks to the letters preserved by the younger brother in the family papers.<sup>602</sup> Their correspondence shows how Mgr de Ségur took a keen interest in his brother's work, even to the point of commissioning books for his mission work. Gaston encouraged Anatole to carry on writing books for apprentices and soldiers, when he could no longer do it, as his time was taken up by his duties as auditor of the rote. These early works by Anatole, written so that Gaston could distribute them amongst the French soldiers garrisoned in Rome (and thus help prevent these men being corrupted by the Italian revolutionaries), clearly bear the mark of Gaston's influence. Many of the amusing stories and anecdotes are based on Gaston's experiences as a military chaplain, upon which Gaston also drew for much of his 'edifying' material for boys and young men.

Likewise, the comtesse took an active interest in the writing of her sons; and there is some evidence that they worked together. She published Gaston de Ségur's first book, *Réponses*, at her own expense after the Saint Vincent de Paul Society had rejected it.<sup>603</sup> When Veillot visited her château in 1857, she judiciously left a copy of Anatole's latest work by his bed. A laudatory review duly appeared in *L'Univers* a few months later<sup>604</sup>. In 1869, bursting with maternal pride, she sent her editor a copy of Gaston's latest book, *La Liberté* "c'est à mon avis irréfutable."<sup>605</sup> She also used her books to advertise her sons' works. Thus, for example, in *Les Vacances*, the hero M. de Rosbourg fortifies his courage by singing Anatole's canticles

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<sup>602</sup> NAF 22830

<sup>603</sup> Anatole de Ségur, *Mgr de Ségur*, 1: chapter seven

<sup>604</sup> See letter from Louis Veillot to Élise Veillot, 25<sup>th</sup> November 1857; and Veillot, review of 'Témoignages et Souvenirs par M. le comte Anatole de Ségur'

<sup>605</sup> Letter from the comtesse de Ségur to Templier, 5<sup>th</sup> June 1869, *Oeuvres*, 1:CXXXII

for soldiers. The brave Zouave Moutier in *L'Auberge de l'Ange gardien* picks up a copy of Anatole's *Mémoires d'un troupier*, and immediately becomes absorbed in the volume, "je n'aurais jamais cru qu'un livre pût amuser et intéresser tant"<sup>606</sup>. Moutier's description of the Crimean War that follows is an almost word for word copy of that found in Anatole's *Troupier*, so she is also slyly signalling her sources to the reader. Her *Jean qui grogne et Jean qui rit* opens with an advert for Mgr de Ségur's books, as the good mother pack two books into her son's bag, the *Manuel du chrétien*, and *Conseils pratiques aux enfants*. "Il doit être bon, cela se voit dans ses livres. Et il aime les enfants, cela se voit bien aussi."<sup>607</sup> And so the list goes on.<sup>608</sup> She did not shy from adapting sections of Gaston's writings and inserting them in her works, in the same manner as Anatole had done. This is most clear in the case of her *Mauvais Génie*. The book features an episode set during the Algerian war, concerning a soldiers' rebellion. A very similar story can be found in Anatole's *Dimanche des Soldats* (1850)<sup>609</sup>.

Anatole's biography of Mgr de Ségur shows that these were anecdotes from Mgr de Ségur's days as a military chaplain during the 1848 revolution<sup>610</sup>. It appears he collected a bank of moral tales, which his family then drew upon. It can be seen from their correspondence that Gaston often suggested which of these anecdotes that Anatole should use. He also told Anatole which sections in his books moved the soldiers in Rome to tears<sup>611</sup>. Similarly, it was Mgr de Ségur who insisted that the rebel leader, Alcide, in his mother's *Le*

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<sup>606</sup> Ségur, *Oeuvres*, 2:504

<sup>607</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:3

<sup>608</sup> See Marcoin, *La comtesse de Ségur* for a more comprehensive list, pp 111-123

<sup>609</sup> *Cahiers Séguriens*, 5, (2004) reproduces two texts from Anatole de Ségur, *Le Dimanche des Soldats* and *Mémoires d'un troupier* to allow comparison with *Le Mauvais génie*. It also contains several useful articles on the subject

<sup>610</sup> Anatole de Ségur, *Mgr de Ségur*, 1:56-69

<sup>611</sup> See letters exchanged between the brothers for the period 1852-1855, contained in NAF 22830, ff 56-66, and 151-161

*Mauvais genie* be executed. While Gaston destroyed most of his correspondence with his mother, there is still evidence that Mgr de Ségur also suggested to his mother that she use his morally improving anecdotes in her fictions. Mgr de Ségur was absolutely convinced of the utility of stories concerning the masculine subjects of war, soldiers, and rebellion in his missionary work. This conviction influenced his brother Anatole's choice of subjects. When the comtesse also wrote on such topics, Gaston was evidently involved. He was so pleased with her moral tale, *Le Forçat ou à tout péché miséricorde* (in the collection *Comédies et Proverbes*), that he asked his mother's editor if he could serialise the tale in a publication he was involved with, *L'Ouvrier*. The comtesse explained to Templier, "mon fils pense que ce *Forçat* pourrait être utile dans ce pauvre public ignorant des campagnes."<sup>612</sup>

Moreover, her son used the opportunity of his mother's connection with Hachette to try to negotiate publishing contracts for his own works. "C'était mon fils qui vous apportait mon manuscrit et aurait désiré vous voir pour la publication de quelques uns de ses ouvrages."<sup>613</sup> The son in question is most probably Gaston, as he was usually the one who dealt with Hachette on his mother's behalf. Her editor declined. Later, in 1861, Templier did approach Mgr de Ségur with a proposal concerning publishing a Bible with Hachette. "Mon fils, Mgr de Ségur... me charge de vous dire qu'il désirerait bien causer avec vous de la Bible que vous désirez éditer; il la croit utile et bonne mais dans des conditions un peu différentes de celles dont vous m'avez parlé."<sup>614</sup> The Bible project as Gaston envisaged it never materialised. However, his mother eventually realised this project instead, and Gaston ended up playing an important role in the ideas behind the book.

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<sup>612</sup> Letter from the comtesse to Templier, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1865, *Oeuvres* 1:CII

<sup>613</sup> Letter from the comtesse to Templier, 12<sup>th</sup> October 1857, *Oeuvres* 1:LXIII

<sup>614</sup> Letter from the comtesse to Templier, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1861, 1:LXXXIII

There is also evidence to suggest that the Ségur/Veuillot family worked together. Laura Kreyder has written a valuable article on the comtesse's Bible series, in which she asserts that the books were part of a concerted literary offensive by the "Bacquois" community, designed to refute the heresy of Renan's *Vie de Jésus* (1863)<sup>615</sup>. This notorious publication, in which Renan wrote the life of Christ as a human being, rather than the divine Son of God, had sent shockwaves throughout the Catholic establishment. The Ségurs and the Veuillots were of course outraged. Kreyder points out that they all then proceeded to publish their own responses to the question of Christ's divinity. Ségur's *Évangile d'une grand'mère* (1865) dealt with this question decisively. The manuscript is covered with notes in several hands, working out how best to answer the conundrum of emphasising the orthodoxy on Christ's divinity in a way that made it simple for children<sup>616</sup>. The Cardinal Donnet's approbation, published at the front of the book, praised her effort "cet *Évangile d'une grand'mère* apparaît fort à propos, à la suite des réfutations du moderne arianisme publiées par les évêques et par de savants et consciencieux publicistes. Ceux-ci parlaient aux érudits; mais vous vous adressez au jeune age."<sup>617</sup>

As already discussed in chapter two, Louis Veuillot also exercised a decisive influence over the subject matter the comtesse chose for her writing. In a review of her works he urged the comtesse to portray children from all classes of society. Both *Pauvre Blaise* and *La soeur de Gribouille* then featured lower class protagonists. She often developed with the idea of

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<sup>615</sup> Kreyder, 'L'évangile selon Sophie de Ségur'

<sup>616</sup> *Ibid*, p 74

<sup>617</sup> Letter of approbation from the Cardinal Donnet, Archbishop of Bordeaux, to the comtesse de Ségur, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1865, published in Madame la Comtesse de Ségur née Rostopchine, *Évangile d'une Grand'mère* (Paris, Hachette, 1865)

the small and mighty in her books, particularly through making use of the figure of a redemptive child. Take, for example, the central idea of *Pauvre Blaise* of the contrast between the corruption of the high and mighty, and the piety of the humble. The book seems to bear the imprint of conversations with Veillot. The young hero, a poor gardener's son, manages to convert the inhabitants of the château. Ségur exposes the sorry state of affairs among the French elite, "il y eut dans l'Église un mouvement général de surprise lorsque, après la communion des enfants, on vit le comte, la comtesse, et Hélène, quitter leur place et s'approcher de la Sainte Table." This story shows the way, as the delighted local population whispers to one another, "le pays y gagnera; ils font beaucoup de bien depuis qu'ils sont amendés."<sup>618</sup> Several of her happy endings follow this schema, such as *La Fortune de Gaspard*, where the conversion of a miserly factory owner by an angelic young girl transforms him from 'the region's oppressor into its providence.'<sup>619</sup> As the holidays draw to a close in *Les Vacances*, M. de Rosbourg and his son conclude, "à nous deux nous battons le pays à dix lieus à la ronde pour que tout le monde soit heureux autour de nous. Nous leur ferons voir ce que peut faire un bon, un vrai chrétien, des richesses que le bon Dieu lui a donné."<sup>620</sup> She echoed a refrain that can be found in Veillot's writings, namely that France would be saved if her nobility would give up its frivolous ambitions and returned to their real duties, "restez dans vos terres, gentilshommes; dépensez là vos revenues... Restez dans vos terres, élevez-y vos enfants, la charrue et le fusil sous la main, parmi ceux qu'ils devront un jour protéger et qui sauront un jour les défendre."<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>618</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1:801

<sup>619</sup> *Oeuvres*, 3:388

<sup>620</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1:504

<sup>621</sup> Veillot, *Ça et là* (1860), quoted in Pierrard, *Louis Veillot*, p 125

The literary members of the family worked hard to present their work as part of a unified front to the public. There is a fair amount of intertextuality between her work and that of her sons, Gaston and Anatole. They worked together, read one another's manuscripts, made suggestions, borrowed from each other's writings, and publicised their respective books. Their corporate identity had initially frustrated the young Anatole, who was obliged to subsume his literary ambitions to Gaston's vision of the greater good. He was keen to establish his own reputation, distinct from that of his famous brother, "si je voulais établir mon individualité, je devrais faire un ouvrage bien impie; peut-être alors ne me confondrait-on plus avec toi: en somme nous finirons par faire à nous deux un grand [word illegible/ possibly écrivain] religieux qui ira à la postérité sous ton nom."<sup>622</sup> It is interesting that the comtesse only very rarely wrote for Catholic editors, preferring instead to stay with Hachette who was not always sympathetic to her militant agenda. It was her husband, rather than Gaston who helped her find an editor. Perhaps she too wanted to ensure she established her own reputation as a writer, independent of the family identity.

The Segurs and the Veillots shared a common cause: educating children, as part of a greater mission, the Catholic revival in France. Together they formed part of a network of militant writers and propagandists, working hard to reinvigorate the faith and save the nation's soul. Their shared mission expressed in writing was part of a wider Catholic mobilisation. The comtesse emerged as the children's favourite however, so it is no surprise that Veillot's article on the Ségur family in 1865 reserved the warmest praise for the matriarch, "la grand'mere conteuse de tous les enfants de France".

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<sup>622</sup> Letter from Anatole to Gaston de Ségur, 15<sup>th</sup> October 1852, NAF 22830, f° 56



## Conclusion:

### The Politics of Public Image

“Voyez ce que Dieu fait... Ce saint abbé de Ségur et ses sept frères et sœurs, parfait chrétiens et parfaits romains, sont petits enfants du voltarien catholique Ségur et du voltarien grec Rostopchine.”<sup>623</sup>

Veillot’s eyes glistened as he watched maman Ségur, frère Gaston, frère Anatole, frère Edgar, sœur Sabine, and sœur Olga transform their family into the ideal aristocracy he had so often eulogised in his writings.<sup>624</sup> Instead of the glories of profane war, they were active in the holy war against the forces of secularism, which he conceived as a delicious affront to the corrupt old order the noble house of Ségur had once incarnated. Veillot and the Ségurs were not simply reactionaries who hoped to simply turn the clock back to the *ancien régime*. Their divine aristocracy was a new creation, formulated as a rejection of older models of comportment. They would be leaders of a counter-revolutionary vanguard. As militant Catholics, and in particular, adepts of Social Catholicism, they would realise Joseph de Maistre’s vision of a regenerated Christendom. For Veillot the nobility would be the natural leaders of such a movement, as he wrote in the aftermath of 1848, “j’honore la noblesse de sang; je désire qu’elle se maintienne et se relève, parce que les révolutions se flattent de l’abolir. J’aimerais que la révolution fût battue par un gentilhomme: ce serait un soufflet de plus que recevrait l’insupportable orgueil démocratique.”<sup>625</sup> In typical provocative fashion, he

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<sup>623</sup> Louis Veillot, letter to l’abbé Morisseau, 18<sup>th</sup> July 1856, in *Correspondance*, 5:12

<sup>624</sup> For example Veillot’s *Ça et Là* (1860), for a discussion of Veillot’s politics, see Pierre Pierrard, *Louis Veillot*

<sup>625</sup> Louis Veillot, *Lendemain de la Victoire*, 1850 preface, pp 71-2

had styled the aristocratic hero of this book, *Le Lendemain de la victoire* (1850), Valentin de Lavour, “représentant du peuple.”<sup>626</sup> In the same vein as his comments on the Ségur family, he suggests that Lavour is the only representative that truly understands the needs of the people. Veillot felt the people needed their rulers to set an example. He was therefore delighted when he met the Ségur family in the 1850’s: here was the ideal noblesse de sang that he had been looking for. This was the motivation underpinning his generous praise for the Ségurs as a corporate entity. Together, their new conception of aristocracy was united in particular by their loathing of the old order, execrated by men like Veillot and Mgr de Ségur for their dissipation, and their resultant failure to provide a strong moral authority for the people.

The family writing project was central to their vision, for it acted on two levels: as a defiantly public declaration of faith on the part of the new, divine aristocracy, and as a method for diffusing their new Catholicism. Together they wrote books designed to encourage a return to the faith in France. Hence, we find an important level of intertextuality in their books, and similar concerns reflected in their choice of subjects. Through their correspondence we can trace how they relied upon each other for support.

