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# "The Celebrated Madame Campan": Educating Republican Mothers à la Française in Nineteenth-Century America

Lydia Heaton

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“The Celebrated Madame Campan”: Educating Republican Mothers *à la Française* in  
Nineteenth-Century America

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in History from  
The College of William and Mary

by

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Accepted for Highest Honors  
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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**“The Celebrated Madame Campan”: Educating Republican Mothers *à la Française* in Nineteenth-Century America**

Undergraduate Honors Thesis

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While writing a thesis can be a very solitary endeavor, my suitemates ensured that I was always surrounded by friends. I treasured every word of encouragement, walk in Colonial Williamsburg, and late-night study session (the constant supply of chocolate was also appreciated).

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## Introduction

I regret that I have not completely revised my Memoirs. It is my particular wish that they should be printed immediately after my death. They contain a justification of the conduct I have pursued, and which has been so greatly calumniated. I shall prove, by undeniable facts, how unjustly I have been treated. ...I should have wished once more to revise my treatise on the Education of Young Females; for that work I consider to be the source of any little reputation which I may hereafter enjoy. I think it may be a useful assistant to mothers.<sup>1</sup>

— Jeanne Louise Henriette Genet Campan, 1823

French girls' school headmistress Jeanne Campan's life was in a constant state of revision: at her own hands until the day she died and at the hands of countless other authors throughout the course of the nineteenth century. What she might not have expected on her deathbed, however, is that many of these authors would be American. The "celebrated Madame Campan," as she was often described by nineteenth-century American authors, seems like a rather grand epithet for a woman who is almost entirely unknown today. However, for more than a century after she first came to prominence in the 1790s, the appellation very accurately described Campan's reputation in Europe and increasingly in America after her death in 1822. Marie Antoinette's former lady-in-waiting and founder of an internationally acclaimed female seminary, Campan taught not only Napoleon Bonaparte's stepdaughter and sister but future American president James Monroe's daughter, Eliza. The story of her life reads almost like a novel—a tale of triumph and tragedy with a strong moral message about the importance of motherhood—acted against the backdrop of the French Revolution.

On October 2, 1752, Marie Anne Louise Genet gave birth to her first child, a little girl

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<sup>1</sup> Jeanne Campan, *The Private Journal of Madame Campan, comprising original anecdotes of the French court; selections from her correspondence, thoughts on education, &c. &c.*, ed. M. Maigne (Philadelphia: Abraham Small, 1825), 31-32.

christened Jeanne-Louise Henriette.<sup>2</sup> The baby's father, Edmé Jacques Genet, had high aspirations for his eldest daughter, but never in his wildest dreams could he have predicted the dramatic changes in fortune that she would experience. An intellectual and bureaucrat in Louis XV's court, Genet personally supervised Jeanne's education, which was particularly strong in languages (she learned to speak English and Italian), literature, and music.<sup>3</sup> Talented at declamation, as a teenager Jeanne entered the service of the King's three unmarried sisters as a reader (tasked, as the title may suggest, with entertaining the princesses by reading aloud).<sup>4</sup> In the course of her service to the princesses, Mademoiselle Genet came into increasingly frequent contact with the young dauphine, Austrian princess Maria Antonia—or, as she was known in France, Marie Antoinette.<sup>5</sup> The two women were around the same age, and Marie Antoinette so enjoyed Jeanne Genet's company that she made the reader one of her ladies-in-waiting and her treasurer, a position of high favor that Mademoiselle Genet would continue to hold until the queen's infamous demise during the French Revolution.<sup>6</sup> In fact, however, Jeanne was no longer "Mademoiselle Genet" when she entered the new queen's service. In 1774, her new royal mistress arranged, with Monsieur Genet's approval, Jeanne's marriage to Monsieur Campan, and she adopted the name under which she would rise to fame—Madame Campan.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> François Barrière, "Biographical Notice of Madame Campan" in Jeanne Campan, *Memoirs of the Private Life of Marie Antoinette, Queen of France and Navarre* (Philadelphia: A. Small, 1823), ii.

<sup>3</sup> Édouard Harlé, *Livre de Famille: Recueil de Documents sur ma Famille, Seconde Partie: Famille de Ma Mère*, vol I (Bordeaux: Imprimerie Wetterwald Frères, 1915), 32, 34-35; Barrière, "Biographical Notice," iii.

<sup>4</sup> Harlé, *Livre de Famille*, 34-35.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Unfortunately, Monsieur Campan did not share much more than his name with his wife. Although the new Madame Campan's father-in-law was the Queen's cabinet secretary (the reason why she had championed the marriage), the younger Monsieur Campan's first wife had died not long before he wed Jeanne Genet and their relationship was doomed from the start.<sup>8</sup> He informed his new wife that he had been pressured into the wedding and that their union was a mistake, and then he promptly departed for Italy.<sup>9</sup> He remained in Italy for the majority of their marriage, and fell deeply into debt.<sup>10</sup> One bright spot did emerge from their failed marriage, however, in the form of Madame Campan's beloved son, Henri.

Years passed, and a potent mixture of enlightenment philosophy, high taxes, and famine fatally sparked the first flames of revolution. Intellectual elites who sought a constitutional monarchy dominated the first act of the Revolution. In fact, they sent Campan's younger brother, Edmond Genet, to the United States as their ambassador.<sup>11</sup> His mission was not a resounding success. Genet quickly became embroiled in a minor fiasco (now known as the "Citizen Genet Affair") when he ignored warnings about America's neutrality policy and attempted to authorize American ship captains to act as privateers for the French, an act which was hostile to British shipping interests.<sup>12</sup> Luckily for Genet, the Americans were not upset enough to sentence him to death by sending him back to France when it became clear (to the alarm of once optimistic onlookers around Europe and the Atlantic) that radicals had taken control of the Revolutionary agenda.<sup>13</sup> He eventually started a family in America, marrying Cornelia Clinton, New York

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<sup>8</sup> Harlé, *Livre de Famille*, 36.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 36, 41.

<sup>11</sup> "Citizen Genet," *American Historical Record* 3, iss. 26 (February 1874): 49.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-52.

<sup>13</sup> "Citizen Genet," *American Historical Record*, 52.



Governor George Clinton's daughter.<sup>14</sup> Under the leadership of Robespierre, meanwhile, the Jacobin party embarked on its Reign of Terror, killing French nobles—including many of the original revolutionaries. As the tide of public opinion turned violently against Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI, Campan was able to escape court (although she emphasizes in her memoirs that she remained loyal to the Queen until the end) and to hide in the countryside with several of her siblings until 1795.<sup>15</sup> Alive but nearly penniless, Campan faced a formidable task. She was suddenly the sole capable adult in her family of six, which consisted of a frail mother, a useless husband, a young son, and two nieces whose mother committed suicide during the Terror.<sup>16</sup> Putting her extensive education to good use, she opened a small pension, or boarding school, in a tiny town just outside of Paris called St. Germain-en-Laye.<sup>17</sup>

Although the pension was not an immediate success, within a few years Campan had attracted over 100 pupils and become renowned both within France and abroad.<sup>18</sup> She taught Josephine de Beauvais's daughter Hortense (Queen Hortense Bonaparte of Holland) and niece Emilie (the future Madame de Lavalette) even before Josephine married Napoleon Bonaparte and became Empress of France.<sup>19</sup> Her connection to the Bonaparte family also brought Bonaparte's sister Caroline into her care, and eventually won her a position—at the Emperor's request—as headmistress of Écouen, his state-funded school for daughters of the soldiers in his Legion of Honor.<sup>20</sup> Campan was also a prolific writer, publishing several small instructional

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<sup>14</sup> "Citizen Genet," *American Historical Record*, 52.

<sup>15</sup> Barrière, "Biographical Notice," xvi; Harlé, *Livre de famille*, 40.

<sup>16</sup> Barrière, "Biographical Notice," xvi; Harlé, *Livre de famille*, 40-41.

<sup>17</sup> Barrière, "Biographical Notice," xvii.

<sup>18</sup> Harlé, *Livre de famille*, 42; Barrière, "Biographical Notice," xvii; Campan, *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, 10.

<sup>19</sup> Barrière, "Biographical Notice," xvii-xviii.

<sup>20</sup> Barrière, "Biographical Notice," xix, xx; Campan, *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, 24.

works during her lifetime as well as the *Memoir of the Private Life of Marie Antoinette*, her own *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, and a treatise *On Education*. At St. Germain, she developed her own system of education, influenced by the prerevolutionary French convent school tradition but uniquely suited to the new world that her pupils would have to confront.<sup>21</sup> She emphasized the importance of training young women in domestic tasks alongside their formal scholastic education, and of imparting religious values that would equip them with the appropriate mental fortitude to direct the moral development of their husbands and children.<sup>22</sup> Her model proved to be inspirational to a large number of girls' school headmistresses who founded schools after the Revolution, both inside and outside the country.<sup>23</sup>

Campan's impact and legacy have been generally overlooked in the United States, and searching for the French headmistress in the American historiographical record is a largely futile quest. However, histories of republican motherhood (especially works that delve deeply into literary domesticity and female education) provide fertile ground in which to contextualize her contributions. In the 1980s, as American social historians re-oriented their research to focus on previously ignored minority groups, Linda Kerber penned what might be considered the founding document of the "republican motherhood historiography." Her *Women of the Republic*, published in 1980, defines the concept of the republican mother as someone who "integrated political values into her domestic life. Dedicated as she was to the nurture of public-spirited male

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<sup>21</sup> Campan, *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, 36-37; Christina de Bellaigue, *Educating Women: Schooling and Identity in England and France, 1800-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 24, 27-29.

<sup>22</sup> Campan, *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, 36-37, 65, 243, 257.

<sup>23</sup> Bellaigue, *Educating Women*, 27-29, 37; Mary Johnson, "Madame Rivardi's Seminary in the Gothic Mansion," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 104, no. 1 (1980): 3-38.

citizens, the republican mother guaranteed the steady infusion of virtue into the Republic.”<sup>24</sup>

Kerber also provides detailed analysis of the political philosophies, personal experiences, and legal precedents that helped form (and constrain) republican women in the decades following the American Revolution. However, she argues that the republican mother operated firmly in the private sphere of her home, and that ultimately the doctrine “provided no outlet for women to affect a real political decision.”<sup>25</sup> While Kerber’s influence is almost universally acknowledged by later scholars, historians have since challenged her work, particularly in regards to the extent of female political agency and the function of didactic literature. Unlike later scholars, she focuses on the Revolution itself, cutting off her analysis at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Writing in 1982, Mary Ryan traces the development of Kerber’s private-sphere republican motherhood into the mid-nineteenth century, while focusing on the place of literature in forming and perpetuating American ideas about motherhood and family. In her work, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity 1830-1860*, she tackles the role of writing, publishing, and reading in creating a “cult of domesticity” in antebellum America. She details the benefits of relying heavily on published work, noting that although such an approach might not represent every woman’s experience, the “shrill or obsessive repetition of certain themes may indicate that the writer had hit upon a particularly critical concern of the reading public.”<sup>26</sup> With her acknowledgment of the contradictions inherent in the premise of a mother whose power confined her to a crucial but inherently supporting role, Ryan closely examines the

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<sup>24</sup> Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980): 11.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>26</sup> Mary Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity 1830-1860* (New York: Hawthorn Press, 1982), 12.

tensions that Kerber touches on in her own book while also offering later scholars like Mary Kelley, Sarah Robbins, and Lucia McMahon a framework upon which to study the interactions between literature and the individual. In fact, in McMahon's far more recent *Mere Equals: The Paradox of Educated Women in the Early American Republic*, she adds the useful term "mere equal" to the conversation. "Mere equals" were women whose simultaneous temperamental inferiority, moral superiority, and "intellectual equality" were flatteringly framed as the reason why it would really be a demotion of respect and influence to be treated like a man.<sup>27</sup>

Beginning in the early twenty-first century, historians began to challenge some of the assumptions made by Kerber and Ryan. Sarah Robbins, for instance, argues that scholars have dismissed the true significance of "didactic" literature (a genre that Ryan contends contributed to a housebound feminine identity). In her 2004 *Managing Literacy, Mothering America: Women's Narratives on Reading and Writing in the Nineteenth Century*, Robbins draws on the work of English professor Charles Schuster to redefine literacy as "the ability to make socially significant meaning."<sup>28</sup> In expanding the definition of literacy, she broadens the possible scope of power for literate women. Her book contends that "maternal literacy managers" influenced the treatment of key societal issues such as slavery, class division, and missionary work by directing the reading habits of their families and communities.<sup>29</sup> Unlike Kerber, Robbins sees a distinct political role for republican mothers, whom she defines as not only "mother-teachers" but additionally as (potentially unmarried) teachers with maternal instincts.<sup>30</sup> Mary Kelley also develops upon and

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<sup>27</sup> Lucia McMahon, *Mere Equals: The Paradox of Educated Women in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012): ix-x, 2-3.

<sup>28</sup> Sarah Robbins, *Managing Literacy, Mothering America: Women's Narratives on Reading and Writing in the Nineteenth Century* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004): 17.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 16, 19-21, 94-96.

challenges elements of Kerber's and Ryan's monographs with her 2006 publication, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*. Kelley argues that female academies, particularly through the voluntary societies and literary associations that they sponsored and inspired, provided women with the venue and critical-thinking skills to become a key part of (and even leaders within) "civil society"—defined as "a public inhabited by private persons."<sup>31</sup> Unlike Kerber, Kelley does not see America's women as remaining trapped within the walls of their homes. While Kelley hesitates to attribute any formal political power to women, she argues that they possessed political and cultural influence. Her "civil society" provides scholars with a new way to envision nineteenth-century American society without assuming a constricting, gendered dichotomy of roles and spaces.<sup>32</sup>

In fact, the extent to which women possessed political power, before and after the Revolution, remains the key preoccupation of most texts concerning literary domesticity and republican motherhood. One work that deals very explicitly with the potential "soft" political power of women in the Early Republic is Catherine Allgor's *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government*, published in 2000. As the title suggests, Allgor argues that the wives and mothers of early American politicians played an important role in managing the political development of the nation's capital. She reveals how women flocked to watch political speeches and how shrewd matriarchs orchestrated political appointments for family members.<sup>33</sup> It is true that unsettled men eventually tried to limit this

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<sup>31</sup> Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand & Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 7.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 116-117, 140.

very visible, active female participation in Washington's political life. Nevertheless, it is evident that American women had long been adept at justifying potentially threatening behaviors in a respectable shroud of maternal and familial duty.

While Campan is very seldom mentioned within the republican motherhood historiography, she is acknowledged by certain European historians as an important figure in the development of French female education. Christina de Bellaigue contextualizes Campan within both French and British educational trends in her 2007 publication, *Educating Women: Schooling and Identity in England and France, 1800-1867*. She provides a valuable picture of the French tendency to view their schoolmistresses as "public figures," noting how the women themselves "cultivated a public persona."<sup>34</sup> Bellaigue also links Campan to her British neighbors, detailing Maria Edgeworth's 1802 visit to St. Germain and discussing the extent to which English teaching methods influenced Campan's educational philosophies.<sup>35</sup> As American scholars tend to emphasize the influence of British practices on American girls' schooling, Bellaigue thus illuminates a connection between the American public and Campan in the form of a prominent author with whom Americans were already familiar.