“Voilà donc maman Ségur en train de mettre une gloire toute nouvelle sur ce vieux nom politique et militaire. Elle enfoncera joliment le grand-papa ou le grand-oncle qui a écrit tant d’histoires, et même aussi l’académicien aujourd’hui vivant.”<sup>627</sup>

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<sup>626</sup> *Ibid*, p 75

<sup>627</sup> Letter from Louis Veillot to Olga de Pitray, 25<sup>th</sup> December 1860, in *Correspondance*, 6:333

Finally, if the cherished dream of Mgr de Ségur and Louis Veillot was to champion the new Catholic era of the Ségur family as an example to the nation, then the comtesse de Ségur was the most successful of them all. While over the course of the twentieth century the writings of her sons and Veillot, fell out of favour, the comtesse's books continued to sell and sell. The name Ségur is now indelibly associated with the comtesse in the popular imagination.

## Chapter 5

### Model Girls and Divine Women:

### Reading the Comtesse de Ségur

Madame de Ségur's place in women's culture is a tricky subject, littered with the obstacles of longstanding prejudices, confusions, and stereotypes. In the popular imagination, her books are generally thought to be for girls of the upper classes. Paradoxically, it is rare to find examples of women writing about how they enjoyed reading books by the comtesse de Ségur when they were young, in comparison to the many men who refer to her in their memories of childhood. This reluctance does not however indicate that Ségur was unpopular with girls; rather it reveals how awkward a symbol she and her *Petites Filles modèles* were for successful women. The focus of this chapter on the comtesse de Ségur, her female colleagues, and their girl readers may seem at first to be unjustified, because Ségur wrote her stories for both boys and girls, and evidence suggests that her readership was far wider than the daughters of the social elite. Re-editions of her books in the 1930's testify to the great variety of people who read her, of all social strata, adults and children alike.<sup>628</sup> Why then does this chapter choose to concentrate exclusively on Ségur's feminine legacy if this is not an accurate representation of the vast circulation of her works?

The answer is twofold. First, the question merits study because the popular perception of Madame de Ségur as writing for girls provides an interesting problematic for understanding

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<sup>628</sup> Renonciat, 'Fortune éditorial de la comtesse de Ségur (1857-1939)', p 218

interpretations of women's culture, for it has its origins in the type of books that she wrote. The comtesse was a 'governess' author, which is to say that she wrote morally improving works for young children. Boys left the nursery to go on to greater things, whereas their sisters did not. Nursery literature has therefore been understood as a feminine genre, and has suffered accordingly. The vocabulary used to describe such books could be very cruel. In 1897, Robert de Montesquiou spoke of how "Fleuriot, Ségur et Monniot suèrent de titres mucilagineux où bercent d'un courant enfantin cet âge ingrat qui s'éternise"<sup>629</sup>, while in 1908 journalist Ernest-Charles pitied the poor girls of the upper classes, "les fillettes restent pour jamais modelées selon les livres de la comtesse de Ségur. Elles n'ont nulle occasion de réagir." The comtesse and her hordes of imitators "ont répandu dans la gélatine étendue d'eau de leurs phrases rances la fadeur de leurs sucreries sentimentales, le parfum éventé de leurs âmes innocentes et niaises, la marmelade sûre de leurs idées rétrogrades! Ils ont donné à la jeunesse des lectures faciles qui combattaient tout l'effort de l'éducation moderne."<sup>630</sup> When Simone de Beauvoir remembered her maiden aunt who wrote for *La Poupée modèle* in the Belle Époque, she dismissed her as "une tante obèse et moustachue, qui maniait la plume."<sup>631</sup> Nursery books conjure up a grim picture of moustachioed old maids, writing saccharine pap. The old stereotypes of the bluestocking, of women's intellectual inferiority, and of their tendency to religious fanaticism have died hard in the case of governess authors.

Owing to this, historians have generally not taken Madame de Ségur seriously, which has been compounded by the problem that the comtesse and her colleagues have proved unattractive subject matter to feminist historians. There is a reluctance to acknowledge

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<sup>629</sup> Robert de Montesquiou, *Les Roseaux Pensants* (1897) pp 18-19

<sup>630</sup> Ernest-Charles, 'La ridicule statue de la Comtesse de Ségur'

<sup>631</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, (Paris, Gallimard, 1958) p 18

women whom they regard as the ‘enemy’, given that many were involved in the production of gender norms, and, worse still, seemed to confirm the worst accusations against Catholic women in republican discourse.<sup>632</sup> Within France, there has been a resurgence of interest in the comtesse from feminists, keen to reclaim her as a talented author. However, this has involved distancing her from the work of her colleagues. The current perception of Ségur’s writings, and how they fit with those of other “governesses” needs to be nuanced, because it has been coloured by a misogynistic notion that these “girly” nursery books were therefore inferior both in terms of form and content. As with all stereotypes, the oft-repeated jibes conceal a much richer and more complex culture than might be expected. Due to their unsavoury reputation, these women’s immense contribution to religious writing in the mid-century publishing boom has not received the attention it deserves.

Second, it is important to study the comtesse and her girls because Ségur’s most notorious contribution to French culture has been that of the ‘petite fille modèle’, the obedient and pious young miss whom little girls were supposed to aspire to. The phrase has entered common parlance. She produced the gender script that most girls for generations were given to emulate. This chapter will argue that it is for this very reason we ought not dismiss the writings of Ségur so easily, for they played a formative role in feminine childhood. To do so is not only important for the history of women, and women’s culture, but also in order to bring to light the ‘model’ girls of the Second Empire. All too often they are hidden, immanent in the domestic sphere, and alienated from the wider world. By examining their reading practices we can locate changes in the nursery experience brought about by political

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<sup>632</sup> On the republican construction of the ‘Catholic woman’, see Ford, *Divided Houses*, introduction

antagonisms – such shifts are not necessarily positive, but nevertheless in so doing we reinsert these girls back into the grand narratives of history (in this case, the Franco-French culture wars).

The female reading public was expanding fast in the nineteenth century, generating an insatiable demand for books and education manuals designed specifically for them. The comtesse de Ségur's oeuvre is situated at the apogee of this incredibly fertile time for girls' print culture. The period stretching roughly from 1750-1830 had seen books for girls grow fivefold.<sup>633</sup> The ensuing boom of the printing industry mid-century carried this new genre with it. Legislation enacted in 1833, 1850, 1867, and culminating in the Republican laic laws of the 1880's, expanded opportunities for schooling for girls. This was in part caused by, but also stimulated debates surrounding the delicate subject of their education. Female literacy rates were steadily catching-up to those of boys. However, as has been noted by several scholars, this is no straightforward story of an unstoppable march towards progress. Historians remain divided over whether the education offered really provided girls with opportunities, or rather served to further reinforce their socialisation along traditional gender lines.<sup>634</sup>

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<sup>633</sup> Isabelle Havelange 'La littérature destinée aux demoiselles 1750-1830', Isabelle Havelange and Ségolène Le Men, *Le Magasin des enfants. La littérature pour la jeunesse 1750-1830* (Montreuil, Association Bicentenaire Montreuil, 1988) p 26

<sup>634</sup> Linda L. Clark, *Schooling the Daughters of Marianne: Textbooks and the Socialization of Girls in Modern French Primary Schools*, (Albany, Suny Press, 1984); Susan K. Foley, *Women in France since 1789. The Meanings of Difference*, (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); cf. Rebecca Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom* (Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005) which argues that in the nineteenth century girls' education was slowly, and not necessarily in an obvious or direct way, developing towards the tentative feminism and "disruptive acts" of the Belle Époque

A similar debate has played out in interpretations of the comtesse's impact on girls' culture. Was she a villainess, responsible for creating the 'petite fille modèle', and as such a crucial part of the cultural straightjacket imposed upon generations of little girls?<sup>635</sup> Or was she too a victim of the patriarchal order of Second Empire France? At the same time as second wave feminists in the mid 1970's were vilifying her works and all they represent in *Les Temps Modernes*,<sup>636</sup> and Marc Soriano in his *Guide de la littérature pour la jeunesse* was suggesting her works were too sexist to give to children<sup>637</sup>, Soriano was also arguing elsewhere that Madame de Ségur had in fact been a proto-feminist<sup>638</sup>. By the early 1980's the issue was still unresolved. One year an issue of the CGT's publication for women, *Antoinette*, asked "faut-il interdire la comtesse de Ségur?"<sup>639</sup>, the next, the magazine of the women's liberation front, *Des Femmes en Mouvement Hebdo* wondered "féministe la comtesse? Qui semble murmurer, comme d'autres après elle, qu'on ne naît pas femme, qu'on le devient?"<sup>640</sup> More recently, the comtesse de Ségur has been interpreted by scholars as marking an important turning point in perceptions of girlhood. Nicole Savy's exhibition 'Petites Filles Modernes' at the Musée d'Orsay in 1989 suggested that the comtesse de Ségur, along with Victor Hugo and Lewis Carroll, created what she described as the modern little girl. The modern boy had been a

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<sup>635</sup> Marie-Christine Vinson, *L'éducation des petites filles chez la comtesse de Ségur*, (Lyon, Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1987), Isabelle Papicau, *La comtesse de Ségur et la maltraitance des enfants*, (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1999)

<sup>636</sup> *Les Temps Modernes* special issue 'Petites Filles en Éducation', 378 (1976)

<sup>637</sup> Soriano, *Guide de littérature pour la jeunesse*, pp 473-485

<sup>638</sup> See his preface to Pauvert's edition of *La Fortune de Gaspard* (1974)

<sup>639</sup> Thérèse Fournier, 'Faut-il interdire la comtesse de Ségur?', *Antoinette*, December 1980

<sup>640</sup> Fabienne Pascal, 'Du côté des Petites Filles Modèles', *Des Femmes en Mouvement*, 7<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> May 1982



product of the eighteenth century, crystallised in Rousseau's *Emile*; Ségur's *Sophie* provided his female counterpart in France.<sup>641</sup> This assertion has been widely accepted.<sup>642</sup>

But are we now in danger of trying to square the circle? On the one hand, there is no escaping the conservatism of most of Ségur's directly stated views on girls and women. All the theories of Ségur's feminism rest upon a deeper reading of her texts, and generally conclude she was a feminist "sans le savoir", or "malgré elle", or because her texts "fail" in their stated pedagogic aim. Furthermore, although her later books may contain some strong female characters, and even make claims which seem to struggle against the weight of cultural norms, it is the notion of the 'petite fille modèle' which has been retained in the French collective memory. On the other hand, her books really are for modern girls, in the sense that they are still read today. While fellow feminine bestsellers such as Monniot's *Journal de Marguerite*, Zulma Carraud's *Petite Jeanne*, or the works of authors like Julie Gouraud and Zenaïde Fleuriot did not survive into the twentieth century,<sup>643</sup> Ségur's sales went from strength to strength, and her books went on to have something of a golden age between the 1930's and 60's.<sup>644</sup> *Petites Filles modèles* and *Les Malheurs de Sophie* still form a formidable

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<sup>641</sup> Nicole Savy, *Les Petites Filles Modernes*, Catalogue d'exposition-dossier, Musée d'Orsay, (Paris, Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1989)

<sup>642</sup> Stéphane Michaud, 'Idolâtries. Représentations artistiques et littéraires', Duby and Perrot, *Histoire des femmes*, 4: 145; Laura Kreyder, *La passion des petites filles. Histoire de l'enfance féminine de la Terreur à Lolita*, (Arras, Artois Presses Université, 2003); Nathalie Dresse, 'Les Petites Filles en Représentation', *Chronique Feministe*, January-February 1997, p 61

<sup>643</sup> Parinet, *Une histoire de l'édition*, pp 89-91; Pierre Caspard, 'De l'horrible danger d'une analyse superficielle des manuels scolaires' *Histoire de l'éducation*, 21 (1984), 67-74 for Zulma Carraud's sales figures; on Fleuriot, see Jacques Chupeau, 'L'école des premiers livres: les romans de Zenaïde Fleuriot et la formation de la jeunesse catholique', *L'enfance et les ouvrages d'éducation*, vol II, *XIXe siècle*, P-M Penigault-Duhet (ed), (Université de Nantes, January 1985), p 320

<sup>644</sup> Renonciat, 'Fortune éditorial de la comtesse de Ségur (1857-1939)', pp 216-9; Bauland, *Les collections de romans pour la jeunesse de la Librairie Hachette*, pp 108-9

presence on the shelves, now repackaged for their 150<sup>th</sup> birthday in sugary pink covers featuring two model little girls in voluminous dresses. In this way, her books form a link between generations of girls and women. In light of these apparent contradictions, it would be helpful to shift the focus slightly. Rather than trying to make Ségur fit the modern concept of feminism, it might be more fruitful to try to examine instead how the comtesse constructed her identity as a woman, and as an author concerned with girls' education. To do this, it is necessary to locate her, her colleagues, and their readers within the specific cultural context of the nursery. As noted above, she wrote at a time when girls' education, and particularly, who had control over it, was the subject of fierce debate. The domestic space was fixed under the glare of moralists and reformers of all political backgrounds – so too were the women and girls involved in this process. There exists therefore a wealth of sources in the form of articles, reviews, manuals<sup>645</sup>, and other forms of discourse<sup>646</sup>, along with the comtesse's works and correspondence, to help us to understand where she and her little girls fit in. This chapter will therefore aim to incorporate new methodology on identity from the New Biography school, as well as from the history of the book and reading, along with the history of girls' education, into this analysis, to try to locate the comtesse de Ségur's place in girls' – and women's – culture with more confidence.

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<sup>645</sup> A sample of the comtesse's and her colleagues' reception has been taken from the *Bibliographie Catholique*, while further reviews of their work have been consulted from the major girls/ children's periodicals of the Second Empire, *Journal des Demoiselles*; their (little) sister publication, *Poupée modèle*; Hachette's *La Semaine des Enfants*; Lecoffre's *La Semaine des Familles*; *Journal des Jeunes personnes*; *Journal des enfants de Marie*

<sup>646</sup> From the writings of republican editor Hetzel; journalist Louis Veuillot; Mgr Dupanloup; and the big illustrated publications listed above.