Bellaigue classifies Campan's school as a hybrid, modeling itself on elements of Old Regime nunneries and archbishop François Fénelon's seventeenth-century treatise on educating women, while also embodying the domesticating goals of the Napoleonic Code.<sup>36</sup> While the concept of republican motherhood blossomed in France during the Revolution, Napoleon's interpretation of the ideology was much more restrictive than that of early revolutionaries

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<sup>34</sup> Bellaigue, *Educating Women*, 119.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 187, 226-227.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 24, 26, 27-29, 195-196.

inspired by enlightenment philosophers like Rousseau.<sup>37</sup> He wanted women to receive domestic and religious instruction but saw little value in nurturing their intellect, a perspective that Bellaigue indicates was not shared by Campan or reflected in her curriculum.<sup>38</sup> However, Bellaigue's analysis lacks sufficient examination of Campan's personal life and her first school at St. Germain. Bellaigue is skeptical that Campan placed genuine importance on her own maternal persona, highlighting the headmistress's writings on her "large-scale institutional model" for schools without giving equal weight to her writings on maternal education.<sup>39</sup>

Scholars Catherine Montfort and Terrie Quintana also contend that Campan's curriculum was subversive, but they see the headmistress's maternal domesticity as a clever and crucial protection for her educational system.<sup>40</sup> They argue that she placated parents and the government by teaching her pupils domestic skills so that she could also provide them with the artistic and academic training that would allow the girls to support their families if the need ever arose. The two authors provide a detailed description of what they dub Campan's "ambitious and unheard-of academic program" and assert that the fact she provided "her students the [artistic] training necessary for a professional career... was revolutionary."<sup>41</sup> The implications of this supposedly revolutionary step for places other than France, however, have gone unexamined.

Both Sarah Robbins and Mary Kelley discuss the complicated interactions between British, American, and (very occasionally) French women in American periodicals, a conversation in which Campan has not yet been included—but ought to be inserted. Examining

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<sup>37</sup> Bellaigue, *Educating Women*, 27-29.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>40</sup> Catherine R. Montfort and J. Terrie Quintana, "Madame Campan's *Institution d'Education*: A Revolution in the Education of Women," *Australian Journal of French Studies* 33, no. 1 (1996): 40-41.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38.

American women writers' fascination with influential women from the past, Germaine de Stael is the only Frenchwoman who Kelley discusses in detail.<sup>42</sup> While the independent and fiercely intelligent Madame de Staël elicited considerable admiration, Kelley asserts that Edgeworth provided a more promising model for American women to follow in their own lives.<sup>43</sup> Yet Kelley's observation that Edgeworth's "claim to selflessness validated female schools and literary societies dedicated to women's intellectual development by linking them to a model of self-sacrificing womanhood" could just as easily be describing Campan's own legacy, and the reason why American readers approved of the French headmistress.<sup>44</sup> Robbins follows a similar line of reasoning, quickly dismissing Madame de Stael as a possible model for American female behavior and focusing instead on the reception of British authors like Edgeworth and Hannah More without investigating the potential influence of other (slightly less famous) Frenchwomen.<sup>45</sup> However, Campan does not fit naturally into the dichotomy Robbins imposes of "English supporters of female learning" who "tend[ed] to tout women's equal mental capability" and their American counterparts who "emphasized the political needs of republican culture."<sup>46</sup> Campan's philosophy offered a third option, as she articulated elements of the American perspective despite her foreign nationality.

Examining the past forty years of scholarship on American mothers ultimately reveals that a currently empty place exists for Campan in discussions about the role, influences on, and development of republican motherhood and female education in America. While Campan carefully constructed her virtuous, maternal persona in order to protect her own reputation, this

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<sup>42</sup> Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 191-192, 204-208, 232-234.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 232-234.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>45</sup> Robbins, *Managing Literacy, Mothering America*, 26-28, 50.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64.



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idealized version of the headmistress ultimately took on a life of its own. Campan's confidence in the power of good mothers reassured American men and women daunted by the myriad of problems they faced not only in civil society, but also in political life.

## Chapter I

### Madame Campan Crafts Her Own Legacy

During her lifetime, Campan's legacy was by no means certain. Determined not to let her detractors control her legacy, however, Campan crafted a public persona, both in writing and through her influence on her students, that emphasized her virtuous, selfless, and maternal attributes and that erased the turmoil of her not-so-perfect private life. Meanwhile, by teaching James Monroe's daughter Eliza, Campan prompted key members of the American political elite to define what constituted a proper American girl's education, and what combination of European aristocratic poise and American practicality befitted a republican gentlewoman. Shaped by years under Campan's tutelage, Eliza served as a living embodiment of the headmistress's assertion that her pupils were trained to comfortably occupy any walk of life with moral fortitude, charming manners, and maternal devotion.

#### *Writing Her Defense*

Campan promoted her educational theories and publicized her maternal persona by authoring multiple books, released both during her lifetime and posthumously. She published her first work, *Conversations of a Mother with her Daughter, in French and in English, Composed for Madame Campan's Maison d'Education* in Paris in 1803, followed by *Letters of Two Young Friends* in 1811.<sup>47</sup> Given that the "conversations" were written in multiple languages to facilitate language learning, they would not necessarily have needed to be translated. However, by 1814 an English, if not American, edition of the former work had been published.<sup>48</sup> After Campan's

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<sup>47</sup> Jeanne Campan, *Conversations d'une mère avec sa fille, en français et en anglais, composés pour la Maison d'Éducation de Mme Campan*. ed. J. Franceschini (Paris: F. Louis, 1803).; Jeanne Campan, *Lettres de Deux Jeunes Amies* (Paris: L'Imprimerie de Plassan, 1811).

<sup>48</sup> Jeanne Campan, *Conversations of a Mother with her Daughter, and some other Persons; or Dialogues composed for Mme. Campan's Establishment for Young Ladies, near Paris; and*

death on March 16, 1822, Baudouin Frères quickly published her *Memoirs of the Private Life of Marie Antoinette*.<sup>49</sup> The memoir proved to be so popular that it was on its third print run by 1823. Also in 1823, Henry Colburn and Abraham Small, London and Philadelphia printers respectively, published English-language editions of the Marie Antoinette memoirs. In 1824, Baudouin Frères separately released the *Private Journal of Madame Campan* as well as her *Thoughts on Education*.<sup>50</sup> In 1825, Colburn (and then Abraham Small) published these two books as one (*The private journal of Madame Campan : comprising original anecdotes of the French court, selections from her correspondence, thoughts on education*), which allowed British and American readers to purchase a consolidated collection of Campan's opinions on motherhood and education, although certain sections of the educational tract were truncated in translation. It must also be noted that calling the book Campan's *Private Journal* is something of a misnomer. The collection of anecdotes and observations was compiled by Campan with the help of her editor (Monsieur Maigne, a doctor whose wife was one of Campan's former students) and consists of a mixture of quoted material and references to the headmistress in the third person.

Perusing the aforementioned works, it would be easy to assume that Campan enjoyed an unblemished reputation; in fact, she faced many detractors during her lifetime who accused her

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*arranged by Madame D\*\*\*\*. For the use of English Young Ladies.* (London: Schulze and Dean for L. Deconchy, 1814).

<sup>49</sup> Jeanne Campan, *Mémoires sur la vie privée de Marie-Antoinette; suivis de souvenirs et anecdotes historiques sur les règnes de Louis XIV, de Louis XV et de Louis XVI*, ed. F. Barrière (Paris: Baudouin Frères, 1823).

<sup>50</sup> Jeanne Campan, *Journal anecdotique de Mme Campan, ou Souvenirs, recueillis dans ses entretiens, par M. Maigne, médecin des hôpitaux de Mantes ; suivi d'une correspondance inédite de Mme Campan avec son fils*, ed. M. Maigne (Paris: Baudouin Frères, 1824); Jeanne Campan, *De l'Education, par Mme Campan, Surintendante de la Maison d'Écouen, Suivi des Conseils aux jeunes filles, d'un théâtre pour les jeunes personnes et de quelques essais de morale*, ed. F. Barrière (Paris: Baudouin Frères, 1824).

of opportunism and social-climbing. Several American periodical articles, reprinted from European papers, portray the headmistress in an unflattering light. An 1810 article in the New York *American Citizen*, originally published in a London newspaper, recounts a French party ten years prior attended by “Madame Campan, according to the public rumour, Bonaparte’s mistress of the revels...with a number of the most fascinating of her nymphs.”<sup>51</sup> The former lady-in-waiting’s time in Marie Antoinette’s court posed a challenging hurdle when seeking public acceptance; her courtly manners and intimacy with the royal family seemed contradictory to the republican, Revolutionary sentiments popular with many of her countrymen and women even during the more conservative Directory and Empire. Napoleon, attempting to increase the prestige and legitimacy of his own court, did look to Campan for etiquette guidance.<sup>52</sup> However, “mistress of the revels” does not evoke images of an etiquette consultant so much as a directress of frivolous parties peopled with bevy of young women trained to seduce and entrance vulnerable men.

Another critical anecdote, published in Boston’s *The Athenaeum* in 1817, forms one of a set of “Parisian Anecdotes” originating from the *New Monthly Magazine*. Prefaced with an introduction sympathetic to Monsieur Revel, ex-husband of Napoleon’s mistress Eleanor de La Plaigne, the article includes the incensed man’s account of his imprisonment and coerced divorce, Eleanor’s affair with the Emperor, and Campan’s central role in facilitating the relationship.<sup>53</sup> The article’s authors call Campan “an infamous deluder of young females to their ruin” and a “disgrace to the title of matron,” while Revel’s descriptions call to mind a mercenary

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<sup>51</sup> “From a London Paper. General Sarrazin,” *American Citizen*, September 22, 1810, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Steven D. Kale, “Women, Salons, and the State in the Aftermath of the French Revolution,” *Journal of Women’s History* 13, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 60.

<sup>53</sup> “Parisian Anecdotes, 1815, 16, 17, From the New Monthly Magazine,” *The Athenaeum; or, Spirit of the English Magazines* 2, iss. 3 (November 1, 1817), 91-95.

brothel madam rather than a maternal icon.<sup>54</sup> With Louis XVIII on the French throne after the Bourbon restoration, Napoleon's followers were vulnerable, and Campan herself lost her position as headmistress and lived the rest of her life in penury after Napoleon's exile.<sup>55</sup> Yet this very article also notes that Monsieur Lally Tollendall "one of Louis the Eighteenth's principal favourites" had published a defense of the headmistress's reputation; Revel's perspective by no means represented the sole interpretation of Campan's actions in post-Napoleonic France.<sup>56</sup> The tension between the conflicting nature of Campan's behavior and principles certainly left plenty of cracks for critics of the headmistress to exploit. After all, she served two successive administrations, ran a business by herself while advocating for the woman's place inside the home, and taught hundreds of young women while encouraging maternal education. Yet Campan was not content to merely let men like Lally Tollendall defend her name for her.

Detractors forced Campan to forge a pointed and successful rhetorical campaign aimed at ensuring her own legacy as a selfless, dedicated, and apolitical teacher. Polite American society might never have condoned Campan as a guide for women seeking to raise good, republican mothers if Campan's self-directed positive publicity campaign had not overwhelmed French distrust of the celebrated headmistress. Campan developed an oft-repeated response to her critics, one version of which she penned in an unpublished letter to an unknown friend, sent from St. Germain around 1802:

I have known for a long time how much antipathy inferior women have in general for women who distinguish themselves by resignation and work in times of adversity, by

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<sup>54</sup> "Parisian Anecdotes," *The Atheneum*, 92-95.

<sup>55</sup> Barrière, "Biographical Notice, xx-xxiii.; Campan, *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, 31-32.

<sup>56</sup> "Parisian Anecdotes," *The Atheneum*, 92.

moderation and order in times of prosperity, and in a word by the adoption of the decorum and good manners which must sufficiently punish [their critics].<sup>57</sup>

Positioning herself as the victim of jealous lies, Campan cleverly and subtly asserts her own superiority by implying that those small-minded individuals who spread malicious gossip lacked the very strength of character and ladylike manners that defined her own life. She repeats very similar sentiments in a letter sent to her son two years prior (published in her *Private Journal*), writing that “Since I am the victim of envy, only because I am at the head of the first establishment for female education in France, I must endeavor to rise above the level whence I have been so unjustly attacked.”<sup>58</sup> By emphasizing these attacks against herself and her institution, Campan actually draws attention to her own success; after all, her contemporaries would not object so vociferously to her conduct and academy if the daughters of the international elite did not seek places at St. Germain.

Campan’s correspondence with Eliza Monroe also makes clear that she actively sought to ensure that her reputation was not tarnished in the eyes of her former American pupil. In an undated letter, Campan writes that she sent along with the letter “some printing matters which will interest you—they are a noble defence in my favor for the outrages which the pamphleteers have made me suffer so unjustly.”<sup>59</sup> It is slightly puzzling that Campan would feel the need to send such a defense to a student who presumably knew her well enough to ignore media slander

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<sup>57</sup> “il y a longtemps que je sais combien les femmelettes ont d’anthipatie en général pour les femmes qui se distinguent par la résignation et le travail dans l’adversité, par la modération Et l’ordre dans la prosperite, et en un mot par l’adoption des convenances et de la bienséance ce qui doit suffisamment les punir.” Jeanne Louise Henriette Genet-Campan to Unknown, *Germinal* 30, [1802?], OTM: hs. Dz 117 b. Special Collections, University of Amsterdam. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

<sup>58</sup> Campan, *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, 110.

<sup>59</sup> Jeanne Campan to Eliza K.M. Hay, n.d., Folder 25, Monroe-Hay Family Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William & Mary (hereafter cited as ViW).

against her former teacher's character. However, perhaps the headmistress hoped that Eliza would share the printed accounts with her family and friends, or merely wanted to share with Eliza her own happiness at having received public support and endorsement of her good character. Campan's fixation on her reputation and her critics also casts her many publications in the light of an intentional defense; from her pen directly to the minds of thousands of readers, the headmistress plead her case.

The sense of civic duty with which Campan imbued her virtuous and maternal persona in both the anecdotal and educational treatise sections of her *Private Journal* created a model of female republicanism for others to follow that aligned closely with the budding ideology of American republican motherhood. At the end of the preface to her tract *Thoughts on Education* (printed in the second half of the American edition of the *Private Journal*), Campan notes that "A sentiment truly national will lead [women] to regard their own homes as the only theatre of their glory, and public morals will then soon shew the immense steps made by social order towards a better state of things."<sup>60</sup> Replace the nation in question with America rather than France, and historian Linda Kerber practically paraphrases Campan in her definition of the republican mother as one who by "the nurture of public-spirited male citizens...guaranteed the steady infusion of virtue into the Republic."<sup>61</sup> Kerber's judgement that American republican mothers were confined to the private sphere also aligns with Campan's public assessment that mothers ought to remain within their own homes, although the headmistress's actions in her personal life sometimes contradicted her own advice.<sup>62</sup>

Creating a maternal public persona served not only to defend against the accusations of

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<sup>60</sup> Campan, *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, 287.

<sup>61</sup> Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 11.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

jealous critics, but to gloss over Campan's poor relationship with her husband and inability to control her son's bad habits. In her letters to her son Henri, included at the end of the *Journal Anecdotique* portion of the *Private Journal*, Campan claims to subscribe to the following philosophy on gender relations: "It is a man's business to direct, to form and to defend his fortune; it is a woman's task to obey, and to attend to her family and domestic affairs."<sup>63</sup> Sweet as this little cliché doubtless sounded to the ears of male readers who wanted to ensure that Campan was a suitable source of advice for their wives, she certainly did not follow this pattern in her own life. In fact, Campan had to earn her own fortune in order to defend against the threatening penury caused in part by her husband's debts.<sup>64</sup> In a letter sent to Napoleon's stepdaughter Hortense in 1800, published in the 1830s after Campan's death, the teacher advises her pupil to trust Napoleon and Josephine to choose a good husband for her because of the importance of her social position. Campan wrote this despite admitting that her own parents did not choose as well for her as she might have hoped.<sup>65</sup> She reveals that in her youth she had loved a man who was not Catholic, and as her father disapproved of the marriage the two did not wed.<sup>66</sup> Instead, she entered into a "very unhappy" (*très malheureux*) marriage with Monsieur Campan.<sup>67</sup> She writes, however, that it was his poor character and complete lack of commitment to their marriage that doomed their relationship, and that her "love of duty always made [her]

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<sup>63</sup> Campan, *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, 185.

<sup>64</sup> Harlé, *Livre de famille*, 41.

<sup>65</sup> Jeanne Campan to Hortense Bonaparte, 11 September 1800, in *Correspondance inédite de Mme Campan avec La Reine Hortense*, ed. J.A.C. Buchon (Paris: Alphonse Levavasseur, 1835), 95-99.

<sup>66</sup> Campan to Bonaparte, *Correspondance inédite*, 97-98.

<sup>67</sup> Campan to Bonaparte, *Correspondance inédite*, 98. Translation from Violette M. Montagu, *The Celebrated Madame Campan: Lady-in-Waiting to Marie Antoinette and Confidante of Napoleon*. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company; London: Eveleigh Nash, 1914), 33.



desire to live in peace with [her] husband.”<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, she comments that “had my parents made a better choice, they might have been instrumental in procuring me happiness.”<sup>69</sup> Campan emphasizes that even in the face of her husband’s complete disinterest, she remained a faithful wife. While she admits that she wishes her parents had chosen her a different spouse, she does not let this personal experience inform the kind of advice she gives, which affirms the power and good judgment of parents to settle their daughters in suitable marriages. In an even more public setting than this letter (which could have been edited, but was at least initially composed for Hortense’s eyes only), the contrast between the way she describes her own marriage and the way that she counsels other women to behave in their marriages is clear in her *Private Journal*. Campan intones in the portion “On Education” that women ought to cultivate “the purity of their religion, morals and modesty” in the face of which their husbands will have no interest in “seek[ing] abroad for amusements.”<sup>70</sup> For the nineteenth-century reader, this philosophy that women bore the responsibility of creating a haven of domestic bliss that would entice their husbands to reject the temptations of the outside world would have been extremely familiar. Yet according to Campan’s own admission, her own husband did not find the married state or his wife to be agreeable to him—in fact, he fled to Italy at the first opportunity. Highlighting her real circumstances would either reveal to readers that she was living proof that it was not always possible for even the most virtuous and attractive women to reform their spouses, or arouse their suspicions that Campan was not the paragon of filial, wifely, and maternal duty that she proclaimed herself to be. Perhaps for this reason, Monsieur Campan is almost entirely absent

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<sup>68</sup> “l’amour de mon devoir m’a toujours fait désirer de bien vivre avec mon mari.” Campan to Bonaparte, *Correspondance inédite*, 98. Translated from Montagu, *The Celebrated Madame Campan*, 33.

<sup>69</sup> “un choix plus réfléchi de la part de mes parens eût pu me procurer le bonheur.” Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Campan, *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, 220.

from his wife's memoirs.<sup>71</sup> Meanwhile, an entire section of published letters in the work is devoted to their son.

However, even Campan's relationship with Henri is represented in an idealistic light in the *Private Journal*. Based on an unpublished letter sent to a friend, Campan was at her wits' end by the Spring of 1803.<sup>72</sup> She asks the letter's recipient if she could send the nineteen-year-old Henri to live with his family for a little while, in order to remove her son from the bad influence of his social circle in Bordeaux.<sup>73</sup> Campan despairs of the fact that her talented son is too lazy to make use of his potential. Apparently he had been ignoring his job, choosing instead to socialize with the beauties of Bordeaux.<sup>74</sup> His frustrated mother writes that "this winter he has not missed a single ball" (cet hiver il n'a pas manqué un seul bal) and that Henri often stayed out until the early morning.<sup>75</sup> Like his father before him, Henri was also racking up debts.<sup>76</sup> Relying only on the published letters in the *Private Journal*, readers would have received a rather different impression of Henri's situation. While the letters do hint at Campan's frustration with her son's behavior, they reframe the narrative into a series of eloquent and emotional essays brimming with maternal love and gentle reproach.<sup>77</sup> The letters serve more as a guideline for other mothers than a real glimpse into the author's own parenting challenges. Campan suggests that Henri heed his guilty conscience, arrive at work more promptly and regularly, and remember his duty to

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<sup>71</sup> Montagu, *The Celebrated Madame Campan*, 33-34.

<sup>72</sup> Jeanne Louise Henriette Genet-Campan to Unknown, Germinal 30, [1802?], OTM: hs. Dz 117 a., Special Collections, University of Amsterdam.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Jeanne Campan to Henri Campan, 14 Brumaire Year XI (November 4, 1802), in *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, 138-143.; Jeanne Campan to Henri Campan, 9 Ventose Year XI (February 27, 1803), in *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, 143-149.

support his mother in her old age and make her proud.<sup>78</sup> According to a letter supposedly sent several months prior to the unpublished 1803 intervention, she writes that “You inform me that your attention to business has called forth approbation. This at once reconciles me to you; for I know I may implicitly rely on your sincerity.”<sup>79</sup> Evidently, Campan could not rely on her son’s sincerity, and he evidently did not find her appeals to his sense of filial duty particularly convincing if he continued his irresponsible socializing. However, some problems were too private for the *Private Journal*. After all, a mother whose child preferred carousing in the city till the early hours of morning and spending money with no sense of economy does not seem like the kind of woman who other parents would want to entrust with their children.

This was a real concern, because Campan emphasized how she viewed her students as her children, and she would not have wanted the habits of her actual child to be widely publicized. Editor Monsieur Maigne observed that his wife’s former teacher “frequently made the following observation:—‘My pupils were my daughters, so long as they remained with me, and my friends, when they returned to their homes.’”<sup>80</sup> If her pupils were her daughters, then Campan implies that she taught not for financial compensation but because she felt it to be her duty. After all, a mother automatically feels invested in the future success and happiness of her daughters, and will not rest until she has done everything in her power to ensure their security. Hortense certainly felt Campan’s dedication to be genuine, reflecting that her former teacher

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<sup>78</sup> Jeanne Campan to Henri Campan, November 4, 1802, in *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, 139-140.

<sup>79</sup> Jeanne Campan to Henri Campan, February 27, 1803, in *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, 143-144.

<sup>80</sup> Campan, *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, 12.

“devoted herself to me with all of a mother’s affection and understanding.”<sup>81</sup> Unlike Empress Josephine, whose Directory-era reputation as a seductive and frivolous “merveilleuse” never completely disappeared, Campan appeared to American readers to have been the stable, maternal core of Napoleon’s inner-circle. Campan expressed similarly maternal feelings towards Eliza Monroe, which American readers learned about decades after the death of both headmistress and pupil in a series of published letters written by Campan, her brother Edmond Genet, and James Monroe. Writing to Genet in 1797, Campan expresses her sadness that the Monroe family will soon be returning to New York, where they will see the brother she has not seen for many years. Campan tells her younger brother that “You will see my Eliza, who is full of wit and agreeable talents, and who I love as my own Daughter. Embrace her tenderly for me.”<sup>82</sup> Eliza provided a physical link between the siblings, a kind of symbolic niece who could transmit Campan’s love for Genet with a hug, just as he could hopefully share his own sister’s familial love for Eliza. It must be noted, however, that Campan might have purposely forged a closer relationship with Hortense and Eliza than with her other students because the two girls’ families were important patrons of St. Germain and Écouen.

### ***Eliza Monroe Links Madame Campan to the American Political Elite***

Crafting a legacy was not limited to publishing. The students under Campan’s care formed part of her legacy as well, educated according to her specifications and shaped into the kinds of women who she thought would be best-equipped to lead successful lives. She certainly

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<sup>81</sup> Hortense Beauharnais Bonaparte, *The Memoirs of Queen Hortense*, published by arrangement with Prince Napoleon, ed. Jean Hanoteau, trans. Arthur K. Griggs, vol. I (New York: J. J Little and Ives Company, 1927), 8.

<sup>82</sup> “XI.—Selections from the Papers of Citizen Genet,” *The Historical Magazine, and Notes and Queries Concerning the Antiquities, History, and Biography of America* 2, iss. 3 (September 1867), 155.

viewed her students as embodiments of her character, writing in her *Private Journal* that one of her rewards for the sometimes challenging task of running a girls' school was "that the moral principles which I inculcate in the minds of my pupils, cannot fail to render them exemplary women, whose conduct will reflect honour on my old age."<sup>83</sup> Just as Campan hoped that her son's conduct would make her proud, she relied on her student "daughters" to go out into the world and prove the value of her life's work by contributing to the stability of their society and families by spreading the same sentiments of hard work and moral rectitude that they learned from their headmistress.

James Monroe was willing to trust Campan's skills even before she had graduates to prove the success of her teaching methods. Soon after Campan first opened her pension's doors, James Monroe and his wife Elizabeth placed their daughter Eliza under her tutelage. What was not widely publicized, and which Campan only wrote in a family history addressed to her American nieces and nephews, was that if not for this decision, she might never have succeeded as a headmistress. In this account, she makes sure to note the importance of Americans in her own life for her young American relatives, remarking that "I must tell you that two estimable families from your good country contributed to my first successes."<sup>84</sup> She goes on to recount how James Monroe saved her family from starving and her pension from closing when she could not pay the bills with the Directory's worthless paper money she was receiving in tuition fees.<sup>85</sup> Like a white knight riding up on horseback (although in less glamorous reality, like a father with a young daughter in a carriage), James Monroe arrived and paid in American currency.<sup>86</sup> Eliza's

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<sup>83</sup> Campan, *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, 136.

<sup>84</sup> "Je dois vous dire que deux estimables familles de votre bonne patrie ont contribué à mes premiers succès." Harlé, *Livre de famille*, 41.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 41-42.

tuition, along with that of the daughters of the Pinckney family whom the Monroes encouraged to also send their daughters to Campan, “thus, in fact, founded an establishment whose strange destiny has since been to launch a host of Duchesses, Princesses, and Queens.”<sup>87</sup>

Mrs. Monroe and seven-year-old Eliza accompanied the former United States Senator when he travelled to Paris in 1794 to take up the position of Minister Plenipotentiary to France.<sup>88</sup> As none of the family spoke much French, language lessons were a priority, and Eliza and her mother both began studying with a tutor immediately.<sup>89</sup> After several months of preparation, however, Eliza’s parents enrolled her with Campan at her school in St. Germain-en-Laye.<sup>90</sup> A lively child, Eliza soon made friends and became part of a school community that included the headmistress’s own nieces, Hortense de Beauharnais, and eventually Napoleon’s sister Caroline Bonaparte.<sup>91</sup>

Other Americans soon joined Eliza when politician and diplomat Thomas Pinckney placed his five daughters at St. Germain under Mr. and Mrs. Monroe’s guardianship.<sup>92</sup> Eliza remained at St. Germain for two years, never guessing as she returned to the United States in

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<sup>87</sup> “Deux familles Américaines ont donc, de fait, fondé un établissement dont les destins bizarres ont depuis fait sortir une foule de Duchesses, de Princesses et de Reines.” Harlé, *Livre de famille*, 42.

<sup>88</sup> Monroe Journal, 19 June 1794, in Daniel Preston and Marlena C. Delong, eds., *The Papers of James Monroe*, vol. 3, *Selected Correspondence and Papers, 1794-1796* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2009), 18.

<sup>89</sup> Monroe to Joseph Jones, September 4, 1794, in Preston and Delong, *Papers of James Monroe*, 3:52-56; Monroe to Jefferson, 7 September 1794, in James P. McClure and Jefferson Looney, eds. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Digital Edition* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2009-2019).

<sup>90</sup> Jeanne Campan to Monroe, 9 January 1795, in Preston and Delong, *Papers of James Monroe*, 3:199-200.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Campan to Monroe, September-October 1795, in Preston and Delong, *Papers of James Monroe*, 3:473; Thomas Pinckney to Monroe, 15 June 1795, in Preston and Delong, *Papers of James Monroe*, 3:363; Harlé, *Livre de Famille*, 41.

1796 that she had merely finished the first of three stays with Campan. In 1803 Eliza sailed back across the Atlantic alongside her parents and new baby sister, Maria. President Jefferson had sent her father to help negotiate the Louisiana purchase and then to serve as the American Minister in London; while the negotiations took place, Eliza spent three months at St. Germain.<sup>93</sup> Ever eager to keep his children close, Monroe brought Eliza with the family to London for the ensuing year, only sending her back to St. Germain when diplomatic business took him to Spain for an extended period of time.<sup>94</sup> Partially in an attempt to manage a strained financial situation, Monroe then rented a home for his wife and youngest daughter near St. Germain so that they could be close to Eliza, who spent a final year with Campan at the age of eighteen.<sup>95</sup>

By placing his daughter at St. Germain, James Monroe thrust Eliza (and by proxy, her instructress) into the center of a debate about what qualities defined an elite, republican American female. Monroe's friends worried about the impact that too much time in France might have on Eliza. Despite the fact that Francophile Thomas Jefferson's own daughter went to school at a prerevolutionary Parisian convent, he cautioned his protégé in 1796 that "I am often asked when you will return. my answer is When Eliza is 14. years old. Longer than that you will be too wise to stay."<sup>96</sup> While Jefferson might simply have been urging Monroe not to keep his family away from home and friends for too long, the comment seems particularly directed at Eliza. By fifteen or sixteen she might start to enter French society, or even find a European husband, which would complicate an American woman's republican duties. In fact, Eliza did return to Europe as

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<sup>93</sup> Monroe to James Madison, 14 May 1803, in Daniel Preston, ed., *The Papers of James Monroe*, vol. 5, *Selected Correspondence and Papers, January 1803-April 1811* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2014), 65-68; Monroe to Samuel Tyler, 29 September 1803, in Preston, *Papers of James Monroe*, 5:129-130.

<sup>94</sup> Monroe to James Madison, 20 December 1804, in Preston, *Papers of James Monroe*, 5:289.

<sup>95</sup> Monroe to Joseph Prentis, 29 December 1805, in Preston, *Papers of James Monroe*, 5:440.

<sup>96</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Monroe, 10 July 1796, *Thomas Jefferson Digital Edition*.

a teenager, much to her great-uncle Joseph Jones's consternation. Writing from London in May, 1804, Monroe assured his elderly relative that "I read Eliza what you mentioned of her, & she requests me to assure you that you shall not be disappointed, in respect to her returning as good an American as she was when she left home."<sup>97</sup> While Mr. Jones might have worried about British influences as well as French, it seems highly likely that Eliza's French seminary education (at a very prominent academy) prompted some of his concerns. Evidently, all three generations shared (or thought they shared) a common idea of what constituted a "bad" American, and how to avoid this fate. That Eliza needed to take care to avoid this danger in Europe suggests that American women and their average French counterparts were not assumed to share similar values or standards of polite behavior. However, neither did a graduate of Campan's seminary behave like an average French schoolgirl.