Influenced by developments in social and gender history<sup>647</sup>, historians of girls' education have begun to look at how women teachers, and to a lesser extent (owing to lack of source material) their pupils, constructed their gendered identity<sup>648</sup>. Philippe Lejeune's pioneering research into young girls' diaries has allowed historians to build an idea of the ways in which their domestic education operated, and how within such a restricted universe young girls constructed rather timorous selves in their diaries<sup>649</sup>. The next step is to continue to expand such work via the medium of biography. Some studies of women pedagogues are now being produced.<sup>650</sup> The field of children's literature, examined from this perspective, remains under-researched, with Madeleine Lassère's excellent study of Victorine Monnot<sup>651</sup> remaining a notable exception. Literary scholarship on such authors has on the other hand been vast, and provides interesting material to work with. In particular, the work of Mitzi Myers, the saviour of English governesses, has inspired scholars of children's literature to completely rethink the way they approach such authors.<sup>652</sup> The comtesse de Ségur's

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<sup>647</sup> This paragraph is partially indebted to Rebecca Rogers, 'L'éducation des filles. Un siècle et demi d'historiographie', in *Histoire de l'éducation* 115-116 Sep 2007 Numéro spécial - L'éducation des filles XVIIIe-XXIe siècles, 37-79

<sup>648</sup> Notably the works of J.B. Margandant and Sharif Gemie on women teachers under the Third Republic, as well as more recently, Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom* and Bellaigue, *Educating Women*

<sup>649</sup> Lejeune, *Le moi des demoiselles*

<sup>650</sup> Isabelle Brouard-Arends, Marie-Emmanuelle Plagnol-Diéval (eds) *Femmes éducatrices au siècle des lumières* (Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007); Marie-Emmanuelle Plagnol-Diéval, *Madame de Genlis et le théâtre d'éducation au XVIIIe siècle* (Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 1997); and her research guide, *Madame de Genlis* (Paris and Rome, Bibliographie des écrivains français, Memini, 1996)

<sup>651</sup> Madeleine Lassère, *Victorine Monnot ou l'éducation des jeunes filles au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, entre exotisme et catholicisme de combat* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1999)

<sup>652</sup> For a full annotated bibliography of her work see Donelle Ruwe, *Culturing the Child 1660-1830: Essays in Memory of Mitzi Myers* (Maryland, Scarecrow Press, 2005); see also the more recent research by M.O. Grenby, "A Conservative Woman Doing Radical Things": Sarah Trimmer and "The Guardian of Education" in Ruwe, *Culturing the Child*, or 'Politicising the Nursery: British Children's Literature and the French Revolution', *The Lion and the Unicorn* 27 (2003), 27, 1-26

contribution to the education of girls in nineteenth and twentieth century France has been ignored by all the major works in the field.<sup>653</sup> The aim of this chapter is therefore to rectify this omission, by locating Ségur's place in the venerable "matrilineage" (to borrow from Mitzi Myers' inventive vocabulary) of women educators. In so doing, it makes an important contribution to our knowledge of the nature of the gender roles that girls were instructed to emulate, the thinking behind such literature, and how girls might have read such material. Feminist historians must overcome their repugnance towards authors such as the comtesse, for by overlooking the 'governesses' of mid-century they are not only accepting misogynist discourse on such women, but they are also ignoring an important component of girls' lives from this period.

The chapter has been greatly influenced by, and even draws its title from, the methodology of Martyn Lyons' fascinating history of reading in nineteenth century France.<sup>654</sup> In this study he places his subjects in their social context by exploiting the dual meaning of 'reading'. When Lyons looks at the reading practices of workers, women and peasants, he also asks how they were 'read' by bourgeois moralists as a social problem. This had serious implications for what and how they read. Likewise, the following section will ask how the comtesse and her governess colleagues were 'read', and analyse the ways in which this affected how they constructed their identities. It then asks in the final section how young girls were supposed to read their books, so as to tentatively suggest what the legacy of the comtesse de Ségur's model little girls might have been for modern girlhood.

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<sup>653</sup> See the introduction to this thesis

<sup>654</sup> Martyn Lyons, *Readers and Society in Nineteenth-Century France. Workers, Women, Peasants* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001)

## I.

### The Mother Educator and “Governess” Literature

Madame de Ségur’s public self was a carefully crafted, and well-maintained performance. Notions of how and why women authors ought to write, and little girls ought to read, permeated this image of the author that she created. She was entering into an already crowded market place. Women had for over a hundred years been prominent in the production of books for the nursery, wresting the genre from male authors such as Fénelon and Perrault. There were still some men writing very successfully, notably Berquin, followed by his protégé Nicholas Bouilly, and latterly the editor Hetzel under the pseudonym P-J Stahl. However, it was a genre in which there was now a strong feminine tradition. Governess literature, as it was known, had produced a clutch of celebrities, and spawned a mass of imitators. It had been developed together by French and English women (as well as through translation, their travels as governesses provided opportunities for cross-fertilisation) by such authors as Sarah Fielding and Madame le Prince de Beaumont, followed by Stéphanie de Genlis, Sarah Trimmer, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Maria Edgeworth, amongst many others, from the mid eighteenth century onwards. The label “governess” illustrates the close relationship between this literature and the education profession. Over a third of the women authors in France for the period 1750-1830 were governess, or teachers of some description.<sup>655</sup> Most famously, Madame de Genlis had been the governess of the Duke of Orléan’s children, including the future King Louis-Philippe. The defining characteristics of governess literature are; that it has an educational aim; it is written for young children; it is centred upon maternal mentors, (reflecting the new authority invested in

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<sup>655</sup> Havelange ‘La littérature destinée aux demoiselles 1750-1830’, p 28

motherhood); and it develops particularly ‘feminine’ religious or moral concerns rather than overtly intellectual ones.<sup>656</sup> While their work had beaten a path for successors, such women had also inevitably provoked a backlash of male ridicule at their pretensions. Similarly, the growing appetite of girls for literature was accompanied by fears as to the effects upon society. However, the generation of governesses had in mid-century several positive images of womanhood to draw upon, as the obsession with the mother educator reached its height, and the religious revival provided celibate women with a cultural model for an active, public life.

We are familiar with nineteenth century neuroses concerning the moral dangers presented by women reading, which provided Flaubert with such rich material for *Madame Bovary*<sup>657</sup>. If women were at risk of corruption from books, then in the eyes of moralists young girls’ reading matter could be a matter of life and death. Take for example the dire warnings issued to parents in *La Semaine des Familles*, in which they describe in detail the dangers that could befall such vulnerable readers exposed to the iniquities of the modern novel. One young victim commits suicide, while Eugène Sue’s *Mystères de Paris* drives another mad<sup>658</sup>. Parents were advised to ensure their sons’ faculties of reasoning were developed enough to withstand the temptations of literature, but their daughters were not considered capable of such sophistication. Exposure to novels could therefore be fatal.<sup>659</sup> Cautionary tales like these were commonplace. The Second Empire proved the high watermark of the restrictive education model for well-to-do young girls that consisted of keeping them in absolute

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<sup>656</sup> Myers, ‘Impeccable Governesses’, pp 34-5

<sup>657</sup> Lyons, *Readers and Society*, pp 86-91

<sup>658</sup> ‘La lecture des romans’, *Semaine des Familles*, December 4<sup>th</sup> 1858, p 154

<sup>659</sup> *Semaine des Familles*, December 29<sup>th</sup> 1860, p 194

ignorance to preserve their purity.<sup>660</sup> This of course, as discussed in chapter three, had a massive impact upon book production. Editorial policy was dictated to a certain extent by readers. The editor of Hachette's children's magazine, *La Semaine des enfants* explained to the comtesse that he received from letters from their subscribers, asking him to keep his content as pure as possible.<sup>661</sup> He also, in a subsequent memo however, admitted that while he felt her recent book was utterly inappropriate for girls, these same readers still bought Ségur's books, because they had faith in her name.<sup>662</sup> An author's reputation was absolutely crucial.

Those charged with writing for such a delicate reading public were not only subject to intense scrutiny, they were also easy targets for ridicule. Their books were derided for being so safe as to be excruciatingly dull. The editor Hetzel waged a passionate campaign to “remplacer la littérature de gouvernante et de fruit sec qui nous suffisait autrefois par quelque chose de sain et de simple, qui pût au moins donner le goût du meilleur.”<sup>663</sup> Louis Veillot echoed his sentiments. He regularly complained about these battalions of spinsters whose abysmal offerings were giving good books a bad name, “bref, le défaut presque invariable de ces sortes de livres est d'être composés par des célibataires qui ne connaissent ni la vie, ni le monde, ni la littérature, et souvent pas même le grammaire”.<sup>664</sup> The hoary old stereotypes of women authors came into play. They were haunted by the spectre of the bluestocking. Rogers' chapter on mid-century educators gives a good idea of the criticisms women pedagogues faced.<sup>665</sup> She reproduces Daumier's caricatures from the 1840's, which

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<sup>660</sup> Knibiehler et al, *De la pucelle à la minette*, p 91

<sup>661</sup> Letter from Théodore Barrau to the comtesse de Ségur, March 1863, *Oeuvres* 1:LXXXVI

<sup>662</sup> Internal memo, undated, *Oeuvres* 1:LXXXVII

<sup>663</sup> Quoted in Van Praag, *La littérature pour la jeunesse*, pp 186-7

<sup>664</sup> Louis Veillot, 'Les contes de Madame de Ségur', p 423; Pierrard, *Louis Veillot*, pp 22-24

<sup>665</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom*, pp 83-107

suggested such women posed a threat to social order. His bluestockings teach their charges ideas beyond their role in life, producing ridiculous unsexed creatures, who are utterly unmarriageable. The venom reserved for the “spinsters” who wrote for children contrasted sharply with the exaltation of the mother educator in this same period. Writing for children was second best, suspect even. On the other hand, female pedagogues could also draw upon a more favourable discourse, as in writing for children they were operating within the boundaries imposed upon their gender. They could associate their work with that of the mother educator, and claim that their writing was an extension of their maternal role. Paradoxically, the obsession with the private sphere provided women with substantial professional opportunities. The discourse on feminine domesticity was also big business in the mid- nineteenth century – this period saw a veritable boom in education manuals, etiquette books and so on. The feminine private sphere was not only held up to intense scrutiny, but also packaged for public consumption. Negotiating this contradiction was no easy task, but it was certainly possible.

To do so, they needed to distinguish themselves from the old stalwarts of governess literature, who were falling out of favour with the growing Catholic reviewing system<sup>666</sup>, but also the reading public. For example, having dominated the market in the first half the nineteenth century, Madame de Genlis’s popularity had begun to wane.<sup>667</sup> Reviewers regularly complained about the dearth of appropriate reading matter available. The emphasis on rationalism and reason to be found in Governess literature from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century had also earned them a reputation for being rather too dull for

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<sup>666</sup> See chapter two

<sup>667</sup> Plagnol-Diéval, *Madame de Genlis*, Introduction



children. Perhaps more damning in the eyes of Catholics was that the big names were perceived to bear the taint of the Enlightenment. In the case of Madame de Genlis, this extended to accusations of libertinism (it was even suggested that her education of Louis-Philippe had included his sexual initiation<sup>668</sup>). They were suspected of lacking religion. Gaston de Ségur accused Madame de Genlis of being associated with the freemasons,<sup>669</sup> while the *Bibliographie Catholique* picked her up for referring to God as the Supreme Being. The same review berates Berquin for only mentioning God very occasionally, and rejects Madame Guizot because she is Protestant.<sup>670</sup> Similarly, the *Journal des Demoiselles* complained Madame Guizot was “trop froide et raisonnable”, while Berquin, “n’est pas religieux”.<sup>671</sup> While the conventions of governess literature still influenced the new generation, a perceptible shift had taken place, as the Catholic revival in France took hold. The new generation of successful women authors distinguished themselves from their predecessors because they were overwhelmingly Catholic. More than simply religious – religion had always played an important role in the pedagogy of the nursery – they were now militantly so<sup>672</sup>. Catholic concern about unsuitable books led to the great spurt in ‘good book’ production 1830-1870.<sup>673</sup> Girls’ literature was swept up and carried along by this new impetus.

It is in this context that the comtesse de Ségur sought to create her identity. The main way in which she constructed her public image was in the dedications at the front of each of her

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<sup>668</sup> Plagnol-Diéval, *Madame de Genlis*, p 101

<sup>669</sup> Hédouville, *Mgr de Ségur*, p 548

<sup>670</sup> *Bibliographie Catholique* 1854-55, Review of the Bibliotheque des chemins de fer

<sup>671</sup> Mathilde Bourdon, review of the early works of the comtesse de Ségur, *Journal des demoiselles*

<sup>672</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom*, chapter three; Havelange, ‘La littérature destinée aux demoiselles 1750-1830’, p 37

<sup>673</sup> Artiaga, ‘Les catholiques et la littérature “industrielle” au XIXe siècle’; chapter two of this thesis

storybooks. She later fleshed out these brief sketches into a proper self-portrait in her apologetic series. It is necessary therefore to return to the opening quotation of chapter one of this thesis, where Madame de Ségur introduced herself to her public in the preface to *Nouveaux contes de fées*<sup>674</sup>. It is addressed to two specific girl readers, her granddaughters Camille and Madeleine. She explains that these are the stories she used to tell them, and that she has now committed to paper. The two girls will be able to remember their grandmother as they read her books. She draws upon the traditional image of the old woman, telling bedtime stories to a gathering of little children. Evoking timeless tradition is reassuring, as is her emphasis on the presence of the doting grandmother. The fairy tale tradition of the old storyteller is not always particularly reputable however<sup>675</sup>, and so here she gives a modern, sanitised re-working of the old storyteller. The author is a genuine aristocrat, but she represents herself in an intimate setting, with a small family of two granddaughters, rendered in an affectionate tone. She exhorts her “chères petites” to think of their “vieille grand-mère”, who wants nothing more than to please them. Louis Veuillot noted the strangeness of this image the illustrious aristocrat painted of herself, as an old granny, bouncing children on her knee. He was clearly impressed that “un esprit si cultivé, si haut et si fier, se plie avec d’autant de charme à ces simplicités et à ces enfances de grand’maman.”<sup>676</sup> In this way, Ségur aligned herself with the new sentimental mother figure who had replaced the distant, aristocratic mode of motherhood, and was gaining favour in elite families, including that of the royal family of the July Monarchy, and the imperial family of the current regime.<sup>677</sup>

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<sup>674</sup> See chapter one

<sup>675</sup> Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, introduction

<sup>676</sup> ‘Les contes de Madame de Ségur’ *L’Univers*

<sup>677</sup> For a discussion of this new symbol of elite motherhood, see J-B Margadant, ‘The Duchesse de Berry and Royalist Political Culture in Postrevolutionary France’, Margadant (ed) *The New Biography*; Havelange ‘La littérature destinée aux demoiselles 1750-1830’, p 33

Moreover, the comtesse refers to her advanced age, not only to recall the origins of storytelling, but also to emphasise that she is fulfilling her biological role. Ségur draws attention to the fact that she is not neglecting her maternal duties, as they are over, and she has now assumed the new role of the wise old grandmother. In so doing, she reassures readers that she neither a spinster nor a governess, nor a mercenary of any sort. She can still lay claim to the glorious mantle of her maternity. To reinforce this, Ségur's emphasis is above all on the private nature of these writings, produced only accidentally, even reluctantly, for the public sphere. Her dedications are always written for her grandchildren, she never acknowledges that her books are written for a public audience. The image of the comtesse as a private, rather than a professional writer resonated with the ideal of humble Christian womanhood. When the monument to the comtesse was erected in the Jardin du Luxembourg in 1910, *Le Figaro* echoed approvingly the sentiments expressed by the committee, "le caractère presque familial que devait avoir cette fête, consacrée à une femme "qui n'a cherché ni le bruit ni l'éclat" et qui en ne songeant qu'à égayer ses petits enfants, a accompli l'une des oeuvres les plus bien-faisantes du dix-neuvième siècle"<sup>678</sup>

The comtesse's humble identity was a creation she took great care to cultivate. While her prefaces offered fleeting glimpses of the author, in her Bible series she developed a full self-portrait. In *Évangile d'une grand'mère* (1865) she introduced the reader into her 'real' home life. She did this by framing her version of the New Testament with a second narrative which featured herself as narrator, surrounded by all her grandchildren, to whom she is reading the Bible out loud. Then, in the opening scene of the second in the series, *Les Actes des Apôtres*

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<sup>678</sup> 'Le monument de la comtesse de Ségur', G Davenay, *Le Figaro* 20<sup>th</sup> June 1910

(1867), we are shown into her room, where we find the famous comtesse de Ségur writing. Her grandchildren are at her feet, playing with her books and constantly interrupting her. The author answers their questions patiently. When one child tries to read from the apostles, which she finds in her grandmother's books by her writing desk, she has difficulties with the words, and here we have the premise for the narrative to begin. "Grand'mère" promises to read it to the children tomorrow.<sup>679</sup> Ségur thus further emphasised the link between her profession as a writer, and her biological role in life. This is made explicit in the dedication of her *Bible d'une grand'mère* (1869), which promises her grandchildren that she will now set to writing the lives of the saints for them, "j'aurai ainsi travaillé jusqu'à la fin pour ceux que j'aime et auxquels je dois le bonheur de cinquante années de maternité."<sup>680</sup> Moreover, these portraits make it clear that she draws her inspiration from Christian sources – her writing table is laden with holy books. It was no accident that she chose the Bible series in which to reveal herself most fully. This was the image that the comtesse wanted to be recorded for posterity.

The overwhelming insistence on writing as a selfless exercise that she engaged in only for the good of her grandchildren was an important fiction not only for her public, but also for herself. This ideal of the endlessly devoted grandmother was impossible. It exhausted the comtesse, and she reproached herself for not being able to live up to her persona. Indeed, her public image was a paradox; the professional author could not write while her children played at her feet and pestered her. As described in chapter three, the whole publication process, and particularly that of the Bible series, embroiled Madame de Ségur in a series of

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<sup>679</sup> Comtesse de Ségur, *Les Actes des Apôtres*, (Paris, Hachette, 1867), Introduction

<sup>680</sup> Comtesse de Ségur, *Bible d'une Grand'mère*, (Paris, Hachette, 1869) Dedication

protracted struggles to achieve the product that she wanted. Similarly, she scabbled to find precious writing time amongst her duties as a wife, mother and grandmother.

Correspondence with her daughter is filled with references to her frustration at having to look after her husband or various grandchildren, when she had a book to finish for Hachette. The writing of *Pauvre Blaise*, for example, was seriously hampered by looking after her granddaughters and helping Camille de Malaret prepare her first communion, “c’est un va-et-vient dans ma chambre... je n’ai pas deux heures pour écrire.”<sup>681</sup> At the same time, her husband had a series of strokes, and she found herself “clouée à Paris”, in order to nurse him. The comtesse was forced to write by gaslight, after the comte had gone to bed.<sup>682</sup> It took her one year to complete *Pauvre Blaise* in comparison to her normal rate of at least two manuscripts per year. Similarly, when the incompetence of her newborn grandson’s nurses meant she had to look after him instead, she complained “j’ai dû perdre mes plus belles heures d’écriture... depuis deux jours je suis dans une impatience intérieure continue de n’avoir pas une heure tranquille à donner à mes lettres... mon coeur tressaille d’impatience et mon esprit devient infernal.”<sup>683</sup> Moreover, we know from the inventory compiled of their Paris apartment following the death of the comte de Ségur in 1863, that when she was engaged in writing her storybooks the books beside the comtesse’s writing materials were of a more profane nature than the religious books the children innocently pick up. The beady eyes of her concierge noticed a bound set of Sir Walter Scott’s collected works, and

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<sup>681</sup> Letter to Olga de Pitray, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1859

<sup>682</sup> Letter to Olga de Pitray, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1860

<sup>683</sup> Letter to Olga de Pitray, 21<sup>st</sup> November 1856

Bouillet's famous encyclopaedia. He also recorded that she kept ten "half empty" bottles of liquor by her desk, which presumably served to stimulate further the comtesse's creativity.<sup>684</sup>

The touching scene in her bedroom evoked in *Les Actes des Apôtres* was a fiction that allowed the comtesse to expiate some of the guilt that she felt for resenting her feminine responsibilities. For her public, she presented her two roles as inseparable the one from the other. In private however, the comtesse expressed a sense of unease with another, more troubling self-image. A letter to one of her granddaughters refers to feeling that she had neglected her maternal duties. She had recently had her photograph taken, and was troubled by the woman she saw, "c'est ennuyeux pour moi, qui ai négligé toute la famille pour passer à la posterité comme un tigre dévorant ou une portière avinée."<sup>685</sup> This image of ferocity and drunkenness, far removed from the submissive Christian mother, is echoed in the violent vocabulary she used to describe her urge to work on *Pauvre Blaise*, or the frustration she felt when prevented from writing her precious correspondence. In private the comtesse de Ségur could not always believe her fiction that she sublimated her voracious desire to write into her role of gentle grandmother, who only engaged in such an activity for the edification of her grandchildren.

Séгур's efforts to establish her reputation could also have a more playful side. She was not above engaging in rivalry with other successful 'governesses',<sup>686</sup> at the same time nodding to the fact that her writings belonged to the governess genre. Her *Mémoires d'un âne* adopted the

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<sup>684</sup> 28 July 1863, Inventaire après le décès de M. le Comte Eugène de Ségur, AN Minutier Central, ET/ CXVII/ 1295

<sup>685</sup> Letter to Élisabeth Fresneau, undated, quoted in Paul Acker, 'La comtesse de Ségur, née Rostopchine', *Revue de Paris*, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1908, 589-612, p 605

<sup>686</sup> Francis Marcoin, 'Autour de la comtesse', *Cahiers Robinson*, 9, p 30

technique of using children's toys or pets as narrators. This was a classic governess genre, first developed by Mrs Sarah Trimmer, in her bestselling tale of talking birds, *The History of the Robins* (1786).<sup>687</sup> Julie Gouraud had popularised it in France with her publishing success of the 1840's, *Mémoires d'une Poupée* (1839), and she had made it her own in numerous sequels. Thus, in her *Mémoires d'un âne* (1860), the comtesse felt the need to nod to her inspiration, but also make her own claim to originality. Midway through the story, the younger girls Henriette and Élisabeth wonder whether their clever donkey would one day write his memoirs, just like the doll whose book they enjoyed reading. Their sensible cousins Camille and Madeleine set them straight, “ne crois donc pas de pareilles bêtises ma pauvre Élisabeth; c'est une dame qui a écrit ces Mémoires d'une poupée, et, pour rendre le livre plus amusant, elle a fait semblant d'être la poupée, et d'écrire comme si elle était une poupée. ... Comment veux-tu qu'une poupée, qui n'est pas vivante, qui est faite en bois, en peau et remplie de son, puisse réfléchir, voir, entendre, écrire?”<sup>688</sup> Ségur gently teases her reader in this hall of mirrors – if dolls cannot write their memoirs then neither can donkeys. Gouraud, who also wrote for Hachette's Bibliothèque Rose, was not insensitive to such cheek. In her *Mémoires d'un caniche* (1865), the poodle puts Ségur's donkey in his place by showing how he is more mindful of the importance of Christian humility. Gouraud's dog explains to readers that he is not a “savant” as *some* animals writing their memoirs have recently claimed (the preface to *Mémoires d'un âne* had boldly argued that this book will end the long-standing injustices done to donkeys, that we will no longer think of donkeys as stupid or stubborn, rather, one will say “clever as a donkey”<sup>689</sup>) “cependant, je ne suis pas plus bête qu'un autre, et je ne vois pas pourquoi je n'écrirais pas ma petite histoire à l'exemple des poupées, des petits garçons, voir

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<sup>687</sup> Isabelle Nières-Chevrel, 'Avant-Propos', *Revue de littérature comparée*, 4 (2002) 413-420

<sup>688</sup> *Oeuvres* 1:604-5

<sup>689</sup> *Oeuvres* 1:522

même des ânes.”<sup>690</sup> This literary spat illustrates the thought which these governess authors put into their work, and how no small measure of pride was involved in their writing projects. Their literary pride inflected their choice of the genre itself. Both Ségur and Gouraud argued that by writing these memoirs they were giving the mute inhabitants of the domestic sphere a voice. Ségur’s tale declared it would change the way people perceived donkeys, sweeping away their prejudices. (Donkeys were the chic pets for little children in the upper classes, who learned to ride on them) Gouraud applied this logic to little girls. She followed *Mémoires d’une poupée* with *Mémoires d’une petite fille*, and *Mémoires d’un petit garçon* (1864). The latter opens with a tussle between a brother and sister. The sister cries that she owns a book called *Mémoires d’une petite fille*, and so he won’t be able to taunt her by calling girls stupid anymore “si tu es fier d’apprendre le latin, moi je suis fière qu’une petite fille ait écrit ses mémoires.”<sup>691</sup>

It has often been argued by the recent school of Ségur researchers that the comtesse stands apart from her fellow governesses; however, the episode above suggests that she was aware that she belonged to this school of writers. In addition, the case of the apologetic series should make us more cautious about concluding too quickly that the comtesse was subversive. Although the sales of Ségur’s apologetic works were pretty feeble in comparison to the rest of her oeuvre, they concretised the explicitly ultramontane aspect of her grandmother image. With her apologetic series, she associated her books with the Catholic Church, by seeking the approval of Archbishops and Bishops, whose letters were published in the front of *L’Évangile d’une grand’mère*. Where the comtesse, mindful of Hachette’s policy

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<sup>690</sup> Julie Gouraud, *Mémoires d’un caniche*, (Paris, Hachette, 1865) p 3

<sup>691</sup> Julie Gouraud, *Mémoires d’un petit garçon*, (Paris, Hachette, 1864) pp 3-4



of neutrality, had always remained cautious in her prefaces, the clerical authorities were keen to spell out to mothers the political importance of her books. Cardinal Donnet, Archbishop of Bordeaux wrote, “sous le rapport de l’instruction dont l’enfance est susceptible, rien ne paraît négligée par le gouvernement. Pourrion-nous en dire autant de l’éducation religieuse et morale? Combien l’intérieur des familles qui devrait façonner le coeur de l’enfant en lui imprimant l’amour de Dieu, ne laisse-t-il pas à désirer?” Ségur’s Bible was an important remedy to this problem. Moreover, he situated the work firmly at the forefront of the culture wars. He hailed her orthodox interpretation of scripture as the perfect antidote to the scurrilous efforts of the likes of Ernest Renan, “cet *Évangile d’une grand’mère* apparaît fort à propos à la suite des réfutations du moderne arianisme publiées par les évêques et des savants et consciencieux publicistes.”<sup>692</sup>

The Christian grandmother was an image that was received with enthusiasm by reviewers. Following the publication of her *L’Évangile*, the *Bibliographie Catholique* declared (erroneously as it turned out) that she had now written the book that would be the most useful and widely read. “Mme la comtesse de Ségur nous a, depuis longtemps, habitués aux excellents ouvrages d’éducation dus à sa plume élégante, facile et tout à fait à la portée du jeune âge. Ce nouveau volume, approuvé par sept archevêques et évêques, sera l’un des plus goûtés, et peut-être le plus utile pour ceux auxquels il s’adresse.”<sup>693</sup> Subsequent reviewers wrote paeans to the comtesse, the grandmother: “Infatigable dans son dévouement à la jeunesse et à la religion, Mme la comtesse de Ségur nous offre une suite à *l’Évangile d’une grand’mère* dont nous avons rendu compte il y a un an. *Nous offre*, non pas à nous précisément, mais aux chers petits

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<sup>692</sup> Cardinal Donnet, Archbishop of Bordeaux, letter dated 5<sup>th</sup> November 1865, published as preface to *L’Évangile d’une grand’mère*

<sup>693</sup> Review of *Évangile d’une grand’mère* by V. Postel, *Bibliographie Catholique*, 35, April 1866

enfants qui débutent dans la vie, et qu'il importe d'y introduire par la voie sûre et solide de l'instruction chrétienne... Sage pourtant, savante, et excellente, et douce, et patiente, la grand'mère!"<sup>694</sup> This portrait of the grandmother really captured the clerical imagination – they now had a face to put to the “nom devenu familier et cher à l'enfance”.<sup>695</sup>

Madame de Segur's fellow 'governesses' of the Second Empire shared her ultramontane identity. Zenaïde Fleuriot (1829-1889) was in fact much more outspoken than Ségur. Her first book, *Souvenirs d'une douarière* (1859) explained “à mes lectrices, ... ces essais je vous les dédie, en m'unissant à ces courageux écrivains qui ont accepté la mission d'épurer la littérature, en la remplaçant sur ses deux immortelles bases: la religion et la morale.”<sup>696</sup>

Fleuriot's energetic literary identity was rather different to Ségur's. She was a governess, not a mother. She hailed from an old Breton family whose steadfast royalism had led to its ruin in the 1830's. Her father encouraged her to read, and latterly, to write. Her Breton identity permeated her writings, which are filled with references to the sea, and her love of her country's raw beauty. She wrote that, as a Breton, piety was as natural to her as breathing.<sup>697</sup> Fleuriot's epitaph summed her life up thus “j'ai cru, c'est pourquoi j'ai parlé”.<sup>698</sup> She also described her mission using the militant vocabulary of the Catholicism of the culture wars. When she helped launch a new journal, *La Famille* – an illustrated magazine concerned chiefly with domestic economy and fashion – she announced its vision thus, “il sera un soldat de plus dans la grande armée qui défend dans la société la cause du beau, du bien, du

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<sup>694</sup> Review of *Actes des Apôtres*, *Bibliographie Catholique*, 37, April 1867

<sup>695</sup> Review of *Après la pluie, le beau temps* by A. Vissac, *Bibliographie Catholique*, 45, June 1872

<sup>696</sup> Zenaïde Fleuriot, *Souvenirs d'une douarière*, (Paris, Dentu, 1859) preface

<sup>697</sup> Such images were popular in her reception, see Anne le Drunot, *Mlle Zenaïde Fleuriot, 1829-1890* (1990) pp 30-33

<sup>698</sup> Le Drunot, *Mlle Zenaïde Fleuriot*, p 25

vrai; une voix juste de plus dans le magnifique concert des intelligences; ce désir est assez bon, cette tâche assez belle. En résumé, il fera tous ses efforts pour se montrer digne de son titre: *La Famille*.”<sup>699</sup> Even the most banal domestic activities were co-opted into the battle against dechristianisation. For Fleuriot, her writing was a profession, but also a serious contribution to what she saw as a struggle to the last.