In light of Eliza Monroe's actual experience at St. Germain, extrapolated both from correspondence and Campan's later descriptions of her curriculum, it is unsurprising that James Monroe considered the Frenchwoman a positive influence. In fact, he was the first of many Americans to place his trust in Campan's educational and childrearing system. Far from training her students to spend their lives as a new generation of empty-headed courtiers, Campan declared in her *Private Journal* that the way she ran her schools was "hostile to aristocratical principles," as "The most perfect equality [was] preserved; distinction [was] awarded only to merit and industry."<sup>98</sup> A girl would leave Campan's nurturing side with the sewing, cooking, and household-management skills necessary to render her "generally superior to those brought up in other establishments."<sup>99</sup> With an education that would prepare her equally well for keeping her

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<sup>97</sup> Monroe to Joseph Jones, 16 May 1804, in Preston, *Papers of James Monroe*, 5:221-224.

<sup>98</sup> Campan, *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, 37.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37.



family from poverty or running a rich household, she could gracefully acquit herself at any station. Campan took care to emphasize that her associations with Versailles and the Bonaparte family did not mean that she prepared her girls to lead lives of leisure. Her implication that there could be one all-encompassing prototype of a well-brought-up woman is far more “American” (at least in theory) than “French,” if the hierarchical Napoleonic Empire and Bourbon Restoration in which Campan taught and wrote are considered instead of the early days of the Revolution. In fact, far from urging Eliza away from the artistic accomplishments associated with the stereotypical French education, Monroe had to encourage his daughter to find the time to cultivate her musical skills. In a letter sent from Spain in 1805, Monroe reminded Eliza: “Don’t forget among all yr useful acquirements the comparatively trivial one, of playing & singing several airs on the harp; I will get you one at Paris. That is an accomplishment that will be really useful to you.”<sup>100</sup> Whether for her own enjoyment or to prepare her to entertain friends, Monroe worried not that his daughter’s education might not be substantive enough, but that it might not place enough emphasis on less obviously practical skills. For a gentry family firmly ensconced in the American political elite, Campan’s balance of intellectual, domestic, and ornamental offerings blended seamlessly to form a young woman ready to socialize effortlessly and to nurture a family with poise in the city or on a plantation. Returning from his initial posting in France, Monroe actually worried that American schools did not offer the kind of curriculum that would best prepare a young girl to become a republican wife and mother. Writing to Fulwar Skipwith, a former colleague at the American consulate in Paris, Monroe admitted that he was

Finding it difficult to finish my daughters [sic] education here I have serious thoughts of sending her with Mrs Livingston to Mrs Campan to stay a couple of years. ...What think you of it. Do not mention this to any person living, as it may not be done probably will

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<sup>100</sup> Monroe to Eliza Monroe, 1 March 1805, in Preston, *Papers of James Monroe*, 5:337.

not.<sup>101</sup>

Unaware that he would soon return to France on a diplomatic mission, Monroe weighed the results Campan produced with the quality of the available American institutions and found the French option superior. The fact that Monroe contemplated sending Eliza back to France despite the extra expense and difficulty involved (not to mention the emotional strain on his close-knit family) reveals both that he considered his daughter's education to be extremely important and that he believed that Campan would provide Eliza with accomplishments that the American educational infrastructure could not currently provide. Skills and values made a "good American woman," not necessarily the country in which she was trained. Certainly the facts that Campan's academy was founded on American money and that a future American president's daughter numbered among her earliest pupils suggests that she could claim a role in the evolution of American systems of institutional education.

The way that society viewed Campan's former students—and Eliza, in particular—offers instructive insight into the headmistress's early reputation in the United States. Eliza Monroe (Mrs. Hay after her marriage) was St. Germain's most prominent American graduate, but at first glance her reputation for arrogance seems to contradict the image that her family and Campan herself painted of the school. Mrs. Hay continued to emphasize the social connections she made at St. Germain in later life, leading some fellow Americans to accuse her of putting on airs. One of James Monroe's modern biographers, Harry Ammon, contends that Campan's academy shaped Mrs. Hay into a "vain young lady," whose "snobbery made her highly unpopular with her

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<sup>101</sup> Monroe to Fulwar Skipwith, 10 March 1801, in Daniel Preston and Marlena C. DeLong, eds., *The Papers of James Monroe*, vol. 4, *Selected Correspondence and Papers, 1796-1802* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2011), 491-492.

contemporaries.”<sup>102</sup> As Mrs. Hay often took on the duties of White House hostess due to her mother’s ill health, she was intimately enmeshed in Washington’s political and social landscape during her father’s presidency, from 1817 until 1825. It is true that the Monroe family’s European pretensions, although patriotically aimed at increasing their government’s international prestige, sometimes ruffled feathers in Washington.<sup>103</sup> For instance, as part of what historian Catherine Allgor refers to as the “‘etiquette war’ of 1819,” Mrs. Monroe affronted her peers when she decided not to make social calls (a customary sign of the First Lady’s respect for politicians and their wives).<sup>104</sup> However, Allgor also emphasizes that the first family “hosted many large social events, and observers report that they were more than well-attended.”<sup>105</sup>

Another contributing factor to Ammon’s conclusions about Eliza’s snobbery might be the fact that she named her daughter, Hortensia Hay, after her childhood friend Hortense de Beauharnais (by that point Queen Hortense Bonaparte of Holland). The girls only spent two years together at St. Germain as children, and Hortense was several years older than Eliza, so the American girl might have exaggerated her intimacy with the royal to American friends. No matter how her peers construed Mrs. Hay’s references to the Queen, the two women maintained limited contact throughout their lives. It is true that Campan’s updates about Hortense’s life in letters to Eliza suggest that the former schoolmates might not have regularly corresponded.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, Hortense Bonaparte agreed to serve as baby Hortensia’s godmother, and sent her

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<sup>102</sup> Harry Ammon, *James Monroe: The Quest for National Identity* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), 139.

<sup>103</sup> Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 147-148.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 147- 149.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>106</sup> Jeanne Campan to Eliza Monroe, 9 October 1803, Folder 2, Monroe-Hay Family Papers, ViW; Jeanne Campan to Eliza Monroe, 17 January 1804, Folder 3, Monroe-Hay Family Papers, ViW; Jeanne Campan to Eliza Monroe Hay, 30 October 1821, Folder 6, Monroe-Hay Family Papers, ViW.

new goddaughter a portrait of herself.<sup>107</sup> Queen Hortense also left either Eliza Hay or Hortensia Hay a bequest in her will. In a letter sent to Hortensia's two daughters, inquiring about that very bequest, Napoleon III's Chief of Cabinet remarks that "The Emperor perfectly recalls what sentiment of tender friendship M Elizabeth de Monroe yr grandmother, had inspired in the Queen Hortense."<sup>108</sup> Some level of genuine emotional attachment existed between Eliza and Hortense, perhaps sustained by their shared immersion in the world of politics as the daughters of the American president and (eventually exiled) French emperor.

Ammon does not accurately represent the nuances of Mrs. Hay's behavior or its reception in Washington society. Throughout her life, observers consistently described Eliza Monroe Hay as a cheerful and witty woman, well liked for her personality if not for her family's politics. Her French education had molded an empathetic mother as well as a woman who could confidently conduct herself in Washington society. On the Monroe family's return journey from France, they stopped in Williamsburg. Leila Tucker, St. George Tucker's wife, remarked that "The Gentlemen found both her [Mrs. M] & Eliza in a plain Republican travelling dress & expressing much pleasure in their return to their native country. They think that Eliza has not at all improved in beauty but that she looks good humored & is chatty & agreeable."<sup>109</sup> There appears to be a hint of approbation in Leila Tucker's tone that Eliza and her mother were not bedecked in the latest European fashions, and that they were properly appreciative of their home country after their time abroad. If the mother and daughter had been upset to return, or were acting like

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<sup>107</sup> Walter Kean Benedict, "Reminiscences of United States Senators. Second Article.," *The Chautauquan; A Weekly Newsmagazine*, 17, iss. 5 (August 1893): 601.

<sup>108</sup> Mouquard to Harriet Wilmer and Mary Curtis Harris, 3 July 1862, Folder 26, Monroe Family Papers, ViW.

<sup>109</sup> Leila and St. George Tucker to Frances Coulter, 18 December 1807, ViW: Tucker-Coleman Papers, in Preston and Delong, *Selected Correspondence*, vol. 5, 668.

“Europeans,” that would have reflected poorly on the virtues of the new nation. By the same token, about one generation after the Revolution itself, a very clear sense that America was not only different from England and France, but superior, permeates Mrs. Tucker’s musings. It is difficult to parse her slightly insulting comment about Eliza’s appearance, but evidently the young woman had not become too haughty to chat with her fellow countrymen, and she seems to have made a good impression with her friendly demeanor. Many years later, Mrs. Hay’s demeanor apparently retained its outgoing charm. Recounting a recent party that he and Mrs. Hay had both attended, John Quincy Adams describes to his wife Louisa how Mrs. Hay told a joke and “burst into one of her hearty laughs.”<sup>110</sup> Certainly, Eliza’s mannerisms do not appear to have been refined by Campan into Versailles-ready levels of aristocratic reserve, given that her laugh was apparently so distinctively loud.

Looking at a Washington insider’s perspective confirms that Mrs. Hay’s time with Campan did not teach her to place outsized importance on parties or her own superiority. In her published papers, *The First Forty Years of Washington Society*, longtime Washington matriarch Margaret Bayard Smith explicitly mentioned Mrs. Hay only once. However, she paints the President’s daughter in a flattering light. Washington ladies were gathering to help one of their number, Mrs. Calhoun, care for her dying baby daughter. Bayard Smith writes that despite the fact that Maria Monroe (Mrs. Hay’s younger sister) was getting married, the President’s eldest daughter

came three evenings successively to beg to sit up and was denied as other ladies were already engaged. I was one night and she came and sat all evening by the child and reluctantly left it, but told Mrs. C. she should come the next evening and would take no denial. The next morning Mrs. C. recollecting Mrs. Decatur gave a large party to the

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<sup>110</sup> John Quincy Adams to Louisa Catherine Johnson Adams, 2 August 1821, *Founders Online*, National Archives, version of January 18, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-03-02-3945>.

bride and thinking Mrs. H. could not with propriety be absent, she sent to beg her not to come, but the President said it was his particular desire that she should, as she was the best nurse in the world and so she proved to be.<sup>111</sup>

Here Mrs. Hay displays a deeply kind and maternal streak, placing another mother's suffering above her own sister's wedding preparations. Indeed, despite the assurances of other women that Mrs. Hay ought to let others who could better spare the time help at the sickbed, Mrs. Hay seems to have truly wanted to help and to have made a real contribution to the nursing duties rather than a token visit to express her sympathies. The fact that President Monroe also encouraged his daughter's decision to help Mrs. Calhoun casts the presidential family in a far more flattering light, working to support the members of their community rather than setting themselves high above on a pedestal.

Campan created an idealized persona for herself in response to a lifetime of hardship. Subject to the whims of a merciless succession of French political regimes that repeatedly elevated and dashed her fortunes, Campan also had to contend with a succession of family members who disappointed her expectations and burdened her with nearly impossible-to-sustain responsibilities. Seizing the opportunity to reframe her actions, Campan not only justified her behavior to her contemporary critics, but to herself—her life's work had not been in vain. When Campan died of breast cancer in 1822, she was utterly disheartened. Her son Henri had predeceased his mother, she no longer superintended either St. Germain or Écouen, and her long service to the Bonaparte clan tainted her twenty years with Marie Antoinette now that her former mistress's son, Louis XVIII, had retaken the throne in the Bourbon Restoration. Yet Campan's legacy would live on in the memory of her acquaintances and in her posthumous memoirs,

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<sup>111</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith to Mrs. Kirkpatrick, 23 April 1820, in *The First Forty Years of Washington Society, Portrayed by the Family Letters of Mrs. Samuel Harrison Smith (Margaret Bayard)*, ed. Gaillard Hunt (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 149-150.

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whose content soon attracted the attention of American readers.

## Chapter II

### **First Impressions, and a Teacher's Legacy in Practice**

In the middle of the nineteenth century, from the late 1820s until the beginning of the Civil War, American periodical articles attested to the influence Campan exerted on the development of an “American” female seminary system, and on the fight to gain state funding for girls’ schools. Campan’s passion for training good French republican mothers and her close personal and professional relationship with members of the Bonaparte dynasty rendered her the perfect figure to support American mothers and educators as they assumed more public roles in civil society. After her death, Campan could only rely on the memories of those who once knew her and her own books to continue transmitting the legacy she had created for herself.

#### *Madame Campan’s Reception by the American Public*

##### *Demographics*

An examination of Campan’s reception by the American public begs the question of who actually constituted that public. It is impossible to know precisely how many Americans knew who Madame Campan was, their opinions of the headmistress, or whether they made changes in their own lives after reading one of her publications or a periodical article that cited her words. However, inhabitants of certain parts of the country were more likely to come into contact with Campan at different times over the course of the century. Several trends emerge from a comparison of the cities where the set of articles analyzed in this study were published. References to Campan appeared first and most often in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston and continued throughout the century. In the South, articles mentioning Campan appeared more infrequently than in the North, and primarily before the Civil War. The Midwest followed an inverse pattern, with a few articles published in Cincinnati and St. Louis before the Civil War



and an upturn in periodical content related to Campan in the last third of the century. Several mentions of the headmistress also appeared in San Francisco publications in the 1860s and 1870s. Of course, the readership of a given periodical or newspaper was not necessarily confined to its publication city. *Godey's Ladies' Book*, the iconic women's magazine, had a readership that scholar Joseph Sommers writes "numbered well into 150,000 subscribers across the North and South by 1860."<sup>112</sup> Thus, while the South and Midwest were never particularly common publication areas for Campan-related material, Americans living in these regions might well have subscribed to periodicals issuing from the Northeast's thriving publishing industry. A scattered audience would have been more likely after the Civil War because of fast-growing railroad networks and cheaper postage.<sup>113</sup> The general trends might also reflect the urban devastation wrought on Southern cities after the Civil War and Sherman's March, as well as demographic shifts caused by westward migration (also facilitated by the railroads).

Scholarship on the demographics of women's magazine readers also helps define the class of the "American public" aware of Madame Campan. The French headmistress's exposure was by no means exclusively limited to women's magazines, but she was frequently mentioned in their pages. Additionally, women's magazines made up a large percentage of the total periodical market by the 1830s, and remained highly popular throughout the century.<sup>114</sup> The kind of woman who would have read a women's magazine (or any literary magazine, for that matter)

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<sup>112</sup> Joseph Michael Sommers, "Godey's Lady's Book: Sarah Hale and the Construction of Sentimental Nationalism," *College Literature* 37, no. 3 (2010): 44.