Just as the comtesse received the support of Louis Veillot and her family, Zenaïde Fleuriot was also part of a network of ultramontane writers and publishers. She had been first helped in her literary career by Alfred Nettement, a writer who collaborated closely with the publisher Jacques Lecoffre. She remained close to both men, and would eventually take over the direction of the house journal, *La Semaine des Familles*.<sup>700</sup> Her work received accolades in books published by Lecoffre and written by Nettement<sup>701</sup> and Henri Jouin<sup>702</sup>, both influential critics of the time. They hailed her contribution to Catholic efforts to missionise France. She had initially been very much a product of the Lecoffre stable, “je comptais sur lui. Il allait prendre en main mes affaires littéraires, et comme il était très religieux et très consciencieux, je n’avais qu’à le laisser faire.”<sup>703</sup> Thus it was with reticence that Fleuriot began to write for Hachette in 1873. She was conscious that she was entering a rather different, commercial

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<sup>699</sup> *La Famille. Journal illustré de la mode et de la vie domestique*, first issue, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1868, quoted in Le Drunot, *Mlle Zenaïde Fleuriot*, p 15

<sup>700</sup> See Fleuriot-Kerinou, *Zenaïde Fleuriot*, especially chapters 4, 15

<sup>701</sup> See entries for Zenaïde Fleuriot and Mathilde Bourdon in the section entitled ‘l’idée catholique dans le roman’ in Alfred Nettement’s polemic, *Le roman contemporain. Ses vicissitudes, ses divers aspects, son influence* (Paris, Librairie Jacques Lecoffre, 1864)

<sup>702</sup> Henri Jouin, *Mademoiselle Z. Fleuriot. Du rôle des femmes dans la littérature populaire*, (Paris, Librairie Jacques Lecoffre, 1871)

<sup>703</sup> Letter from Zenaïde Fleuriot to her sister Marie, 19<sup>th</sup> January 1866, Fleuriot-Kerinou, *Zenaïde Fleuriot*, p 140

world.<sup>704</sup> However, like Ségur, her work continued to be dominated by religious concerns.<sup>705</sup> Indeed, just like the comtesse, she became something of a Catholic celebrity, and was surprised by the extent to which she was fêted in Rome, “je ne me croyais pas vraiment si connue”<sup>706</sup>. Her fiction set during the Franco-Prussian War, *Aigle et Colombe* (1871), received both the Pope’s blessing and the Académie Française’s Montyon Prize. Following a crisis in 1867, Fleuriot felt tired of the world and considered taking the veil. She was instructed not to do so by the Jesuit priest Père Olivaint, but to return instead to her desk and dip her pen in holy water. As he said, she had the spiritual wellbeing of her 500,000 readers to consider.<sup>707</sup> Both the case of the comtesse and Zenaïde Fleuriot demonstrate that these ‘governesses’ were far from rose-water writers. They were professionals, and were respected by their masculine peers.

Madeleine Lassère’s book on Victorine Monniot<sup>708</sup> brings to light another militant Catholic personality amongst these writers who peopled the nursery. Also a former governess, the success of her first book *Le Journal de Marguerite* (1859) allowed Monniot to devote all her time to writing. Hers was an austere religion, rather different to that of Ségur, or any of the books to be found by Gouraud or Fleuriot in the *Bibliothèque Rose*. There was to be no light entertainment in what she saw as “le grave sujet de l’éducation, de l’enfance et de la

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<sup>704</sup> Caroline Rouxel, *Zenaïde Fleuriot ou Le parcours d’un écrivain catholique pour la jeunesse au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Mémoire de Master de littérature jeunesse, Université du Maine, septembre 2005 Unpublished, p 66

<sup>705</sup> Chupeau, ‘L’école des premiers livres: les romans de Zenaïde Fleuriot et la formation de la jeunesse catholique’

<sup>706</sup> Letter from Zenaïde Fleuriot to the Reverend Mother of the Auxiliatrices Marie de la Providence, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1870, Fleuriot-Kerinou, *Zenaïde Fleuriot*, p 282

<sup>707</sup> Le Drunot, *Mlle Zenaïde Fleuriot*, pp 16, 7

<sup>708</sup> Lassère, *Victorine Monniot*

jeunesse”.<sup>709</sup> Thus, most of her books were long, and not illustrated. Even *Le Journal de Marguerite* did not receive any visual decoration until ten years later. She was a dolourist, and defiantly so in the face of critical reservations about the suitability of such an approach for little girls. The *Journal* does not flinch from describing the tragic death of a baby, or from killing off the protagonist’s dearest friend. A review in *La Poupée modèle* for example warned mothers not to give *Le Journal de Marguerite* to sensitive children.<sup>710</sup> The preface to its sequel, *Marguerite à vingt ans*, explained to her readers, “je vous préviens que ce livre n’est point un livre amusant. Des voix attentives, des voix amies se faisant, dans mon intérêt, l’écho des différents jugements du public sur *Le Journal de Marguerite*, m’ont répété ce mot: “trop triste... trop triste”. Et, moi, je répons: “c’est la vie.”<sup>711</sup> Monniot was also a fervent Ultramontane, unflagging in her devotion to the Pope. She expresses her most fervent and militant belief “pratiquement dans chacun de ses livres”. This devotion was centred on the personality cult of Pius IX. For example, in *Marguerite à vingt ans*, Marguerite is depicted praying beneath a bust of Pius IX, “en un mot, cette suave et majestueuse figure de Pie IX rappelle l’adorable image du Sauveur”.<sup>712</sup>

Both Fleuriot and Monniot clearly struggled with the stigma of remaining unmarried. Although Fleuriot had been attracted to the idea of becoming a nun, the usual destiny of her literary heroines was marriage. Family disaster, or lack of physical charm might intervene however, and she portrays with sympathy girls whose lives are devoted to their family or charity, but it is always second best. Monniot defended her status of old maid ferociously in

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<sup>709</sup> Introduction to her *Simple tableaux de l’éducation maternelle*, quoted in Lassère, *Victorine Monniot*, p 35

<sup>710</sup> Review of *Le Journal de Marguerite*, *La Poupée Modèle*, March 1864

<sup>711</sup> Victorine Monniot, *Marguerite à vingt ans*, preface, quoted in Lassère, *Victorine Monniot*, p 34

<sup>712</sup> Lassère, *Victorine Monniot*, pp 88-89

*Notre Seigneur Jesus-Christ, etudes et meditations pour les jeunes filles* 1874, “se peut-il que jamais, par choix, l’on embrasse la vie solitaire et décolorée de la vieille fille? [...] L’auriez-vous constituée une sorte de paria dans la grande famille chrétienne? Non, non, Seigneur Jésus [...] elle aime ce que Vous avez voulu et, l’aimant, elle est heureuse! [...] La vieille fille a donc cet avantage sur la mère de famille et même sur la religieuse qu’elle a vu faire son sort uniquement par la main de Dieu.”<sup>713</sup> Still, both women received the endorsement of the clerical authorities, including the Pope, as well as the Académie Française. The Father Olivaint had even dissuaded Fleuriot from taking the veil. Their work was important to the Church, and as such they carved out a positive identity for themselves.

Thus it becomes clear that there was a constellation of at least several authors who stood out from the crowd, and that the comtesse de Ségur belongs to this group. They found warm support for their militant work. Julie Gouraud, Zenaïde Fleuriot, Victorine Monniot, and the comtesse de Ségur all wrote (for the most part) with their real names,<sup>714</sup> and constructed very recognisable and individual identities. Alongside Ségur’s grandmother storyteller was the pious Breton Zenaïde Fleuriot, the proudly literary Julie Gouraud, and the dolourist Victorine Monniot. Interesting and forceful personalities, they drew upon accepted images of women (mother educator, and Catholic militant) and the notion of women’s natural piety, to create public identities for themselves. These women formed an integral part of French upper class and bourgeois girlhood in the second half of the nineteenth century:

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<sup>713</sup> *Ibid*, p 25

<sup>714</sup> Although Fleuriot wrote under the name Anna Ediane de L\*\*\* de S-B until 1866

Lejeune notes that Monniot's book was the "roman-culte" for girls,<sup>715</sup> while in 1910 Jules Lemaitre referred to a girl who "possède parfaitement sa Bibliothèque Rose."<sup>716</sup>

The governesses' ultramontane identity was not lost on their readers either. Isabelle, one of Ségur's young correspondents, felt sure that her "chère Madame de Ségur" would appreciate a relic from the sacred shrine of Notre Dame de La Salette.<sup>717</sup> Moreover, although neither the comtesse de Ségur or Zenaïde Fleuriot were officially made a saint after their deaths, in the eyes of some of their readers, this minor detail was immaterial. They were women who had devoted their lives to the good of children and their families, and so were clearly people who would look down favourably upon the troubles of those still in this world. Arnold Van Gennep records how women and girls would go to Ségur's grave to pray for a husband or a baby, or to ask for a cure. Her tomb was covered with children's crutches, babies' bonnets, and sheets from invalids' beds, left as ex-voto by grateful pilgrims. The grave of Zenaïde Fleuriot was believed to have similar powers.<sup>718</sup> As Van Gennep notes, young girls prayed to these 'imitation saints' precisely because they were perceived to be protectors of children and youth<sup>719</sup>. The vocation of children's writer, at this time, held special spiritual connotations; and their readers were encouraged to see them as latter-day saints, engaged in the wider struggle to save the nation's soul.

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<sup>715</sup> Lejeune, *Le moi des demoiselles*, p 19

<sup>716</sup> Jules Lemaitre, speech for the inauguration ceremony of the comtesse de Ségur's monument in the Jardin de Luxembourg, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1910, reproduced in his *Les Contemporains. Études et portraits littéraires. Huitième Série* (Paris, Oudin, 1918)

<sup>717</sup> See section II of this chapter

<sup>718</sup> Arnold Van Gennep, *Manuel de folklore français contemporain* (Paris, Éditions Auguste Picard, 1943), 1: 243

<sup>719</sup> *Ibid*

It seems fitting to conclude this section with the image of Gouraud's Catherine, proudly brandishing her book, written by a little girl just like her. This proved that boys were wrong to call girls stupid. These generations of governess authors created a distinctly feminine culture, and with this came a sense of self-esteem for such women. It remains to ask how this flourishing genre – which thanks to the publishing boom was reaching more girls than ever – might have impacted upon girls constructing their gendered identities as they grew up reading such books.

## II. “Moi je suis fière qu’une petite fille ait écrit ses mémoires”: Books for Model Girls

Following the publication of her book *Petites Filles modèles* in 1858, Madame de Ségur received a letter from a young girl named Isabelle.<sup>720</sup>

“Dans cette épître, la jeune correspondante demandait si les deux petites filles modèles existaient *pour de bon*, car sa maman les lui citait comme exemples et Isabelle ne pouvait croire que des enfants aussi sages vécussent autrement que sur le papier. Ma mère répondit aimablement à cette naïve question, et depuis cette époque il s’établit entre l’enfant et la conteuse une correspondance qui fut fidèle et animée pendant longtemps.”

This fragment of a correspondence, now lost, whets the historian's appetite. It provides a glimpse of how readers might have responded to her books, and engaged with the idea of the comtesse herself. It also shows that Ségur was happy to communicate with her young fan base. However, what it really demonstrates are the difficulties historians face when trying to trace the voice of readers like Isabelle, the model little girls of Second Empire France. Not only are the sources all too often missing, but those that do exist appear only as further

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<sup>720</sup> Letter quoted in Olga de Pitray, *Mon bon Gaston*, pp 159-60



reflections of the same model. We might just as well ask whether we could believe that readers as perfect as Isabelle existed anywhere other than on paper. Her letters – entirely deliberately (this was the only example of the comtesse’s fan mail selected for publication by Ségur’s daughter) – exemplify the intended relationship between Madame de Ségur and her readership. Educated by her mother, at least partly at home, Isabelle is instructed to emulate the behaviour of Camille and Madeleine, thus replicating the scenario of the book. *Petites Filles modèles* was designed to furnish mother educators with rich material for their task. The daughter is much impressed by these heroines, but despairs of ever attaining their perfection. However, as Ségur explains in the dedication to the book, “elles existent bien réellement...Camille et Madeleine sont une réalité dont peut s’assurer toute personne qui connaît l’auteur.”<sup>721</sup> She practically invites the reader to check the veracity of her portraits, and so this young reader takes her up on her offer. Isabelle’s mother further developed the pedagogical exercise, by encouraging her daughter to send the letter to the comtesse.

The correspondence continues, “dans une de ses lettres, Isabelle racontait à ma mère qu’elle avait été en pèlerinage à Notre-Dame de la Salette et qu’on lui avait donné là un fragment de rocher sur lequel ‘la belle dame’ était assise, toute pleurante! La pieuse enfant était d’autant plus charmée d’avoir ce souvenir qu’elle voulait partager son trésor avec sa chère Madame de Ségur, et elle lui envoya un petit médaillon contenant la moitié de ce qu’elle avait reçu. Ma mère, fort touchée de cette attention si aimable, me le montra et le conserva soigneusement.”

As the relationship between writer and reader develops, it is articulated in the religious vocabulary of the period – one that is typically described as “feminised”. The childish

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<sup>721</sup> *Oeuvres* 1: 119

description of the Virgin as a “belle dame... toute pleurante” is typical of the tone of the Ségur family biographies. Like the young visionaries of La Salette, and the naïve rhetoric of ultramontanism the Ségurs used, Isabelle represents an innocent piety. She has read this religion in the comtesse’s books, and so she eagerly shares her spiritual experience with the author. Here in Isabelle’s letter we find all the ingredients of how Ségur and her family hoped girls would read her books, and indeed, perceive the comtesse herself.

The aim of this section is to shed some light on the reading experiences of real girls of the time (and to tentatively question whether they really did flounder in the sticky “marmalade” of nursery literature, as Ernest Charles would have it) using the comtesse de Ségur’s writings and those of her colleagues as a window onto such readers. Undertaking to analyse girls’ ‘real’ responses to their books would be fraught with difficulties, if possible at all<sup>722</sup>. Moreover, while we possess a large amount of discourse on the comtesse and her readership, source material concerning these young girls directly is almost non-existent, or at best fragmentary. Apart from Isabelle, the rest of the comtesse’s fan mail has either been destroyed, sold, or lost.<sup>723</sup> The main sources used by historians, *journaux intimes*, are of little help. Such diaries do not mention reading Ségur, as her books are aimed at the 4-12 age group, and girls generally took up writing diaries around the time they were preparing their first communion, aged 12 or 13. Mothers may occasionally mention Ségur in their correspondence however, as in the case of Zélie Martin, mother of the future girl saint,

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<sup>722</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (London, Macmillan, 1984)

<sup>723</sup> There is no mention of this, or any other, fan mail in subsequent biographies, or in the *Cabiers Séguriens*. The Hachette archives at the IMEC do not contain any such letters, even from more recent readers

Thérèse Martin,<sup>724</sup> but such references tend to be brief. Then there are Sigmund Freud's patients from turn of the century Vienna who, within the privacy of the doctor patient relationship, could reveal how her books stimulated their erotic fantasies.<sup>725</sup> However, it seems a little dramatic to draw conclusions about her readers using the testimonies of those who sought the help of a psychoanalyst. The vast majority of descriptions of reading the comtesse's books come from subsequent generations. Such material is fascinating but immediately brings a new set of problems of interpretation. We risk skating blithely over a period of 150 years, comparing the responses of readers from wildly different contexts, and making assumptions about reactions which may well be difficult to decipher. For example, author and right-wing anarchist Gyp makes several references to the comtesse in her novels. Interpreting the intended meaning of her references to the comtesse, and how this may relate to her girlhood experiences, from such tiny drops in a huge oeuvre is a hazardous enterprise. The bitter description of a tomboy being forced by her French governess to write "foolish" dictations from *Petites Filles modèles* as punishment, in Radclyffe Hall's lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) is perhaps a little easier to understand.<sup>726</sup> This problem is particularly acute when dealing with childhood, as sources tend to be written once the subjects are older, and so reflect adult concerns. They also, partly due to the tricks our memories play on us, but often on purpose, draw upon accepted cultural narratives of childhood.

This is how Martyn Lyons' emphasis on always looking at how various groups were 'read' by society is useful. Such an approach can be used for Ségur's oeuvre. The books girls were

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<sup>724</sup> Zélie Martin, *Correspondance familiale 1863-1887*, (Office de Lisieux, 1958)

<sup>725</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'A Child is being beaten'

<sup>726</sup> Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness*, (London, Wordsworth Classics, 2006) p 47

given, how they were taught to read them, and the ways in which they related such material to the outside world, were all determined by intermediaries: by adults such as teachers, parents, or clergy, but also by peer pressure, or from siblings. Whether they are given books is partially determined by political, or ideological concerns, and so the image of the comtesse de Ségur in the eyes of the public plays a crucial role in shaping her readership's response, even their access to the texts. If locating anything close to a 'real' response to Second Empire governess literature is impossible, this section will try to look at girls' reading in a more oblique manner instead. The questions to ask then are, what reading models were being presented to them? Why were authors like Ségur interested in writing books for girls? How did they want girls to interpret them?

The Christian girl was encouraged to read little and read well, according to Bishop Dupanloup's famous dictum.<sup>727</sup> Once boys from well-off families reached the age of reason, at seven, they left the confines of the nursery and commenced their more cerebral education. This was designed to prepare them for public life. The most important difference was the depth and intellectual rigour of such studies, and that they learned Latin. Without Latin, a student could not sit for the *baccalauréat*, and so girls were effectively barred from higher education. Girls' reading however, although circumscribed, was still a serious occupation. According to Dupanloup, girls ought to take notes as they read, and never leave books half-finished, but rather read and study them several times over. They were presented with books and instructed to study carefully, and then imitate, the behaviour of these model dolls and girls. The most amusing books still had a didactic aim. Some books, like those by Mgr de

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<sup>727</sup> Françoise Mayeur and Jacques Gadille, (eds), *Éducation et images de la femme chrétienne en France au début du XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle. Entretiens de La Combe de Lancey (Isère) 8, 9, 10 octobre 1978 à l'occasion du centenaire de la mort de Mgr Dupanloup*, (Lyon, Éditions l'Hermès, 1980) p 32

Séjour, and the *Imitation de Jesus-Christ*, required a particularly serious approach. Even readers of a tender age were expected to follow this. Thus, the *Poupée Modèle* explained to its audience (from toddlers up to eight year olds), how to read Mgr de Séjour's *La piété enseignée aux enfants*, "ce livre-là ne se lit pas comme un livre de contes... après chaque chapitre, il faut se reposer et réfléchir bien sagement avec sa petite mère ou sa soeur aînée à ce qu'on vient d'y voir, d'y apprendre. Puis on formera la bonne résolution de toujours mettre en pratique les sages conseils qui y sont renfermés, et l'on ira jouer ou travailler comme à l'ordinaire... mieux qu'à l'ordinaire même, si l'on a bien compris les enseignements du bon prélat."<sup>728</sup> In contrast, his mother's volumes were presented to girls as a treat. For example, after having reprinted a section from the Old Testament, the *Poupée Modèle* rewarded its girls with a passage from one of the comtesse de Séjour's books "pour vous dédommager de votre attention ou... de votre ennui, je vais vous parler d'un charmant volume de Madame de Séjour."<sup>729</sup> Nevertheless, when reading the comtesse's storybooks, girls still had to make sure they learned their lessons, as the *Poupée Modèle* explained, "les récits amusants et spirituels fourmillent, les bonnes pensées aussi, et il y a tant d'exemples faciles et charmants à suivre, que toutes, mes amies, vous allez vous efforcer, j'en suis convaincue, de ressembler aux héroïnes de madame de Séjour."<sup>730</sup>

Reading was an activity that was ideally carried out together, as a family.<sup>731</sup> This was so that parents could police their children, and avoid the perils of solitary reading, which was of course a particular concern for girls and women. When Bonnie G. Smith reconstructed an

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<sup>728</sup> *Poupée Modèle*, March 1865

<sup>729</sup> *Poupée Modèle*, May 1864

<sup>730</sup> Review of *Les Bons enfants*, *Poupée Modèle*, June 1864

<sup>731</sup> Roger Chartier and Jean Hébrard, 'Les imaginaires de la lecture', *HEF*, 4: 535.

average day in the life of a pious bourgeois woman of Northern France, she drew it to a close with this cosy domestic scene, “in the evening she will sit with her family listening to one of the children read from the comtesse de Ségur’s *Évangile d’une grand’mère*”.<sup>732</sup> Still, to a certain extent, little girls were encouraged to read independently. In her first dedication to Camille and Madeleine, Ségur referred to having read her fairy tales out loud to the girls, and impressed upon them that they think of her as they read. Ségur’s correspondence with Templier indicates she wanted to help her little readers follow the story. She worried about the size of the print, and the problems children might have when opening the pages<sup>733</sup>. This suggests that she wanted to make it easier for children to read her books on their own. When Zélie Martin’s youngest daughter was learning to read, her mother was encouraged to see her reading Ségur’s books without help, “je la voyais tantôt, bien sérieuse, lire à mi-voix: “Les petites filles modèles.” Elle croyait que je ne l’entendais pas, et elle donnait à chaque personnage le ton qui convenait.”<sup>734</sup> The girl is not left to her own devices; the reading is still within a familial context as the mother supervises her, but from a distance. Because she was allowed to become utterly absorbed in the book, the girl learned her lesson all the better. Madame Martin looked on, and was reassured to see that her daughter was indeed imitating the model characters. Books by reputable authors like the comtesse de Ségur could be read in this way. Zenaïde Fleuriot used a similar technique. Like Ségur, she still evoked the feminine storyteller – the conceit of her first book was that these were tales told by an old aristocratic widow. “Avant de commencer la lecture de ces nouvelles, rappelez-vous la narration écoutée le soir auprès de la table de famille et que les jeunes filles ont pu entendre

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<sup>732</sup> Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class*, p53

<sup>733</sup> See letters to Templier, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1858, *Oeuvres* 1:LXVI; 20<sup>th</sup> February 1861, *Oeuvres* 1:LXXVIII

<sup>734</sup> Letter from Zélie Martin to her sister, October 1875, *Correspondance familiale 1863-1887*

sans frissonner; cette narration, c'est la mienne."<sup>735</sup> The narratives of the comtesse de Ségur and Zenaïde Fleuriot emphasised that they were traditional, and had already been read aloud to young girls. They were therefore safe to give to a child to read alone.

However, this rather severe approach to reading was an educational ideal, and it does not always sit well with the descriptions of girls reading we find in governess literature. Such women were professional authors, and had a passion for writing. Naturally they also took great pleasure in reading. Zenaïde Fleuriot reminisced about her love of books as a child, and how those that she had really enjoyed offered little in the way of models for her gender,

“Le *Robinson* a le tort de ne pas compter une seule petite fille parmi ses personnages; cela fait que les jeunes lectrices qu'il électrise, ne trouvant d'autres types à copier que ces garçonnetts à pieds légers, aux mains adroites, sont portées à s'identifier avec eux. Depuis que ce bienheureux livre m'a été donné, je n'avais plus qu'expéditions lointaines, qu'exercices gymnastiques, que nourriture sauvage, que grottes, que navigations. En un mot, j'étais devenue la plus aventureuse des petites filles...

... Ces dangers me paraissaient mille fois plus préférables aux palais enchantés des contes de fées. Est-ce l'idée de voir se rendre utiles, à l'âge de toutes les faiblesses, ces travailleurs enfants agissant comme des hommes, qui les entoure d'un tel prestige? Je n'en sais rien: mais la vie laborieuse, active des Robinsons me plaisait bien davantage que la vie molle de ces princesses un peu sottes qui ne font rien, et se bornent à regarder agir la baguette magique d'un génie ou d'une fée."<sup>736</sup>

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<sup>735</sup> Fleuriot, *Souvenirs d'une douanière*, Preface

<sup>736</sup> Fleuriot-Kerinou, *Zenaïde Fleuriot* (here using notes from her unpublished autobiography), pp 50-1

The language Fleuriot uses is interesting. She describes being “electrified” by *Robinson Crusoe*, it so stirred her imagination that she wanted to live as the characters did. Zenaïde Fleuriot felt she knew the moral dangers posed by the current dearth of exciting heroines. She set out to write characters for girls to emancipate them from the simpering heroines they are currently offered, and provide them instead with exemplary girls who led active, meaningful lives. Eugénie Foa argued that older sisters’ bookshelves were also in need of urgent rethinking. She noted that while there is some material available, “ces publications sont bien loin de suffire à cette soif de lecture qui dévore le jeune âge.”<sup>737</sup> This was the vocabulary of dangerous passions that Ségur had used privately to describe her desire to write. Such desires needed simply to be safely guided by the maternal hand of the author, rather than severe repression, was the implicit message.

In fact, to be moved by a book was considered an important response. The comtesse d'Armaillé dryly observed that this was a common ploy in the religious education of the time, “on tenait à émouvoir les enfants à cette époque. Nous pleurons beaucoup.”<sup>738</sup> Certainly Ségur judged her *Pauvre Blaise* was a success when it moved her granddaughter to tears: “ce sera fini ce soir, Camille le lit; succès complet, un intérêt immense, elle pleure depuis la seconde partie.”<sup>739</sup> The *Bibliographie Catholique* commended the occasional “pleurs salutaires” that children would shed over Ségur’s *La Soeur de Gribouille*.<sup>740</sup> Louise L (b. 1850) described indulging in an orgy of tears each time she re-read Monniot’s bestseller.<sup>741</sup> Indeed, Lucile le

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<sup>737</sup> Eugénie Foa, preface to *Six histoires de jeunes filles* (Paris, Librairie Louis Janet, 1858, original date of publication unknown)

<sup>738</sup> D'Armaillé, *Quand on savait vivre heureux*, p 58

<sup>739</sup> Letter from the comtesse to Olga de Pitray, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1860

<sup>740</sup> Review of *La sœur de Gribouille*, by Ch. Laval, *Bibliographie Catholique*, 27, April 1862

<sup>741</sup> Lejeune, *Le Moi des demoiselles*, pp 204-5



Verrier felt she was a failure when she was not upset by Madame Craven's *Récit d'une soeur*, "je me claque, je me pince de fureur, car... je n'ai pas de sympathie pour personne. Alexandrine? Eugénie? Olga? Pauline? Oui, oui, elles sont toutes édifiantes, unies, douces, charitables, charmantes, mais, mais, mais je ne les aime pas. Je ne sais pourquoi, j'en suis très mécontente, mais elles ne m'inspirent pas de sympathie, et la sympathie ne se commande pas."<sup>742</sup> Tears were the outward expression of the soul.<sup>743</sup> Crying was a sign that these edifying stories had moved the reader's heart. The 'heart' was an important concept in the new Catholicism which emphasised love. Such writers therefore aimed to manipulate the emotions of their audience, to encourage this piety.

In 1868, the year following the great furore over girls' education, created when education minister Victor Duruy proposed rudimentary secondary education for upper-class girls,<sup>744</sup> Ségur formulated her own views on the subject. In a letter advising her daughter Olga on how to oversee the education of her own daughter, Ségur wrote:

"les gouverneurs et les gouvernantes ont parfois la manie du travail exagéré; ce qui n'est jamais le fait d'une femme et ce qui lui fait négliger des choses essentielles, comme le travail à l'aiguille, l'ordre dans les tiroirs et effets, etc. Ce n'est pas une grande et inutile instruction de langues diverses, de hautes études, qui fait le mérite d'une femme dans l'habitude de la vie et dans son ménage, mais les mille petits travaux féminins, plus utiles cent fois que le latin, le

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<sup>742</sup> Lucile le Verrier, *Journal d'une jeune fille Second Empire 1866-1878* (Paris, Zulma, 1994), p 46

<sup>743</sup> Alain Lanavère, 'Le bonheur selon Madame de Ségur', *Mélanges offertes à M le Professeur Jacques Robichez. Cent ans de la littérature française 1850-1950* (Paris, SEDES, 1987) pp 23-30

<sup>744</sup> See introductory chapters in Mayeur and Gadille, (eds), *Éducation et images de la femme chrétienne en France au début du XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle*

Grec et les je ne sais quoi, qui ne servent à rien qu'à exalter l'amour-propre et à faire perdre le temps."<sup>745</sup>

Madame de Ségur had not provided her own daughters with anything like the extensive education that she had received herself as a girl, and she did not envisage it for her granddaughters either. Ségur's argument hinges on the fact that a woman's place was in the home. Her granddaughter could not hope for anything else in her life, so why allow her governess to overload the young girl with work, "ne la laisse pas accabler de travail, afin que son corps puisse se développer en même temps que son intelligence". She does not suggest the girl would be incapable of learning Latin or Greek, simply it serves no purpose, and as such she would be wasting her time. Worse, an education that developed a sense of self-worth would be dangerous. Ségur's argument here concurred with the conservatism of Louis Veuillot, Dupanloup, and Victor Duruy's detractors. In 1931 Chanoine Cordonnier cited this letter approvingly, and lamented that young women now did not listen to the comtesse's sage advice.<sup>746</sup>