<sup>113</sup> Mary Ellen Zuckerman, *A History of Popular Women's Magazines in the United States, 1792-1995* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>114</sup> Amy Aronson, *Taking Liberties: Early American Women's Magazines and their Readers* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2002), 2; Zuckerman, *A History of Popular Women's Magazines*, 26.

changed over the course of the century, although she would have almost certainly been white.<sup>115</sup> Antebellum magazine subscriptions were relatively expensive, limiting periodical readerships to wealthier families.<sup>116</sup> As prices fell and female literacy rates improved after the war, a much larger percentage of middle-class women were able to purchase periodicals.<sup>117</sup> While scholar Amy Aronson does note that “pass-along and group reading” might have exposed certain enslaved individuals or lower-class women to periodicals, it seems unlikely that Campan’s name and legacy extended far beyond the upper and middle classes as a result of these practices.<sup>118</sup> By the 1880s, when several new editions of the *Private Life of Marie Antoinette* were published, the book became accessible to a very different audience from the elite readers who purchased copies in the 1820s. In 1887, for example, multiple advertisements appeared in the *Christian Union* for “A new and cheap edition” of the memoirs “superior to the English edition in that it will have a number of steel portraits, while the London edition has but one.”<sup>119</sup> A large portion of the American middle class might have been poised to learn about Campan with the publication of this cheaper edition. The very fact that the advertisement emphasizes the contrast between the low price and high quality indicates that the publishers expected to sell a large number of copies to people who wanted to advertise their refined tastes at a reduced budget, and that there was enough of a demand for the memoirs to justify commissioning and printing copies with multiple illustrations. The patriotic jab at the British publication was merely the icing on the cake—reading Campan’s book about one of France’s most infamous rulers was also a way to show national pride by supporting American rather than foreign publishers.

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<sup>115</sup> Aronson, *Taking Liberties*, 13.

<sup>116</sup> Aronson, *Taking Liberties*, 14; Zuckerman, *A History of Popular Women’s Magazines*, 29.

<sup>117</sup> Aronson, *Taking Liberties*, 14; Zuckerman, *A History of Popular Women’s Magazines*, 2, 29.

<sup>118</sup> Aronson, *Taking Liberties*, 13, 14.

<sup>119</sup> “Literary Notes,” *Christian Union* 35, iss. 6 (February 10, 1887): 23.

While actual examples of readers interacting with Campan's books are difficult to find, occasionally the archives do offer a tantalizing glimpse into the headmistress's place in one American household. Lucia McMahon recounts one such anecdote in *Mere Equals: The Paradox of Educated Women in the Early Republic*. In 1826, Ann Parker received a rather pompous missive from her husband Daniel, who had been travelling for several months. Mr. Parker recommends that his wife look at Campan's *Private Journal* "as this little treatise confirms the remark you have often heard me make that it is to mothers that we are most indebted to our characters."<sup>120</sup> Mrs. Parker writes that "her ideas respecting, are completely in unison with my own—and her method is what I aim at in educating them."<sup>121</sup> We know that both husband and wife read the *Private Journal* and that although Mrs. Parker did not model her mothering style on Campan's advice, both spouses considered the Campan method extremely conducive to producing "good" American mothers and well-educated American children. It is also possible that irritation with her husband led Mrs. Parker to claim that she was already following Campan's model, communicating that he was infringing on her maternal authority in the domestic sphere. It is impossible to draw sweeping conclusions from a single data point, but Ann Parker's response is certainly evidence in favor of the notion that Campan influenced the way that real American families tried to model and reproduce proper republican behavior.

### *Reviewers*

The first Americans to publicly react to the legacy that Campan had created for herself were book reviewers. Many reviewers believed Campan's account of her life and times

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<sup>120</sup> McMahon, *Mere Equals*, 147.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

wholeheartedly, and encouraged their readers to do the same. An impressed writer for the Philadelphia *Port Folio* exclaimed in 1823 that “our confidence is cemented by the perfect notoriety of the high character of Madame Campan, acknowledged in acts, not in mere compliments, by both parties of the Revolution, in all their gradations from private life, to the throne of the two dynasties.”<sup>122</sup> Rather than branding Campan disloyal or attracted to power, as some of her detractors had claimed, this reviewer believed that her uniquely close position to the ruling families of two succeeding dynasties made her a reliable rather than an opportunistic and biased witness. For a woman to be so universally admired and elevated to positions of trust and responsibility by fundamentally opposed factions, her character must have been so beyond reproach that no one could fail to recognize her virtue. Thus, Campan’s history of Marie Antoinette’s life must also have been penned with the strictest attention to accuracy. Certainly, this is the interpretation that Campan herself hoped her readers would make.

Addressing the claim of Campan’s “perfect notoriety,” it is possible the author is referring to the *Private Life’s* biographical introduction on Campan, written by French historian F. Barrière. This introduction, which Barrière claims to have compiled from “the recollection of the relations, friends, and pupils of Madame Campan” as well as “her manuscripts, correspondence, and other papers,” imposed an additional layer of interpretation between Campan’s own words and her impact on American readers.<sup>123</sup> Before her own memoirs were published (and even after, as her memoir of Marie Antoinette’s life was reprinted far more frequently than the *Private Journal*), F. Barrière’s biography rather than Campan’s autobiography was the primary vehicle for her life story. However, the tone of the biography

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<sup>122</sup> “The Queen of France,” *Port Folio*, iss. 260 (December 1823): 509.

<sup>123</sup> Barrière, “Biographical Notice,” ii.

cleaves closely to that of Campan's *Private Journal*. The fact that some of the same anecdotes even appear in both texts also supports Barrière's claims about authenticity of his primary sources.<sup>124</sup> Thus, American reviewers were still reacting to a work which flatteringly emphasized Campan's maternal virtue in rhetoric informed by her own preferred self-representation. Campan was so well known and respected by 1835 that an extremely critical review of Sir Walter Scott's Napoleon biography mocked the novelist's claim that Marie Antoinette had a lover prior to the Revolution by declaring that as "every intelligent reader of modern history very well knows, ... this piece of scandal has not only been triumphantly refuted, but proved to be false from the testimony of Madame Campan herself."<sup>125</sup> Evidently the reviewer deemed Campan's *Memoirs* to be an authoritative source, and a staple text in the personal collections of serious amateur historians.

Not all reviewers accepted that her surviving the Old Regime stemmed from virtuous maternity, choosing to interpret Campan's actions and writing style as evidence of feminine naiveté and obliviousness. One proponent of this stance wrote a piece for the Boston *Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction* in early 1823 and observed that Campan:

collected her anecdotes, without always considering *how they would tell*: and in the simplicity of her heart, she has rendered herself an unexceptionable evidence of political errors, she neither saw nor understood. Yet this very circumstance gives additional weight to all she says; as it leaves her divested of the malice which misrepresents, and the spirit of system which seeks to distort events. ...[T]he quantity of collateral evidence

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<sup>124</sup> For instance, Campan mentions that she employed a nun when first founding St. Germain in both her *Private Journal* (243) and in a quotation transcribed by Barrière in his "Biographical Notice" (xvii).

<sup>125</sup> "The Life of the Emperor Napoleon, with an appendix containing an examination of Sir Walter Scott's Life of Napoleon Bonaparte, and a notice of the principal errors of other writers, respecting his character and conduct, by H. Lee. Vol. 1. New York, Charles de Behr," *New-York Spectator* (March 26, 1835): 3.

brought forward by her editors, while it increases this stock of amusement, assists the memory of more serious readers, and adds largely to the value of the publication.<sup>126</sup>

The idea that Campan wrote “anecdotes” rather than history (and that anecdotes are not really history) casts patronizing aspersions on her intelligence. Given that she grew up enmeshed in the French court and navigated the aftermath of the French Revolution with considerable aplomb to make a successful new career for herself, it seems unlikely that Campan lacked the mental acuity to identify and understand political maneuverings. This assessment might reveal more about the reviewer’s individual biases about female scholarly capacity than about Campan’s writings. Her (male) editors are accorded more reliability than the author’s recollections. Of course, it is also true that the distortion of time and the changing political regimes render the *Memoirs*’ accuracy suspect. The tendency to dismiss Campan’s memoirs as anecdotal continued throughout the century, when a reviewer for the *Critic and Good Literature* remarked in the 1880s that the new edition provided entertaining anecdotes for the relatively amateur historian.<sup>127</sup> Just as the headmistress was not always treated with the respect that she felt she deserved in life, so too were her accomplishments sometimes dismissed after her death.

Readers and reviewers also debated the question of editorial mediation, and the extent to which it added to or detracted from the *Private Life*’s value. Curiously, the interpretation of one of Campan’s former pupils in a letter to her sister blames the editor for the *Memoir*’s faults. The daughters of American merchant Henry Preble and his British wife, Harriet and Anica Preble

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<sup>126</sup> “Madame Campan’s Memoirs,” *Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction*, (January 5, 1823): 464.

<sup>127</sup> “Reviews ‘The Private Life of Marie Antoinette,’” *The Critic and Good Literature*, iss. 4 (January 26, 1884): 41.

were born in England and France respectively at the end of the 1790s.<sup>128</sup> Harriet likely attended Campan's seminary from ages eight to thirteen, and knew Eliza Monroe during the teenager's third stay at St. Germain.<sup>129</sup> Visiting old friends in France and reading Campan's newly published memoir, Harriet Preble records one reaction: "'Who would believe it?...they are as white as snow!' exclaimed my friend in her astonishment at a continuous panegyric of Marie Antoinette."<sup>130</sup> Preble goes on to imply that the editor distorted Campan's message and that the book's "evident want of impartiality will rob it of a part of the confidence which it certainly ought to inspire."<sup>131</sup> Unfortunately, the editor of Preble's own memoirs truncated the letter, leaving the identity of the speaker a mystery. However, given the context, it seems quite likely that the mystery friend was a fellow schoolmate whose shock at Campan's portrayal of the late queen was informed by (possibly contradictory) stories that she herself had heard the headmistress tell. The fact that Preble herself seems unimpressed with the historical value of the account lends some credence to the misgivings of skeptical and patronizing American reviewers of the work, but Preble's attribution of the problems to the editor rather than to Campan herself suggests that the headmistress Preble knew *would* have written a conscientious history. The headmistress's students helped preserve her memory in a perhaps more authentic way than their teacher's own carefully chosen (but potentially edited) words.

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<sup>128</sup> Richard Henry Lee, *Memoir of the life of Harriet Preble, Containing Portions of her Correspondence, Journal, and Other Writings, Literary and Religious* (New York: G.P. Putnam & Co., 1856), 14.

<sup>129</sup> Lee, *Memoirs of Harriet Preble*, 253; Monroe to Eliza Monroe, 1 March 1805, in Preston, *Papers of James Monroe*, 5:337.

<sup>130</sup> Harriet Preble to Anica Barlow (née Preble), February 12, 1823, in Lee, *Memoir of the life of Harriet Preble*, 176.

<sup>131</sup> Preble to Barlow, February 12, 1823, in *Memoir of the life of Harriet Preble*, 176.

***“Thanks to the care of Madame Campan”:* Hortense, Eliza, and the American Public**

One common way that American readers familiarized themselves with Campan’s link to Napoleon was by reading articles about her Bonaparte pupils, seldom referenced without at least a brief mention of their celebrated headmistress. As a quick glance at the Bonaparte and Beauharnais family trees makes evident, Napoleon liked to arrange strategic matches for his female relatives with top military officers. These dynastic marriages between members of Napoleonic France’s aristocracy clearly piqued American readers’ curiosity. For instance, an 1831 article about the Marquis de Lavalette (that was reprinted multiple times near Washington D.C.) recounted the General’s trip to St. Germain to meet his fiancée Emilie de Beauharnais, and an excerpt from Madame de Lavalette’s own memoirs ten years later repeats the anecdote.<sup>132</sup> Ten years made a rather large difference in the interpretation of their marriage, however. The Philadelphia magazine that discussed the Countess’s perspective on her marriage dramatically described how, after both of her parents fled the country, “the poor girl might have been doomed to a life of suffering, had not General Buonaparte, with his usual sagacity, come to the resolution of uniting her to a man worthy of her in every sense of the word.”<sup>133</sup> While both the excerpts from Lavalette’s own memoirs and those of his wife make it clear that neither party was particularly excited about getting married, the later article’s author happily overlooked this minor detail in positioning Napoleon as a benevolent fairy godfather. One inspired author went so far as to actually re-imagine Napoleon’s matchmaking in fiction. In 1836, a New York periodical published “The Aristocrat’s Wife,” in which the young protagonist’s father comes into a fortune

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<sup>132</sup> “Lavalette’s Memoirs. ‘Courtship and Marriage of Lavalette,’” *United States Telegraph*, November 3, 1831, 2; *Globe*, November 11, 1831, 1; *Maryland Gazette*, December 1, 1831, 1.; “From the Court Magazine. Memoir of the Countess de Lavallette,” *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art* 14 (May, 1841): 601-611.

<sup>133</sup> “From the Court Magazine,” *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*, 601.



and sends her “to be trained into finished courtliness by the experienced hands of Madame Campan. The rumor of her prospects and merits now reached the ear of the Emperor, and determined him to render her hand a prize for one of his indigent adherents.”<sup>134</sup> The story’s author implies that readers ought to already recognize Campan, as no explanation is given that her experience came from teaching at St. Germain and Écouen, that she served at Versailles for many years to acquire her own courtly manners, or that she taught Napoleon’s relatives and the daughters of his soldiers, thus giving her access to his ear. By sending the tale’s protagonist to a famous school that really existed under the Napoleonic regime, the author adds authenticity to his fanciful work of historical fiction while revealing that even ordinary Americans (not simply the amateur historians Sir Walter Scott’s critic addressed) associated Campan with Napoleon Bonaparte and excellence in education.

As Mrs. Hay’s reception in Washington society made evident, Campan’s students were a part of her carefully crafted legacy just like her *Private Life of Marie Antoinette* and *Private Journal*. Yet unlike her foreign schoolmate, Queen Hortense Bonaparte (née Beauharnais) never made a personal impression on elite American society. Thus, her reputation in the country was entirely print-based. While Campan mentioned Hortense in her *Private Journal* and readers had known to connect the two names for decades, the ex-Queen of Holland’s personal character was barely touched on in that work, and was shaped largely by her own memoirs. Like a university degree from an Ivy League school today, Campan’s stamp evoked mental images of a certain kind of impressive graduate. Biographical articles and book reviews published throughout the first half of the century emphasized that Hortense fully embodied those expectations. An

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<sup>134</sup> “The Aristocrat’s Wife,” *The Albion, A Journal of News, Politics and Literature* 4, iss. 50 (December 10, 1836): 394.

admiring reviewer of one of Hortense's memoirs in 1833 remarked that "Of the family of Napoleon, none has established a fairer claim to the admiration of mankind, than Hortense Beauharnais," whose character was marked by "amiability, and... retiring virtues."<sup>135</sup> Although she and her husband ruled Holland for a time before she died in exile, Hortense is characterized as pure and reserved when compared to the rest of the grasping Bonaparte dynasty. For American readers who worried that Campan's model might prove too elitist for a good republican mother, such an endorsement would assure them that Hortense did not act like an entitled noblewoman. Not every description of Hortense was completely adoring, but even commentators who attributed negative influences to Empress Josephine noted that Hortense "had been spoiled by her mother, but in other respects was very well educated, thanks to the care of Madame Campan."<sup>136</sup> In this *Littell's Living Age* article, dating from 1849, the headmistress is given credit for all the good aspects of Hortense's personality, presumably having required the girl to work hard in lessons and in the school community in a way that her mother did not. The subtext of this comment also warns American mothers of the dangers of indulging their children too much and underscores the civic importance of providing children with both good mothers and good teachers.

Napoleon III's ascension to the French throne in 1852 made his mother a topic of particular scrutiny. Americans naturally wanted to know more about the new French ruler's family background and relationship with his famous namesake, and newspapers like the *New Hampshire Statesman*, the *New York Daily Times*, and the *Spirit of the Times* obliged them. In

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<sup>135</sup> "Art. V.—Mémoires sur Madame la Duchesse de St. Leu, Ex-Reine de Hollande: suivis des Romances composées et mises en Musique par elle même, et ornés d'un Portrait et de douze Gravures," *The American Quarterly Review* 13, iss. 25 (March 1, 1833), 127.

<sup>136</sup> "Josephine," *Littell's Living Age* 20, no. 253 (March 24, 1849), 554.

fact, the new ruler of France's Second Empire was the son of the original Napoleon's brother, Louis I of Holland. Yet these articles also reminded readers that they already knew Napoleon III's mother for another reason—she was Madame Campan's most illustrious pupil. Interest in the Queen remained a decade later in the early 1860s, when another memoir of her life was published to mixed reactions. Originally written for the *Athenaeum* but published in *Littell's Living Age* in March 1862, the review bemoans the book's lack of believable sources or factual accuracy.<sup>137</sup> The author is particularly indignant because Queen Hortense's life needed no editing or embellishment to make a riveting tale, as "Hortense was a heroine graced by circumstances and conditions as romantic as any book of faëry or romaunt or chivalry could match. No Tale of Magic...could produce more wonderful changes of fortune and transformations of circumstances."<sup>138</sup> Likening the late Queen's life to that of a fairy tale princess paints the Napoleonic era in a rather nostalgic light, concerned more with the leading players' interpersonal relationships than with their political actions. It is true that like Cinderella, Hortense arose from the ashes of Revolutionary France to become the daughter of an emperor and wife of a king. Campan, in this interpretation, could easily take on the role of fairy godmother or wise woman, bestowing the gifts her protégé would need to successfully embody these new positions. Sadly, Louis Bonaparte was no handsome prince, and their marriage was not a happy one. However, the reviewer is quick to defend Hortense's maternal devotion to her son, noting that she "was, before all things, a mother, and as a mother she would have periled her soul to secure what she considered her son's interests."<sup>139</sup> Any questionable behavior on

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<sup>137</sup> "From the Athenaeum. Review of Memoirs of Queen Hortense," *Littell's Living Age*, iss. 930 (March 29, 1862): 725.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 728.

Hortense's part is pre-emptively explained away by the justification that a good mother's life revolved around caring for her children. The emphasis on Hortense's maternity also reveals that Campan's claims to have educated dedicated mothers were, at least in the case of this illustrious pupil, entirely true. The reviewer also places the decadent world of Josephine, Madame Tallien, and their fellow socialites in direct contrast with Campan's establishment, as if the school were a kind of virtuous refuge from the decadence of Directory-era French society.

Throughout the century, Eliza Monroe Hay's reputation also became fused with Campan's in the reading public's eyes. As she did with Hortense, Campan actually referenced the future President's daughter in her *Private Journal*. Thus, even during Mrs. Hay's lifetime she was renowned outside of her personal social circle for her connection to the French headmistress. Campan describes a walk she took with Eliza and her father James Monroe, recounting how "he was talking in defence of his country, which he held to be finer than ours." Immediately, American self-definition in flattering comparison with other countries is brought to the forefront of readers' minds. Little Eliza remarked in response to her father's comments that the American roads were not as nice as their French counterparts, to which Monroe replied: "'Very true... our nation may be compared to a newly-formed [sic] household; we are in want of many things, but we possess the finest thing of all—liberty.'"<sup>140</sup> This entire anecdote can be read as an extremely symbolic piece of rhetoric. With a child's literal mindset, Eliza highlights the physical differences between her home country and the much longer-inhabited (by Europeans, at least) French landscape. The interaction between father and daughter thus serves as an opportunity for an American founding father to teach the naïve younger generation (upon whose shoulders the future of the nation depended) not to value the material conveniences bought by taxes paid to an

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<sup>140</sup> Campan, *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, 78.

absolute monarch over the invisible treasure of freedom. The fact that Campan does not refute Monroe's assertion almost suggests that she agreed with the future president. Perhaps the continual and disruptive regime changes had disillusioned the headmistress with her own country's political system, or perhaps she wanted to represent her encounters with patriotic American rhetoric to her readers and assumed that Monroe's words had no bearing on her own opinions. Whatever the case, nineteenth-century American readers might well have proudly interpreted this passage as a celebration of American potential. A particularly engaged reader might have even concluded that Campan's curriculum was ordered around sufficiently "American" (that is to say, egalitarian and rigorous) principles that a founding father who had devoted his life to ensuring that the new nation did live up to its potential in the ensuing decades was happy to enroll his daughter at St. Germain.

Half a century later, Mrs. Hay was remembered not only as one of Campan's students, but as an admirable example of republican womanhood who owed her poise to the French headmistress. In an excerpt from George Townsend's 1877 *Of Washington City and its Founders*, Townsend describes how "Mrs. George Hay of Virginia, attended Madame Campan's famous boarding-school in Paris, and was there the intimate friend of Hortense Beauharnais, the mother of Louis Napoleon. Mrs. Hay was witty and accomplished and a great favorite in society."<sup>141</sup> Not only does Campan's school get a positive mention, Mrs. Hay's identity and behavior are closely linked to attendance. The proficiency of a woman's accomplishments naturally reflected the quality of her teachers. As such, Mrs. Hay's wit and popularity (a far cry from Ammon's characterization) reflected favorably on Campan. Townsend was eager to ensure

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<sup>141</sup> George A. Townsend, *Historic Sketches at Washington* (Hartford, Conn.: Jas. Betts & Co., 1877), 85-86.

that his readers were impressed by Mrs. Hay. Not only did his emphasis on St. Germain's fame imply that he believed his readers would recognize and respect the institution, but the link between Eliza Monroe and Hortense Beauharnais illuminated an unexpected social connection between two French and American ruling families. A patriotic reader could take pride in the fact that, in a sense, the education that was good enough for an American woman was good enough for a queen.

### ***Madame Campan Makes Her Mark on Institutional Education***

Campan's model directly influenced the form of new "American" female seminaries. Writing about "Madame Rivardi's Seminary in the Gothic Mansion" in 1980, historian Mary Johnson reveals that Rivardi, an émigré who fled France during the Terror, modelled her Philadelphia school on Campan's example. Indeed, the Campan model proved to be extremely popular in Philadelphia between 1802 and 1815 when Rivardi was in business, and her board of trustees was comprised of prominent men "who had been outspoken about their interests in improving female education."<sup>142</sup> French-style boarding schools fell out of favor after the War of 1812, and a more "utilitarian" system took its place. Yet, Johnson notes, these new schools still retained key elements of the Campan-Rivardi model, including the "practical studies, the familial organization of student life, [and] the emulatory methods."<sup>143</sup> New schools run by women like Emma Willard and Catherine Beecher might have been tailored to American tastes, but Campan had already helped define what those tastes were.<sup>144</sup> With her detailed analysis of Rivardi's methodology and subsequent influence, Johnson provides a concrete institutional link between

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<sup>142</sup> The list of trustees included: Bishop William White, Dr. Benjamin Rush, Anthony Morris, Peter Duponceau, and Richard Smith. Mary Johnson, "Madame Rivardi's Seminary in the Gothic Mansion," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 104, no. 1 (1980): 5.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38.

Campan and the generations of American schoolgirls who supposedly received distinctly “American” educations.

While Campan’s model did advocate for the acquisition of the “ornamental” skills that defined French seminaries in many American eyes, recent scholarship suggests that plenty of American women saw the sense in her theory that these accomplishments could provide women with the means to secure their family’s financial security. Skills like dancing, drawing, or playing an instrument competed for a young girl’s time with more “serious” subjects like English or mathematics. Many Americans wondered if such accomplishments had any bearing on whether or not a woman could be dubbed “well-educated,” and would be a good mother. A reviewer of Queen Hortense’s 1832 biography hints at the answer, remarking that Napoleon’s stepdaughter’s “education had been successful, and she added to the usual stores of information, a particular excellence in all those various ‘arts d’agrément,’ which, according to Madame Campan, are the ornaments of the rich and the wealth of the poor.”<sup>145</sup> After all, good mothers were able to provide for their children if tragedy struck and no male relative could capably do so. Far from condemning ornamental skills or dismissing such pastimes as the useless domain of aristocrats, the reviewer emphasizes that Campan saw these “arts” as a practical investment for women of all social classes.

Campan herself had to rely on her education and artistic accomplishments to feed her family when she first established her pension at St. Germain. Having lived through the tumult of the Revolution, the headmistress knew many women in similar situations who could no longer rely on their husbands or families for incomes. Montfort and Quintana certainly believe that

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<sup>145</sup> “Art. V.—Mémoires sur Madame la Duchesse de St. Leu,” *The American Quarterly Review*, 130.

Campan intentionally formulated her curriculum and manipulated her public image in order to provide young women with practical qualifications that would help them make money for their families.<sup>146</sup> Their argument parallels that of Margaret Nash's "A Means of Honorable Support: Art and Music in Women's Education in the Mid-Nineteenth Century." Nash argues that art and music education, dismissed as "ornamentals," were more important to antebellum women than scholars have previously acknowledged.<sup>147</sup> Citing the huge demand for music and art lessons, combined with the potential employment opportunities that this demand created, she describes a path to female self-sufficiency or familial support that is not dissimilar from that created by Campan.<sup>148</sup> While it is impossible to trace direct causation, it is unfair to assume that just because certain contemporaries derided "ornamental" French educations as frivolous, the recipients of those educations were unfit to support their families and communities as practical republican mothers.

One other American institution, although far more modest than Rivardi's, was an equally direct successor as its headmistresses (sisters Harriet and Anica Preble) had attended St. Germain themselves. The Preble girls, who would later discuss Campan's *Private Life of Marie Antoinette* in their correspondence, were only babies when Hortense and her Bonaparte relatives were pupils at St. Germain. However, they and their mother lived in the town at the time.<sup>149</sup> Apparently, Mrs. Preble took lessons from some of the school's instructors when her daughters were still young and became "a great favorite" with some of the students, including Hortense

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<sup>146</sup> Montfort and Quintana, "Madame Campan's *Institution d'Education*," 37-38.

<sup>147</sup> Margaret A. Nash, "A Means of Honorable Support: Art and Music in Women's Education in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *History of Education Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (2013): 45.

<sup>148</sup> Nash, "A Means of Honorable Support," 51-60.

<sup>149</sup> Lee, *Memoirs of Harriet Preble*, 15-16.



herself.<sup>150</sup> Many years later, Mrs. Preble, Anica (Mrs. Barlow), and the unmarried Harriet founded a girls' school in Pittsburgh.<sup>151</sup> An 1836 advertisement for their "Mignonette Boarding School" emphasizes only Mrs. Barlow's presence, possibly in order to reassure parents of the eminent respectability of the establishment.<sup>152</sup> One of the school's main attractions was intensive French study under Mrs. Barlow's tutelage (the lady professed to actually be French). The curriculum included art and music lessons, as well as optional Latin, German, and Italian. Students would also learn "Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Botany, and all the higher branches of a good English education" with a Mr. S. G. Olmstead. The Preble sisters evidently put their training to the very use Montfort and Quintana suggest Campan intended, supporting themselves and their mother with their artistic and language skills. Despite the fact that a man was engaged to teach science, the school's wide range of offerings certainly echo Campan's curriculum, which included natural history and chemistry.<sup>153</sup> It is true that motherhood is not mentioned at all in the advertisement. However, the school's small size (only twelve boarders) would have contributed to an intimate atmosphere, which the owners emphasized by repeatedly referring to their school community as a "family."

The relationship between Mignonette Boarding School and Campan is not made explicit in the above advertisement. However, like Eliza Monroe Hay and Hortense de Beauharnais, the American public remembered the Preble sisters in tandem with their former teacher. A long article on the Preble family published in the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*

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<sup>150</sup> Lee, *Memoirs of Harriet Preble*, 15-16.

<sup>151</sup> Annie Clark Miller, "Old Houses and Estates in Pittsburgh," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 9, no. 3 (July 1926): 157.

<sup>152</sup> "Mignonette Boarding School," *Daily Pittsburgh Gazette*, February 18, 1836, 4.

<sup>153</sup> Montfort and Quintana, "Madame Campan's *Institution d'Education*," 37.

in 1870 brims with admiration for Harriet's piety and intellectual accomplishments.<sup>154</sup> Campan's influence is also painted in a positive light. Due to ill health, Harriet was unable to stay with Campan throughout her teenage years, and was "obliged to withdraw, and forego the benefits to be derived from that experienced and judicious teacher."<sup>155</sup> The appellation "judicious" is particularly noteworthy, as it hints at the impartial virtue which prevented the famous schoolteacher from letting her connections to royalty and Old Regime career from corrupting good future republicans and Protestants like Harriet. In fact, in an excerpt from one of Miss Preble's obituaries published in the same piece, the author notes that "Although she had been educated abroad, her love of country was ardent yet rational. She inherited the lofty and disinterested patriotism of her ancestors. ...She was educated in the celebrated female institution of the famous Madame Campan."<sup>156</sup> Like Eliza Monroe Hay before her, Harriet sparked fears back home that a French education might corrupt her American character and values. If a young woman decided that she preferred France to her own homeland, then perhaps the United States was not so noble a country as its citizens liked to believe. The obituary underlines that Campan produced such a model American patriot that Harriet's behavior is put upon a pedestal along with that of the idealized founding generation.

Campan also exerted traceable influence on Emma Willard and the students of Troy Female Seminary. During her 1830 European tour, Willard visited the Legion of Honor school (whose first incarnation Campan superintended). She remarked that the school "has, for a long

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<sup>154</sup> Captain George Henry Preble, "The Preble Family: Henry Preble, Youngest Son of Brigadier General Jedidiah and Mehitable Preble. 1770–1825. Harriet Preble," *The New-England Historical and Genealogical Register and Antiquarian Journal* 24, iss. 3 (July 1870): 258-264.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

time, been with me a special object of curiosity.”<sup>157</sup> This comment suggests that she might have consciously applied some of Campan’s practices at Troy, or considered Campan to have shaped her own teaching style. Willard’s younger sister Almira Phelps certainly admired the Frenchwoman; perhaps the sisters shared similar opinions of Campan. Phelps, famous in her own right for writing some of the first botany and chemistry textbooks directed at young women, served as interim principal of Troy Female Seminary during Willard’s trip to Europe and used the opportunity to give several lectures to the student body. Published in 1833 for a wider audience, *Lectures to Young Ladies* references Campan multiple times. In the lecture on “Modern Languages,” Phelps’s discussion of French female authors alights on Madame de Genlis and Madame de Staël before noting with approbation that “I would also mention Madame Campan, whose ideas on female education were more just and solid than most of her contemporaries.”<sup>158</sup> In her lecture about music, meanwhile, Phelps cites Campan’s assessment that a good mother “in bringing up her daughter...secures to her a durable good in the cultivation of her judgment and in the enlightening of her mind” and renders her “wise without vanity, happy without witnesses, and contented without admirers.”<sup>159</sup> According to Phelps, practicality governed Campan’s own life and teaching career. Filled with patriotic sentiment, Phelps implied that her approval of Campan’s “ideas” about female education and motherhood stemmed from their American nature. Yet Phelps does not extend this line of thinking to its logical conclusion:

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<sup>157</sup> Emma Willard, *Journal and Letters, from France and Great-Britain* (Troy: N. Tuttle, 1833), 114.

<sup>158</sup> Almira Phelps, *Lectures to young ladies, Comprising outlines and applications of the different branches of female education, for the use of female schools, and private libraries. Delivered to the pupils of Troy female seminary*, (Boston: Carter, Hendee & co., 1833.), 114.