However, the comtesse's views on female education were not as clear as the quotation above might suggest. Just one year later, Ségur submitted her final manuscript to Hachette in July 1869, *Après la pluie, le beau temps*, and in it she contradicted her earlier advice to Olga. It is a story of how a young girl, Geneviève, is rescued from the clutches of her evil guardian, Monsieur Dormère, by an eccentric old woman. Dormère devotes all his time to his son, Georges, and so aged eleven, Geneviève knows nothing, and would have been left

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<sup>745</sup> Letter from the comtesse de Ségur to Olga de Pitray, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1868

<sup>746</sup> Cordonnier, *Silhouettes familiales*, pp 97-8

“ignorante comme une cruche”<sup>747</sup> if it had not been for Mlle Primerose. The whole scenario of the book, with its recurrent motif of the father privileging the son, while leaving his adoptive daughter to her own devices, underlines the unfair treatment that girls receive. Governess Mlle Primrose therefore takes Geneviève under her wing, and sees that she receives a proper education. Mlle Primerose upbraids the father and son for having neglected their duties, and shows them how wrong they were: “une fille! C’est bon à mettre de côté. Une vieille fille est souvent utile pourtant; comme moi, par exemple; j’instruis la bonne petite Geneviève; je lui apprend beaucoup de choses allez. Elle en sait autant que toi, Georges, maintenant, excepté le Latin.”<sup>748</sup> As this quote suggests, the real lynchpin of the book is the outlandishly named Mademoiselle Cunégonde Primerose. This straight talking spinster plays the role of a rather unlikely fairy godmother. Being an aging, unmarried woman was an unhappy position in the nineteenth century. Contemporary discourse had little pleasant to say about her. Segur however rehabilitates such women in this final book, providing us with a more positive literary image of the ‘governess’. In the original manuscript she is a widow, like the comtesse,<sup>749</sup> and would appear to be semi-autobiographical. Rude, outspoken and bossy, she is at once a burlesque creation, and a heroine. Burlesque, when in her constant stream of chatter she turns and tells her serving maid to stop wittering because she cannot hear herself think. Heroic, for she challenges M. Dormère’s authority in order to protect her pupil. She not only undermines masculine authority openly, but also discreetly, through her learning. When furious, she quotes Virgil’s *Aeneid*, in Latin.<sup>750</sup> Mlle Primerose is allowed a share in the happy ending (which she has engineered for young lovers Geneviève and

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<sup>747</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:953

<sup>748</sup> *Oeuvres*, 3:957

<sup>749</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:953, fn. 1

<sup>750</sup> *Oeuvres* 3:1015

Jacques), when she goes to Rome and joins the petites soeurs de charité, where she provides much needed moral support to the Zouaves who are fighting to defend the Pope. Through her twin contributions of teaching and nursing, the main activities in which Catholic women participated in the community, Mlle Primerose proves “une vieille fille est souvent utile pourtant.”

The development of a feminine literary world, one which had grown out of governess literature of the eighteenth century, created a culture that would be interpreted by generations of young girls. When feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (b. 1908) delivered her verdict on Ségur, she was not as critical as one might expect: “c’est à travers les yeux des hommes que la fillette explore le monde et y déchiffre son destin... les livres de Mme de Ségur sont une curieuse exception: ils décrivent une société matriarcale où le mari quand il n’est pas absent joue un personnage ridicule.”<sup>751</sup> *Petites Filles modèles* is the clearest example of such a matriarchy. The heroine of the story is Madame de Fleurville, a widow and mother of two daughters, who oversees Château Fleurville. She is then joined by Madame de Rosbourg, whose husband is lost at sea, when her coach crashes outside the Château. These two lone women decide to live together and dedicate themselves to the education of their daughters, “Et pourquoi donc me quitteriez-vous, chère amie? dit un jour Madame de Fleurville. Pourquoi ne vivrions-nous ensemble?” To Madame de Rosbourg’s concern, “mais ne serait-ce pas bien indiscret aux yeux de votre famille?”, Madame de Fleurville replies, “nullement. Je vis dans un grand isolement depuis la mort de mon mari... Vous n’avez pas de mari non plus”<sup>752</sup>. Their decision to live together is not depicted as

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<sup>751</sup> Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, 2: 36-37

<sup>752</sup> *Oeuvres*, 1:129

second best, owing of the tragic loss of their husbands; rather it is a happy fortune which allows them to live as friends. Together they create Fleurville: a utopian vision of a kind of open convent, looking after the poor and sick of the region, and with an emphasis on joy and laughter. When Simone de Beauvoir re-read her girlhood, in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, she saw this feminine literature as having a profound effect upon her conception of her gendered self. Thanks to such books, she did not feel disappointed with having been born a girl: “Madame de Ségur, Zenaïde Fleuriot prenaient pour héros des enfants et leur subordonnaient les grandes personnes: les mères occupaient donc dans leurs livres une place prépondérante. Les pères comptaient pour du buerre. Moi-même j’envisageais essentiellement les adultes dans leur rapport à l’enfance: de ce point de vue, mon sexe m’assurait la prééminence.”<sup>753</sup> The young Beauvoir’s games, where she played mother to her doll (described inevitably as her ‘petite fille modèle’), mimicked the cité des dames in Ségur’s *Petites Filles modèles*, as she and her sister agreed that their husbands were always on holiday.<sup>754</sup>

The view into the life of the feminine domestic sphere was absolutely typical of governess literature, both French and English. The ideal set out by women such as Maria Edgeworth, or Madame de Genlis, was that mothers ought to teach their children on their country estates, hidden away from the iniquities of the city. However, as Beauvoir points out, the comtesse de Ségur was much more focussed on placing children at the centre of this universe. In her books it is the adults who are peripheral, not the children. Victorine Monniot and Julie Gouraud were doing similar things, for, in structuring the narrative around the idea of memoirs, or diaries, readers viewed the intrigue through the child’s eyes,

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<sup>753</sup> Beauvoir, *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, p 77

<sup>754</sup> *Ibid*, p 78

rather than the mother mentor. It is significant that Ségur, in her guise as grandmother-educator, only entered the text in the dedications, she did not hamper the pace of her narrative. (With the exceptions of her Bible series) Where previously the mother mentor had formed the centre of the story, now the girls themselves were taking centre stage.

Simone de Beauvoir's use of the comtesse's and Fleuriot's books in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* (1958) is indicative of the importance she accorded to governess literature, and Ségur in particular as the most famous example of this. In her memoir Beauvoir wanted to examine how, and to what extent, as a girl she internalised gender norms. References to the comtesse, often subtle, appear quite frequently in the early stages of the book. She recalls how she and her sister used to imitate the Fleurville girls in their play with dolls. Should this be interpreted as an example of how effectively the gender codes set out in Ségur's books worked? Was Beauvoir's recollection of her childish games accurate? Or, was she using the vocabulary of collective memory so that her readers would instantly know how to read it? What better way to describe her relationship to her doll than as that of a "mère parfaite d'une petite fille modèle"<sup>755</sup>? She describes the effects of Catholic education in the same way, "la vertu me gagnait; plus de colères ni de caprices: on m'avait expliqué qu'il dépendait de ma sagesse et de ma piété que Dieu sauvât la France. Quand l'aumônier du cours Désir m'eût prise en main, je devins une petite fille modèle."<sup>756</sup> Her progress mirrors that of Sophie in the plot of *Petites Filles modèles*, as she is transformed from a naughty little girl prone to tantrums into a gentle and obedient girl like her model cousins. That she applied this narrative of girlhood from the 1850's to characterise her life in the 1910's, writing it for readers in the

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<sup>755</sup> *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, p 78

<sup>756</sup> *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, p 42

late 1950's is indicative of the place Ségur's girls occupied in French culture. It suggests her 'petites filles modèles' were an easily readable symbol for a particular model of female childhood, but also, a model that exactly one hundred years later Beauvoir felt still needed to be repudiated.

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, Ségur and her girls proved an awkward symbol for many women in the twentieth century. Not all were as nuanced as Beauvoir in their desire to reject Ségur's model girls, because, understandably, they were keen to distance themselves from any comparisons with them. During an interview in 1980, Marguerite Yourcenar (b. 1903) took offence when asked if she had been 'petite fille modèle' as a girl: "non, car le sentiment de classe n'existait pas du tout pour moi. Je n'étais pas non plus une 'petite fille modèle': l'idée d'être un modèle ne me venait pas. Je dois dire que j'ai toujours détesté les livres de la comtesse de Ségur."<sup>757</sup> Her class and her gender condemned Yourcenar to this association. According to her biographer, Yourcenar received only a basic education from her governess, but this was supplemented by her father, who gave her books from his own library to read. He justified this unconventional practise by declaring, "better Tolstoy than the comtesse de Ségur."<sup>758</sup> Louise Weiss (b. 1893), in her memoirs of her "republican childhood" admits that she had enjoyed reading the comtesse as a child. She notes however that "des accents plus passionnés retentirent alors à mes oreilles", explaining family discussions were more important to her education, "ce sont ceux que je n'ai pas oubliés, tandis que je ne sais plus rien aujourd'hui des fables de la Comtesse." It is striking

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<sup>757</sup> *Les yeux ouverts*. Entretien avec Matthieu Galey, quoted in Kreyder, *L'enfance des saints et des autres*, pp 222-3

<sup>758</sup> Quoted in Josyane Savigneau, *Marguerite Yourcenar: Inventing a Life*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993), p 42

that Weiss too emphasises that it was her governess, not her family, who gave her the comtesse de Ségur's books to read.<sup>759</sup> The 'petite fille modèle' was a noxious concept to many women of Yourcenar's and subsequent generations. Michelle Perrot (b. 1928), one of the leading historians of women in France, uses the 'petite fille modèle', as she puts it "sans appétit ni désir", as the measure of repressed girlhood against which to compare the experience of real girls from the Second Empire.<sup>760</sup> Claude Langlois points out that Perrot belongs to the generation of feminists who saw the Catholic Church as being the real oppressor of women.<sup>761</sup> For them, the comtesse de Ségur was the embodiment of this stifling education.

There was a noticeable shift in sensibilities after the 1970's, no doubt due to the impact of the écriture féminine movement. The question was raised as to what extent Ségur was really a victim of her circumstances. Could she have written any other books under the Second Empire? Researchers set to reading between the lines of her texts, looking for hints of her feminine subversion of the established norms.<sup>762</sup> As noted above, Ségur's stories are somewhat contradictory on the subject of girls' education, and so just as it was possible to castigate her for being an instrument of repression, so scholars have also been able to construct a narrative of feminine struggle in her books. Thanks primarily to the exhibition by Nicole Savy, *Petites Filles modernes*, it is now the figure of Sophie, depicted fighting against the weight of parental prohibitions, rather than Camille and Madeleine, who features in feminist

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<sup>759</sup> Louise Weiss, *Souvenirs d'une enfance républicaine*, (Paris, Denoel, 1937), p 37

<sup>760</sup> Perrot, 'Une jeune fille du faubourg Saint Germain', p 174

<sup>761</sup> Claude Langlois, 'Le catholicisme au féminin revisité', Corbin et al, *Femmes dans la cité*, 139-149, p 143; cf. the revisionist view, for example McMillan, who argues in *France and Women* that republicans were equally active in ensuring women remained in their place

<sup>762</sup> Doray, *La comtesse de Ségur*, Beaussant, *La Comtesse de Ségur ou l'enfance de l'art*; Strich, 'Critique génétique d'un manuscrit: La Bible d'une grand-mère (1869)'



discussion of Ségur. With Sophie, Madame de Ségur is credited by feminist scholars as one of the first creators of the “modern little girl”, a psychologically complex being, imbued with a concept of her own timorous self, rather than created as a simple biological destiny (as opposed to Rousseau’s Sophie).

However, as this thesis has argued, it is inaccurate to cast Ségur as a passive victim, or to try to make her fit a modern conception of feminism. Such an interpretation is all too often based upon a desire to see Ségur as an exception from her counterparts.<sup>763</sup> This view tacitly accepts the idea that governess authors were generally awful spinsters. Rather, as this chapter has attempted to show, Ségur and her colleagues were talented professionals, heavily engaged in the work of the religious revival, and that they knowingly fashioned role models for girls which they felt would be useful for the regeneration of the faith in France.

On the one hand, the language of passion with which ‘governess’ authors expressed their desire to free girls from pathetic fairytale heroines was imbued with a sense of pride, even an urge to rival with boys in terms of being active. On the other hand, this is not the language of feminism. Such authors did not have any subversive intentions. Far from it. As Fleuriot suggests, the lack of suitable material for girls led her to indulge in potentially unbecoming behaviour. By providing protagonists tailored to little girls, authors such as Ségur were reinforcing gender roles by ensuring that girls did not have to resort to reading their brothers’ books and finding inspiration therein. Reading books that were not specifically designated for them had become a transgressive act. Anne-Marie Thiesse’s survey of readers

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<sup>763</sup> See for example Isabelle Nières-Chevrel, ‘Au miroir des écrivains français’; or Isabelle Jan, ‘Children’s Literature and Bourgeois Society in France since 1860’, *Yale French Studies*, 43 (1960) 57-72

born in the Belle Époque noted that when asked about Jules Verne many women responded, “j’ai vu des romans de Jules Verne, mais c’était plutôt pour mes frères.”<sup>764</sup> This surge of interest in girls’ reading matter worked both for and against them. While they now had a literary universe of their own, it was a strictly codified and restricted one. The comtesse de Ségur’s approach to the subject illustrates well the ambiguities of the governess’s legacy to little girls.

## Conclusion

Perhaps the most obvious conclusion to draw from the findings of this chapter is that writing for girls proved important for governess authors, as it provided them with an opportunity to reassess their own role in society. Drawing upon the feminine ideals of the time, these women exploited the possibilities offered by assuming the role of the mother educator, or the Catholic militant, to create distinctive public identities for themselves. They managed to defy masculine hostility, indeed, to even win the unalloyed praise of ‘great’ Catholic men, such as Louis Veuillot, Father Olivaint, and even the Pope. Furthermore, it was specifically by thinking about the type of books that girls needed that helped women like Ségur and Fleuriot to consider what they felt was important for their gender. Their own love of reading, and pride as wordsmiths, ensured that they were concerned to stimulate this same passion in their readers. In this way, their books also made an important contribution to feminine culture. Their works privileged young girls as active protagonists, which, as Nicole Savy rightly points out, that this makes them “modern little girls”.

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<sup>764</sup> Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Le Roman du quotidien. Lecteurs et lectures populaires à la Belle Époque* (Paris, Chemin Vert, 1984), p 41

This creation of a militant feminine culture was a double-edged sword however, for their representations served to further codify gendered behaviour. This was indeed the intention of Ségur and her colleagues; in their zeal to protect 'traditional' values as they saw them, they set about creating role models for girls that they felt the current literature did not provide them. Judging from the hostile readings of the comtesse de Ségur to be found in the work of feminists who grew up in the first half of the twentieth century, it would appear that Ségur did help to create the image of the 'modern little girl', in that this was an image riddled with ambiguities, which is no doubt fitting for our image of girlhood in twentieth century France.

## Conclusion

This thesis has studied the comtesse de Ségur as a cultural icon. She has been viewed as a historical subject, restoring her to the original context of the religious antagonisms of Second Empire France. This has brought to light a neglected aspect of the Franco-French culture wars, namely the important contribution made by women authors such as Ségur to the massive surge in devotional print culture. By examining the workings of one small and highly influential network involved in leading this literary offensive, and by reconstructing the role played by the comtesse in their politico-religious campaign, it has helped to nuance the understanding of gender and power in this period.

Madame de Ségur's personality meant that she would not readily accept being sidelined. Her gender excluded her from any direct involvement in politics; as a woman, Ségur was not only disenfranchised, but also, in theory at least, she was not meant to be involved in political life at any level. Nevertheless, the informal nature of intransigent ultramontane politics provided the comtesse de Ségur with a real opportunity to engage in the combat. Once age released her from many of the cumbersome tasks of motherhood she was free to become a writer, and earn an independent income; and so the comtesse discovered that she had a 'voice'. She joined the extreme rightwing *Veillotiste* camp and entered the fray with all the enthusiasm of a new convert.

As a member of the Ségur family literary powerhouse, she participated in their efforts to refashion the French nobility according to the ideals of intransigent ultramontanism. The journalist Louis Veillot applauded their efforts, which responded exactly to his own hopes for the French nation. The comtesse struck up a close friendship with Veillot, and became his correspondent. In these letters that she refined her ideas. The Ségurs along with Veillot formed part of a wider network of writers, clerics and politicians who met regularly for dinners where they debated, discussed and shaped the ideas of their political community. As the government and sections of the ecclesiastical authorities in France became increasingly hostile towards their activities, the intransigents were forced to rely upon such private forums. Madame de Ségur doubly ensured she was not relegated to the sidelines both by hosting dinners in her capacity as the Ségur family matriarch, and through her correspondence with Veillot.

It was imperative that the Ségur family's conversion to this new Catholicism be made public, as ostentatiously as possible, for, as Margaret Lavinia Anderson has explained, high profile conversions amongst the European intellectual elite played a key role in the religious revival, by showing that "the terrain is habitable". Their defiant stance gave others further down the social scale the "cultural self-confidence" needed to practise their religion when many were deserting it.<sup>765</sup> In the French case, the need for religious revival in the context of de-christianisation in the aftermath of 1789, and renewed fears of revolution following 1848, meant that the more extreme Catholics like the Ségurs and the Veillots were driven by a sense of embattlement. Men in nineteenth century France in particular felt that they risked

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<sup>765</sup> Anderson, 'The Divisions of the Pope: the Catholic Revival and the Transition to Democracy', pp 26-7

ridicule if they dared to practise their faith in public. The Ségur family was part of the move to reverse this trend, and as part of this, their own lives had an important, representative function. That they were one of the oldest noble houses in France was all the better: Veillot saw it as poetic justice that it should be the French nobility that led the nation back into the fold. It followed that the nature of the writings that were published under this famous name ‘Ségur’ was crucial. Their books were produced within the context of this shared mission, evidenced by the significant level of inter-textuality in their collective oeuvre. This also extended to their life stories that were published in the public domain.

Madame de Ségur immortalised their ideal of the family in her books, creating an illusion that her stories were based upon the lives of her children and grandchildren. She fashioned an attractive image of the Catholic family which was warmly received by Veillot in particular, but also other organs of the Catholic ‘good book’ movement. However, although this thesis has emphasised the importance of reading the comtesse through the optic of her role as part of the Ségur family, it has also argued that in her work the comtesse developed her own idiosyncratic version of the Ségur family mission. The romanticised religion of the ‘New Catholicism’ rejected the fearsome God of eighteenth century Jansenism, and replaced it with a religion of love. Madame de Ségur aligned this new religion with modern ideas on parenting. In particular she used her vision to denounce the continued practise of corporal punishment within French families (her own included). Thus, although the Ségur family and subsequent religious campaigners harnessed her life stories to the cause, they were never really able to reduce Madame de Ségur to the ideal of Christian womanhood. Her obsessions, eccentricities, and powerful personality have ensured that accounts of the

‘nation’s grandmother’ have always been contradictory. She was a committed militant, but on her own terms.

Catholics proved highly enterprising in their efforts to disseminate the new devotions; using pamphlets, newspapers, and cheap literature to complement grassroots missionary work. Mgr de Ségur’s best-selling opuscles played a large part in this. In the era of Napoleon III’s plebiscite politics, reaching a wide audience was crucial – as the Mgr remarked to Élise Veuillot, “j’ai écrit mes *Réponses* pour les sénateurs et les cuisinières.”<sup>766</sup> Madame de Ségur was also shrewd in her approach to the market. She had cut her teeth in these matters by helping to launch Gaston de Ségur’s first book, *Réponses* (1850). Thus, when the comtesse set to getting her own books published, she was determined to construct a commercially viable name for herself. Madame de Ségur was very conscious of the new ideas on children, how to write for them, and how to appeal to her little readership. She understood that her power lay in her commercial success. Financial gain was of course welcome, but what really mattered to the comtesse was the size of her readership. Healthy sales figures gave her bargaining power with her editor, and ensured that men like Louis Veuillot took her seriously. Income gave her independence, but it was her audience which gave her authority. She was aware of the importance of using the possibilities offered by commercial culture. Just as historians now recognise that men like Veuillot were a part of the crucible of modern European political culture, so it is important to include Madame de Ségur and other authors of ‘improving’ literature in the narrative of ‘modernisation’.

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<sup>766</sup> Olga de Pitray, *Ma chère maman*, p 176

This thesis provides a bridge between the research which has been done on the influential men of the 'New Catholicism', and many of the studies that have been carried out on female religiosity. The sentimentalised religion of the 'New Catholicism', with its cult of suffering, obsession with the childlike, and noisy rejection of the modern world, has been argued by some writers to have the greatest appeal to women because it was a creed of the powerless.<sup>767</sup> Women often appear far removed from the great political questions that occupied male Catholic intellectuals. Madame la comtesse de Ségur née Rostopchine did not see herself in these terms. In her view, dolourism was an excellent doctrine for the lower classes, to keep them in their place. She was a woman of letters and the matriarch of the Ségur/ Veillot family network of writers, and, as such, she had important work to do. The comtesse saw herself as part of the literary vanguard of the culture wars, and she was received as such by her contemporaries. She expressed her faith in highly militant, politicised terms. Ségur was not manipulated by her male superiors (despite attempts by her family and editor): chapter three has shown just how ferocious she could be when her artistic interests were threatened. Furthermore, although the comtesse may have been a singularly determined lady, she was by no means the only woman author to be engaged in militant ultramontanist. This thesis has revealed that there were in fact large numbers of women involved in writing books, in journalism, and in editing magazines for Catholic publishers, or with stated religious aims. This feminine print culture flourished in the publishing boom, and many were celebrities. They were held in great respect by fellow writers and critics, and their work was recognised by influential clerics, even by the Pope. Catholic women could interact with the

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<sup>767</sup> Di Giorgio, 'La bonne catholique'; Richard D. E. Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood. Women, Catholicism, and the Culture of Suffering in France 1840-1970* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2004)



male elite on terms that are simply not covered by the vocabulary currently used in historiography to describe their experience.

Still, the view of the role of such women authors' role in the public sphere must be qualified. Even though they were conservative women, seeking to reinforce rather than to challenge the structures of patriarchal society, the "governess" authors were still bound by many restrictions because of their sex. Using the methodology of the 'New Biography', this case study of the comtesse de Ségur has illustrated the effect of the cultural pressures that weighed upon her construction of her 'self', her life, and actions. She was still the "pygmy" at the "giant" Veuillot's feet. Female authors such as Ségur who wrote children's literature faced particularly harsh ridicule. They risked being derided as spinsters and bluestockings. Later generations would add accusations of bigotry and religious fanaticism to the list of insults. Their troubles were exacerbated by the contemporary perception of little girl readers as being incredibly vulnerable; the purity of these young innocents had to be preserved at all costs. Any material that was to be put into their hands had to be rigorously vetted before it could go to press. All women had to construct their public identities with the utmost care, and the "governess" authors were no exception. They still had to vociferously deny any interest in politics, despite their evident interest in the religious questions of the time. The construction by Madame de Ségur of her grandmother image was in this respect a masterpiece, drawing on accepted ideas of the old woman storyteller, and the new obsession with the mother educator, to create a reassuring brand. Similarly, her maternal headship of the Ségur family was an excellent justification for the comtesse's involvement in the ultramontane network.

This thesis has argued that Madame de Ségur's experiences reveal the activities of women in intransigent Catholicism, and that her books made an important contribution to feminine culture. Only a small minority of women in the Second Empire were prepared to speak out against the repression of their sex. Many more were energetically involved in the Church. What this thesis has done is to bring to light an important sector of this activity, which might be termed Catholic women's 'voice'. It is important to recognise that the involvement of women in political activities was not just in leftwing feminism, but also rightwing conservatism. It is necessary to incorporate their struggles and ideas into the narrative of women's political activities, which has long been dominated by feminist historians' interest in resistance. This means studying books such as *Petites Filles modèles*, because they played a significant role in the construction of gendered identity of girls. Although the impact of the comtesse de Ségur on the generations of girls who grew up reading her books was in some ways negative, as can be inferred from the ambivalence of many women to her in their autobiographies and memoirs, still it is interesting to note that, more recently, Madame de Ségur's semi-autobiographical character 'Sophie' has been reclaimed by modern feminists in France. They see in her stories an account of resistance to, and finally painful acceptance of, society's restrictions. However, this has all too often been accompanied by an attempt to 'sanitise' her, by glossing over Ségur's political engagement, and casting her as a passive victim of the excesses of her era. This thesis has attempted to redress the balance. Ségur is no feminist heroine, but neither is it helpful for historians to dismiss her as a villainess and continue to ignore her.

## Appendix I

### The Collected Works of the Comtesse de Ségur (1855-1871)

Sources: Claudine Beaussant (ed), Ségur, *Oeuvres*, 1:XLIV-LIII; Laura Kreyder, *L'enfance des saints*, pp 233-239; *Cahiers Séguriens*, 2000-7; Hachette Catalogues, IMEC; *Bibliographie de la France. journal générale de l'imprimerie et de la librairie* (BF) 1856-1871 (this journal announces the date of the legal registration of the book, and could often be several months later than the actual publication); *La Semaine des enfants* 1856-1874

#### 1855

*La santé des enfants*. First published at author's expense. Second and third editions 1857, 1859, Hachette, Bibliothèque des chemins de fer.

#### 1857

*Nouveaux contes de fées*, Hachette, Bibliothèque des chemins de fer.  
Beaussant dates its publication December 1856, Kreyder suggests January 1857. A volume entitled *Contes à mes petites filles* by Madame de Ségur is advertised in the Hachette catalogues in October 1856, which was the provisional title, but does not appear under the definitive title until January 1857. The *Semaine des enfants* serialisation begins 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1857.

#### 1858

*Petites Filles modèles*, Hachette, Bibliothèque Rose illustrée.  
Beaussant dates its publication 12<sup>th</sup> October 1857, however, there is no mention in the Hachette catalogues until March 1858, and it is first announced 15<sup>th</sup> May 1858 in the *BF*

*Livre de messe des petits enfants*, Paris, Douniol.  
Announced 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1858, *BF*.

*Les Malheurs de Sophie*, Hachette, Bibliothèque Rose illustrée.  
Announced 8<sup>th</sup> January 1859, *BF*. Some episodes serialised in the *Semaine des enfants*, July-October 1860, and December 1862.

#### 1859

*Les Vacances*, Hachette Bibliothèque Rose illustrée.  
Announced 1859, *BF*.

#### 1860

*Mémoires d'un Âne*, Hachette Bibliothèque Rose illustrée.  
Serialised in the *Semaine des enfants* 17<sup>th</sup> December 1859. Advertised in the Hachette Catalogue October 1860.

## 1861

***Pauvre Blaise***, Hachette Bibliothèque Rose illustrée.

Announced 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1861, *BF*. Serialisation in the *Semaine des enfants* begins 13<sup>th</sup> July 1861.

## 1862

***La Soeur de Gribouille***, Hachette Bibliothèque Rose illustrée.

Advertised November 1861 Hachette Catalogues. Announced 28<sup>th</sup> December 1862, *BF*. Serialisation in the *Semaine des enfants* begins 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1862.

## 1863

***Les bons enfants***, Hachette Bibliothèque Rose illustrée.

Announced 6<sup>th</sup> December 1862, *BF*. Serialisation in the *Semaine des enfants* begins 13<sup>th</sup> August 1862. Kreyder dates publication late 1862, Beaussant 1863.

***Les deux nigauds***, Hachette Bibliothèque Rose illustrée.

Announced November 1862, *BF*. Serialisation in the *Semaine des enfants* begins 4<sup>th</sup> October 1862. Kreyder dates publication late 1862, Beaussant 1863.

***L'Auberge de l'Ange gardien***, Hachette Bibliothèque Rose illustrée.

Serialisation in the *Semaine des enfants* begins 8<sup>th</sup> April 1863.

***Le Général Dourakine***, Hachette Bibliothèque Rose illustrée.

Announced 19<sup>th</sup> December 1863, *BF*. Serialisation in the *Semaine des enfants* begins 14<sup>th</sup> November 1863. Probably went on sale for the New Year.

## 1864

***François le bossu***, Hachette Bibliothèque Rose illustrée.

Announced 14<sup>th</sup> January 1865, *BF*. Serialisation in the *Semaine des enfants* begins 4<sup>th</sup> May 1864.

## 1865

***Un bon petit diable***, Hachette Bibliothèque Rose illustrée.

Serialisation in the *Semaine des enfants* begins 14<sup>th</sup> December 1864.

***Comédies et proverbes***, Hachette Bibliothèque Rose illustrée.

Serialisation in the *Semaine des enfants* begins 30<sup>th</sup> August 1865.

***Jean qui grogne et Jean qui rit***, Hachette Bibliothèque Rose illustrée.

Hachette Catalogues advertise this book under the title *Jean le bon et Jean le mauvais* until 1866.

***Évangile d'une grand'mère***, Hachette albums illustrés.

Kreyder dates the publication 1866, Beaussant, it seems likely that it appeared for the New Year.

1866

*La Fortune de Gaspard*, Hachette Biobliothèque Rose illustrée.  
Serialisation in the *Semaine des enfants* begins 25<sup>th</sup> April 1866

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Announced 24<sup>th</sup> November 1866, BF.

1867

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1868

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1869

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1871

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(Where no author is indicated, the review was anonymous)

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