<sup>159</sup> Phelps, *Lectures to young ladies*, 284.

that even if those “American” ideas blossomed far across the Atlantic, they might have been planted and nurtured in France.

School addresses also began to mention Campan in the 1850s, indicating that beyond any structural elements of her model that they might have unknowingly adopted, her “brand” continued to inspire educators around the country. For instance, an 1856 issue of *Godey’s Lady’s Book* published a speech James R. Spalding gave at the Pittsfield, Massachusetts, Young Ladies Institute entitled “The True Idea of Female Education.”<sup>160</sup> The address incorporated the following quote into its emphasis of mothers’ civic importance: “Napoleon knew men well. None better. His words were: ‘The future character of a child is always the work of its mother;’ and to Madam Campan he said: ‘Be it your care to train up mothers who shall know how to educate their children.’”<sup>161</sup> This paternalistic interpretation of the “Mothers” quote (from a speech written by a man) praises Napoleon’s good judgment, unlike earlier analyses of his actions by Willard and Hale. Perhaps male readers found it more comfortable to think of the French headmistress as the vehicle used to realize Napoleon’s vision. After all, if the anecdote was interpreted as an analogy for the United States government’s role in endorsing institutional female education, then Napoleon represented American politicians. In the address he gave at “the Inauguration of the Female High and Normal School, at Charleston, May 19, 1859,” a Mr. Memminger declared,

The [sentiment behind the] motto which you now see over the portal of this Hall...is engraved on our memories by the sententious reply of Madame Campan to the inquiry of the great Napoleon: “What is wanting to regenerate France?” “Mothers,” was the answer. In that one word is embraced a whole system of philosophy.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> “The True Idea of Female Education,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* (April, 1856): 370-371.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.

<sup>162</sup> “Speech of Mr. Memminger, at the Inauguration of the Female High and Normal School, at Charleston, May 19, 1859.” *Charleston Mercury*, May 24, 1859, 1.

Although the quotation they actually engraved contained the words of an American politician, Memminger was quick to note that the school found Campan's sentiments on female education important enough to announce to everyone who entered the building. For the Charleston community that the Female High and Normal School served, Campan's name evoked words like "patriotism," not "frivolity."

In fact, Campan's legacy proved particularly useful to Willard as she crusaded for state-funded female seminaries. From her reading as well as her trip to France, Willard saw the Legion of Honor academy as an example of a government-funded school that could have been truly successful if Campan had been given more power. In her 1845 "Address to the Pupils of the Washington Female Seminary," Willard recounted the struggles she faced while attempting to open a girls' school without the government support for which she had hoped, while also giving a brief overview of noteworthy systems of female education (both modern and historical) in Europe.<sup>163</sup> Campan merited a mention, but Willard's praise for Écouen was not unconditional.

She notes:

Madam Campan, under the auspices of Napoleon, arranged a system of instruction for the daughters of the legion of honor, especially those who fell in battle. A munificent provision was made by Napoleon for this school, which was continued after his decease, but the school was neither intended, nor was it calculated, to elevate the female character.<sup>164</sup>

Despite the article's unusually critical assessment of Campan's system, Willard nevertheless lays Écouen's failure at Napoleon's feet. Campan structured the curriculum and taught at the school, but she was not an independent agent. Her patronage and funding came from the Emperor, and

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<sup>163</sup> Mrs. Willard's Address," *Christian Advocate and Journal* 19, no. 36 (Apr 16, 1845), 141. ("Mrs. Willard's Address" is the second half of "Education: An Address to the Pupils of the Washington Female Seminary," *Christian Advocate and Journal* 19, no. 35 (April 9, 1845): 137.)

<sup>164</sup> "Mrs. Willard's Address," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, 141.

his motivation stemmed more from a desire to support his troops than to provide benevolently for female advancement.

It is true that Willard's disapproval could be construed as disapproval of the damage that ignorant politicians could do to female education by gaining control over funding and thus curriculum. However, what she appears to advocate for in the rest of the address is a system in which the government provided support for female education and then left women to their own devices, so that the "country [would] be like a well-ordered family" and "politically speaking, every woman should be a mother to the children of her neighborhood."<sup>165</sup> It is noteworthy that Willard implies that maternal attentions were a matter of political weight, because she engages in political activity (advocating for greater educational funding) by giving and publishing this address, protected by the justification of her own motherly care for her fellow citizens. There are clear parallels between the strategies that Willard and Campan used in their attempts to justify high-quality female education, as both women masked their true motives in nationalistic rhetoric about the protective power of domesticity.<sup>166</sup>

Sarah Hale also found Campan's situation at Écouen to be pertinent to her (concerned, maternal) political activism. In the article Hale wrote to preface the first issue of *Godey's Lady's Book* that she edited, entitled "The 'Conversazione'" she remarked that Napoleon

grasped the idea which, had he carried [it] out for good, would have left a nobler and more-enduring memorial to his memory than the far-famed "Code" which bears his name. He acknowledged that "the future character of the child is always the work of its mother." Had he acted on this idea, with the means at his command and his characteristic energy, female education would have been placed on a basis in France, which would have ensured its moral and political renovation. But he did something—he founded the "Royal house of St. Denis," for the education of the daughters of the officers belonging to the

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<sup>165</sup> "Mrs. Willard's Address," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, 141.

<sup>166</sup> Robbins, *Managing Literacy, Mothering America*, 104-106; Montfort and Quintana, "Madame Campan's *Institution d'Education*," 37-41.

Legion of Honour, placing at its head the celebrated Madame Campan. ...When will our National Government do as much for female education. [sic]<sup>167</sup>

Unimpressed by the restrictions placed on women by the Napoleonic Code, Sarah Hale agreed with Emma Willard that Campan's educational system might have helped stabilize French society by providing it with good mothers. Her veiled request at the end of the excerpt for policy changes with regards to American women's educational opportunities is also a distinctly political action, that of a citizen reaching out to her representatives. While *Godey's Lady's Book* might have been read within the "private sphere," Hale herself operated at least within the "civil society" (defined as "a public inhabited by private persons") that Mary Kelley notes Hale considered herself to inhabit.<sup>168</sup> Kelley accords Sarah Hale a great deal of importance as an individual who helped shape her (large) readership's conception of what it meant to be a good republican mother, which makes Hale a particularly powerful patroness of Campan's legacy.<sup>169</sup> Yet when Kelley discusses this very article in *Learning to Stand and Speak*, she does not discuss Campan's rhetorical function in the piece. This silence reveals the extent to which modern scholars have overlooked both the context which makes passages about Campan meaningful and the resulting impact the headmistress might have had on the lives of contemporary readers.

Returning to Hale's potential political motivations, Joseph Michael Sommers's "*Godey's Lady's Book: Sarah Hale and the Construction of Sentimental Nationalism*" claims that Hale used her position as editor to further her own personal political agenda without her publisher's knowledge. Sommers argues that later in the century Hale wanted to dissuade the South from seceding, and he emphasizes the increasing urgency conveyed in her Editor's Table articles as

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<sup>167</sup> "The 'Conversazione,'" *Godey's Lady's Book* (January 1837): 4-5.

<sup>168</sup> Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand & Speak*, 7.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

the Civil War loomed, particularly in sentimental poetry that Sommers asserts encouraged “a stronger domestic national union.”<sup>170</sup> While Sommers’ argument focuses on the deployment of poetry in the periodical, Hale’s political motives can actually be discerned in a wider array of articles focusing on republican motherhood and female education. Furthermore, as Emma Willard proves, Hale was evidently not the only female editor or author to use periodicals as a voice for her political views. In this “Conversazione,” Hale places part of the responsibility for furnishing a nation with good mothers on the government rather than only on individuals, going so far as to suggest that Écouen could have been an effective step on the road to national “moral and political renovation.” Her implied suggestion is that schools like Écouen, established in the United States under the sponsorship of a more enlightened government, could be extremely beneficial to American national development.

Campan also provided an ideal example of a successful, female-run school. An article on the proposed organization of the new Vassar College, written by Sarah Hale for the “Editor’s Table” section of the February 1864 issue of *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, references Campan several times and sees her legacy as a key piece of evidence in its argument that female teachers ought to teach at girls’ schools.<sup>171</sup> Hale approves of the proposed curriculum but not the male faculty proposed to teach it.<sup>172</sup> While quick to note that “We have no desire that women should occupy political offices, or should be professors in colleges for young men,” Hale feels that women are naturally best suited to teach younger women. While not a radical struggle, this article is still part

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<sup>170</sup> Sommers, “*Godey’s Lady’s Book*,” 48-49.

<sup>171</sup> “Editors’ Table: Vassar College. The New Plan of Organization Examined; only ‘One Defect;’ and this may be easily amended,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* 68 (February 1864): 199-200.

<sup>172</sup> Girls would learn about “Christian Ethics” (first on the list, thus perhaps most important) alongside such subjects as Chemistry, Natural History, English, History, Music, and Art. *Ibid.*, 199.



of a more widespread movement to place women in traditionally male-occupied teaching positions.<sup>173</sup> Warming to her theme, Hale recounts how, when founding his Legion of Honor school for girls, Napoleon “sought not for an able and learned man, but for a judicious and experienced woman.” Campan, “who had for several years conducted a boarding-school for young ladies with success,” perfectly fit his criteria, and the Emperor was rewarded for his choice when “under her management the Imperial Seminary of Écouen became in a few years celebrated through Europe.”<sup>174</sup> Women, this anecdote emphasizes, are completely capable of running a financially viable educational institution. If Campan was able to win international acclaim for her teaching skills, then gender would certainly not prevent a female faculty from making Vassar successful. Finally, Hale compares Campan to her American peers, declaring that the best American girls’ schools have generally owed their quality to “the management and instruction of ladies, some of whom, from the numbers of pupils whom they have trained to usefulness and excellence, may be justly ranked with Madame Campan among the benefactresses of their sex.”<sup>175</sup> It is the American headmistresses who are honored by their place alongside the French instructress. Indeed, Hale seems to suggest that certain gender ties crossed the boundaries of nationality; these teachers are the “benefactresses of their sex” rather than the “benefactresses of their countrywomen.” The fact that Campan, rather than an English teacher like Maria Edgeworth or an American educator like Emma Willard, was chosen to make this argument also reveals how deeply entrenched she had become in the vocabulary used to discuss American female education.

For women looking to use their republican motherhood as a platform to advocate for

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<sup>173</sup> Robbins, *Managing Literacy, Mothering America*, 94.

<sup>174</sup> “Editors’ Table: Vassar College,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, 199.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

greater governmental support for female education (and as veil to hide behind while doing so), the language used to describe Campan's position also made the headmistress an admirable role model. The civic responsibility inherent in Campan's role as headmistress of a female boarding school transformed into an official position funded by the French government when Napoleon put her in charge of Écouen. Campan certainly liked to emphasize her influence with Napoleon on matters pertaining to education in her *Private Journal*. She filled the book with brief anecdotes about her interactions with the Emperor, including a particularly bold claim that "During the Consulate, Napoleon one day said to Madame Campan: 'If ever I establish a republic of women, I shall make you First Consul.'" <sup>176</sup> As the head of an academy comprised of the daughters of the Imperial army, Campan served as a symbolic republican mother for the French army; perhaps serving as "Female First Consul" would have been a natural leap if such a position existed. Whether Napoleon ever made such a comment is impossible to know, but Campan clearly hoped to bolster her own authority and importance with readers by indicating how highly the Emperor esteemed her expertise. After all, with an Emperor who firmly believed in the separation of the "public" and "private" spheres, education and motherhood would almost certainly be the central policy issues debated by the ministers of a "republic of women."

From the 1820s onward, American teachers and authors incorporated Campan's ideology into their classrooms and eagerly included her in books and articles. Although Campan was a Frenchwoman educated at Versailles and closely associated with the Bonaparte Dynasty, nineteenth-century Americans nevertheless approved of her appropriately "American" passion for training practical republican mothers. Campan's established maternal character as well as the personal interest that key educational reformers like Emma Willard took in her academic model

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<sup>176</sup> Campan, *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, 59.

allowed the headmistress's influence to expand from the schoolroom into the home, unfettered by the negative reputation associated with the French boarding school system. It is true that much of Campan's acceptance rested on the fact that she claimed to subscribe to the theory that women's most important civic role lay in their support of future male citizens. However, examining how Campan's life was interpreted by America's female intellectual elite reveals that, at least for a subset of the female intellectual elite, Campan provided a valuable ally in the struggle to make practical improvements to the American educational infrastructure.

### Chapter III

#### Madame Campan Tells America What It Wants to Hear

“Napoleon once said...what do young women stand in need of, to be well brought up in France?”  
–‘Of *mothers*,’ answered madame Campan.”<sup>177</sup>

More likely than not, this conversation never happened. However, search for references to Madame Campan in nineteenth-century periodicals and the French headmistress’s concise advocacy for the power of motherhood appears more frequently than any other anecdote or citation associated with her name. Given that Campan wanted to be remembered as a semi-fictional version of herself, it is fitting that Americans continued to rewrite her persona even after her death. Campan was well positioned to acquire “social power” in nineteenth-century America because American readers were predisposed to listen to “mother-teachers” with respect. Historian Sarah Robbins asserts that “a clear sign of nineteenth-century women writers’ own awareness of literacy regulation as a route to social power appears in their frequent use of rhetorical techniques presenting themselves as mother-teachers.”<sup>178</sup> Campan herself never developed a program of directed readings for the American public, although it is true that she recommended many books to her son and more generally to mothers educating daughters within the pages of her *Private Journal*. However, Campan certainly took pains to emphasize her identity as a “mother-teacher,” and embodied the term even before she began to embellish her public identity. After all, the French headmistress was not only both a mother and a teacher, but had devoted her career to teaching mothers. American authors established Campan’s voice as a staple in articles about the importance of training good republican mothers. Depicted as a wise matriarch whose authority stemmed from her intelligence and personal experience, Campan

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<sup>177</sup> François Barrière, “Biographical Notice,” xxv-xxvi.

<sup>178</sup> Robbins, *Managing Literacy, Mothering America*, 21.

urged Americans to recognize the importance of women not only to civil society, but also to civic life. Campan's advice about the importance of motherhood was embraced by mothers, teachers, preachers, and concerned onlookers who used her to help formulate crucial arguments about how best to establish, maintain, and expand their nation's prosperity.

### *Origins of the "Mothers" Quote*

American periodicals enthusiastically embraced Campan as a paragon of republican motherhood to whom their readers could look for guidance. One quote in particular appears to have captured the minds of the American public, printed in a wide variety of journals and placed within an increasingly patriotic framework throughout the century. Examining the evolution of the quote helps explain why elements of Campan's model of female education and her public persona remained popular in the United States even after French-style seminaries had fallen out of vogue. The passage originated in F. Barrière's biographical notice on Campan. He described how

One profound sentiment, her attachment to the Queen—one constant study, the education of youth, occupied her whole life. Napoleon once said to her, "The old systems of education were good for nothing—what do young women stand in need of, to be well brought up in France?"—"Of *mothers*," answered madame Campan "It is well said," replied Napoleon. "Well, madame, let the French be indebted to you for bringing up mothers for their children." Madame Campan's answer contains the leading idea of her system of education.<sup>179</sup>

Coming from her biographer's pen rather than her own, this passage already imposes a subjective and idealized interpretation of Campan's life between American readers and the real woman herself. However, Barrière effectively summarizes several key points that Campan would later highlight in her *Private Journal*. He represents her as ultimately more devoted to France than any of its individual rulers. While her personal affection for Marie Antoinette never waned,

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<sup>179</sup> Barrière, "Biographical Notice," xlii-xliv.

this affection did not prevent Campan from advising Napoleon about female education. Similarly, Campan's devotion to the education of good mothers is presented as her life's passion. The fact that she was not the actual mother of the many young girls whom she educated is not of central importance, because Campan is essentially positioned as the starting point on a chain reaction. Like a national matriarch, or perhaps a republican grandmother, she used her new, superior system of education to train a new generation of Frenchwomen to live in their post-revolutionary world. These women were then prepared to teach their own daughters the same lessons that they learned at Campan's academy. The very year that the memoir appeared in Abraham Small's Philadelphia print shop, a review in the city's *Port Folio* picked this very quotation out to share with its readers (perhaps feeling that the anecdote provided a concise representation of Campan's educational philosophy and personal brand for readers unfamiliar with her reputation).<sup>180</sup> However, this citation belonged very naturally in a review of the *Private Life of Marie Antoinette*, and was not linked with American life in any way. Soon, both the wording and framing of the "Mothers" quote subtly shifted, introducing Campan's name into a new genre of periodical articles.

While the passage's original wording originated with F. Barrière, many Americans also quoted a slightly paraphrased version from French author Louis Aimé-Martin's 1837 *On the Education of Mothers of Families or the Civilization of the Human Race by Women*.<sup>181</sup> At the conclusion of his first chapter, Aimé-Martin passionately describes the "*divinité méconnue*" (unknown/unsung divinity) of mothers, and the need for good mothers capable of educating

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<sup>180</sup> "The Queen of France," *Port Folio*, iss. 260 (December 1823): 513.

<sup>181</sup> Aimé-Martin, *De l'Éducation des mères de famille; ou, De la civilisation du genre humain par les femmes* (Bruxelles, 1837): 32-33.

devoted citizens for “*la gloire de la patrie*” (the glory of the motherland).<sup>182</sup> He supported his argument with a retelling of Napoleon and Campan’s conversation about motherhood, here recounted in an English translation taken from the *Fayetteville Observer*: “‘What is wanting,’ said Napoleon, ‘that the youth of France be well educated?’ ‘MOTHERS!’ replied Madame Campan. This reply struck the Emperor. ‘*Here,*’ said he, ‘*is a system of education in one word!*’ *Be it your care to train up mothers who shall know how to educate their children.*”<sup>183</sup> By adding Napoleon’s call to action (presumably to take charge of Écouen) at the end of the passage, Aimé-Martin (and the many periodical editors and authors who included the quotation in their own publications) provided Americans with their own plan of action: to model their educational system after Campan’s. Napoleon also refers to “the youth of France” rather than the “young women.” This gender-neutral term suggests that mothers were needed not just to oversee their daughters’ educations, but also those of their sons—the future citizens being prepared to take control of the public sphere. It is true that some small element of the changing vocabulary could have been the result of different English translations of the same words; after all, Aimé-Martin’s and F. Barrière’s texts were both written in French. However, Aimé-Martin introduced subtly different wording in the original French as well.<sup>184</sup> Ultimately, the changes in connotative meaning that the passage underwent over the course of the century at the hands of American authors extend far beyond what could be explained by a translator’s interpretive choice.

As these two versions of the “Mothers” quote appeared in articles discussing motherhood, nationalism, religious duty, and even suffrage, the anecdote underwent considerable “rhetorical accretion.” Sarah Robbins borrows this useful term from Vicki Tolar Collins in her

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<sup>182</sup> Aimé-Martin, *De l’Éducation des mères*, 32.

<sup>183</sup> [Untitled], *Fayetteville Observer*, December 4 1839, 1.

<sup>184</sup> Aimé-Martin, *De l’Éducation des mères*, 32-33.

discussion of American author Anna Barbauld's shifting legacy during the nineteenth century. Robbins relates how "'rhetorical accretion' helped position Barbauld's *Lessons* more clearly within the context of America's own domestic literary practices, gendered education systems, and beliefs about civic life's connections to home teaching."<sup>185</sup> The process that Robbins describes mirrors the process Campan's writings and public image underwent, particularly in the case of her "Mothers" quote. The contextualization within the system of American ideas about the relationship between feminine domesticity and civic life was particularly important as it had to overcome the French background in which Campan had explicitly foregrounded her own writings. The American public was never her primary intended audience. In its original form, the passage conveyed that Campan's proven experience as a teacher at St. Germain made her the logical person for Napoleon to ask for advice when he wondered how to improve French female education. In her response, Campan articulated that in her opinion motherhood—with its dual responsibilities to nurture and educate—already perfectly encapsulated the kind of system that Napoleon sought. Men simply needed to recognize and support the work that their mothers and wives were already performing. The potential parallels between Campan's relationship to Napoleon and France and American women's relationship to their government and country proved to be a popular angle for authors to emphasize.

### ***The Fate of a Nation in Maternal Hands***

Two decades after the "Mothers" quote arrived on American shores, United States authors explicitly applied Campan's words to their own national prosperity. In the *New York Evangelist*, for instance, Senator Daniel Webster prefaced the anecdote with extremely patriotic rhetoric. His 1841 interpretation of the "Mothers" quote in an article titled "Female Influence"

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<sup>185</sup> Robbins, *Managing Literacy, Mothering America*, 43.



declared that “It is by the promulgation of sound morals in the community, and more especially by the training and instruction of the young, that woman performs her part towards the preservation of a free government.”<sup>186</sup> Webster further recounts how “Bonaparte ... asked Madame Campan in what manner he could most promote the happiness of France. Her answer was full of poetical beauty. She said—‘Instruct the mothers of the French people.’”<sup>187</sup> No longer did Bonaparte concern himself with how well Frenchwomen were educated, but with ensuring his subjects’ happiness under his regime. Perhaps Webster’s own priorities as a Congressman influenced his interpretation of the quote. He framed female education as important not for the individual women themselves, but for their crucial role in keeping their society functioning smoothly (a popular argument in nineteenth-century America in favor of extending opportunities for female education).<sup>188</sup> Webster places a heavy responsibility on the shoulders of American women, and he treats Campan as an authority whose observations deserved American attention. By prefacing the quote with the observation that women aid the “preservation of free government” by teaching and maintaining proper moral behavior, Campan’s advice is positioned as an example of how seriously the American government ought to pay attention to its female citizens. Furthermore, the scope of female influence is not limited to mothers and their children, but to women and other members of the community. Civil society rather than the private, domestic sphere is truly the setting in which Webster wanted his female readers to take action.

After the Civil War, some onlookers, including Louis Godey himself, used Campan’s voice to articulate their fears that mothers imperiled the future of Reconstruction-era America by neglecting to personally educate their children. In an 1868 section of the “Godey’s Arm-Chair”

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<sup>186</sup> Daniel Webster, "Female Influence," *New York Evangelist* 12, iss. 13 (March 27, 1841): 52.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Robbins, *Managing Literacy, Mothering America*, 64-66.

section of the famous *Lady's Book*, the eponymous publisher approvingly cites the Aimé-Martin version of the “Mothers” quote and observes that “[w]e fear the training of mothers for their very important duties is but little attended to. Children are intrusted too much to servants; but the moral education of a child is what no thoughtful mother would dare to delegate to a stranger.”<sup>189</sup> By connecting Campan directly to a problem apparently faced by many American families, Godey compares Campan’s system of education and thoughts on educating mothers favorably to contemporary American practices. He also suggests that Americans ought to be paying more attention to Campan’s (French) example. Godey insults mothers who leave their children to be watched by servants, suggesting that this practice characterizes only thoughtless and shallow women, too preoccupied with their own concerns to devote time to their most important duty. Ironically, Campan herself struggled with this question, writing in her “Thoughts on Education” that while maternal education could be better than the finest boarding school, an unexceptionable school was still preferable to a bad mother. While such a philosophy might have justified the headmistress’s own profession, this nuance would not have helped Godey’s argument. The Madame Campan that he needed was a one-dimensional spokeswoman who would remind his readers that good mothers had a duty to save their nations.

An article published in San Francisco’s *Overland Monthly and Out West* in 1871 shares and expands upon Godey’s sentiment. While recounting Campan and Napoleon’s conversation, the piece frames Napoleon’s request as an inquiry into “what France most needed to develop her resources and increase her greatness,” and then follows Campan’s response with the comment that “America is not less in want of mothers than was France; and a true motherhood means

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<sup>189</sup> “Godey’s Arm-Chair: How True,” *Godey's Lady's Book* 77, iss.460 (October 1868), 366.

something more than a kindly attention to the multiplied physical wants of the nursery.”<sup>190</sup>

Mothers are positioned as a natural, national resource that historical France and, more importantly, “modern” America, needed to actively cultivate in order to ensure international and domestic prosperity. The author who framed this quote also suggests that America’s current mothers no longer nurtured and protected their families’ spiritual and moral welfare in the way that the previous generation did. Scholar Christina de Bellaigue believes that Campan ultimately thought that an institutional education, superintended by trained teachers, was superior to its maternal counterpart, “although even she claimed to believe that maternal education was the ideal.”<sup>191</sup> American educators like Emma Willard may well have chosen to interpret Campan’s writings and accomplishments through a similar lens. American readers, however, preferred to focus on the headmistress’s advocacy of the mother’s power.

Maternal power proved to be a double-edged sword, however, rendering women equally capable of imperiling and elevating American social and civic life. In 1870, the *Lowell Daily Citizen and News* excerpted an article from the *Nation* that recalled Napoleon’s conversation with Campan as an urgent cry for help. In their retelling, Napoleon declared that

“Old institutions are passing away, everything seems to change; we need something to insure the stability of the State. What shall it be?” In one word [Madame Campan] answered him, “Mothers.” Then he continued, “Behold an entire system of education, in one word, we must so educate the girls that the mothers shall know how to train their children.” He spoke the truth. Good mothers that know how to train their sons to be good men and good citizens are the hope of the State. What can be said of drunken mothers?”<sup>192</sup>

Napoleon did not lament the loss of old institutions and express his anxiety in the face of change in the original version of the anecdote. The French emperor’s altered words actually reflect

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<sup>190</sup> “Ideal Womanhood,” *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* 6, iss. 5 (May 1871): 455.

<sup>191</sup> Bellaigue, *Educating Women*, 29, 123.

<sup>192</sup> [Untitled], *Lowell Daily Citizen and News*, August 10, 1870, 2.

American fears about the changes caused by industrialization and nostalgia for a supposedly simpler and more virtuous time. Campan's confident endorsement of motherhood is here presented as the antidote to a fast-moving world in which women no longer occupied their old posts as society's guardians as firmly. The temperance movement was beginning to gain widespread support in the 1870s, and fears of the damaging impact of alcohol on American family life, which would culminate fifty years later in Prohibition, are also at the forefront of this author's mind. A drunken mother, mentally distanced from her children and unable to model any kind of moral behavior for her children, could be of no help to "the State." By explicitly listing that mothers needed to form "good men and good citizens," the author also differentiates between the role of men in civil society and in the political sphere. Although men and their mothers live side by side in civil society, at first glance it seems that mothers do not have a corresponding "good citizen" identity. However, the fact that mothers are positioned as the "hope of the State" suggests that they bear the responsibility for the behavior of these good male citizens in political life. Thus, good mothers simultaneously embodied both good womanhood and good citizenship. The fictional Madame Campan stands as a stalwart defender of the regenerative and protective power of motherhood in the face of very real American societal problems. Indeed, Campan's endorsement of maternal influence was also mustered in support of the common argument that women needed higher education in order to fulfil their natural duty and instill pious morality in their families and communities.<sup>193</sup> A chapter published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1878 of Mrs. H. O. Ward's *Self Training; A Companion to the "Young Lady's Friend," Compiled to Suit Life in America* draws heavily upon Campan's example and the "Mothers" quote in advancing this very point. With such a system in place, she declared that

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<sup>193</sup> Robbins, *Managing Literacy, Mothering America*, 64-66.

“in another generation some of the most perplexing problems of social science will be solved. ‘Good teachers make good scholars, but it is only mothers that form men,’ cannot too often be repeated; for in this truth Aimé-Martin gives us the key to the reformation of mankind.”<sup>194</sup> Ward then quotes Aimé-Martin’s version of the “Mothers” passage. Her implementation of the “Mothers” quote acknowledges the original Aimé-Martin strain in combination with a very American-focused angle that suited her specific argument about the need for female higher education. She applies Campan and Napoleon’s conversation to societal problems in America, and suggests that the moral behind their conversation, that nations rise and fall on the quality of their maternal education, was just as pertinent in the 1870s as it was in early nineteenth-century France.

### *Religious Republicans*

Campan felt that religion ought to form the foundation of female education. In fact, her advocacy for religious instruction combined with her willingness to facilitate the alternative religious education of non-Catholic students contributed to her revered status as a guide for republican mothers in American periodical culture. Yet her attitude towards the role of religion and the state had more in common with American republicanism than its French counterpart. French scholar Caroline Fourest astutely identifies the difference in her work on French secularism, despite the fact that the monograph primarily focuses on the modern period. She contrasts the different crucibles in which the American and French republics were formed, one colony freeing itself from the rule of its parent country and the other replacing a supposedly

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<sup>194</sup> Mrs. H. O. Ward, “Home Culture. XXXIII.: Self-Training; A Companion to the ‘Young Lady’s Friend,’ Compiled to Suit Life in America,” *Saturday Evening Post* 57, no. 30 (February 16, 1878): 4.

divinely ordained monarchy.<sup>195</sup> As a result, she asserts, “The United States placed itself under the protection of God to remain united. France had to put God in his place to remain a republic.”<sup>196</sup> America needed pious republican mothers to ensure that virtuous self-government could continue, and Campan provided a Frenchwoman’s voice of support.

Like so many aspects of her life, Campan’s personal attitudes towards religion are somewhat difficult to discern, veiled behind layers of carefully crafted rhetoric and the practical considerations of keeping her school economically viable. Campan bragged in her *Private Journal* that she offered religious instruction to her students even during the Directory when Catholicism was suppressed, refusing to be cowed by the governmental soldiers periodically sent to halt her efforts. Recounting one such dramatic episode, Campan apparently informed the soldiers “in my school principles of morality must be inculcated. If you take away the Gospel, what would you substitute in its stead? A code of religion is necessary for the preservation of morality.”<sup>197</sup> Doubtless embellished for dramatic effect, and possibly even invented for the sake of her memoirs, the impact of this impassioned speech on readers remains strong nevertheless. Campan is positioned as a brave teacher and a model for other women and mothers, attempting to preserve her society’s morality with religion despite the legal policies of the Directory. During the Directory, a period of oligarchical rule between the Reign of Terror and the Napoleonic Empire, Catholicism was still outlawed and elite Parisians gained a notorious reputation for dissolute behavior. It was not until Napoleon’s reign that the Church was restored to its former position, although its relationship with the State itself had forever changed. Thus, it also true that

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<sup>195</sup> Fourest, “La Guerre des modèles est déclaré” in *Génie de la laïcité* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2016), 79.

<sup>196</sup> “Les États-Unis d’Amérique se sont placés sous la protection de Dieu pour rester unis. La France a dû remettre Dieu à sa place pour rester une république.” *Ibid.*, 79-80.

<sup>197</sup> Campan, *Private Journal of Madame Campan*, 65.

part of the headmistress's adamant insistence on her strong religious principles might have been framed to appeal to French readers in the 1820s. At this point, Louis XVII, scion of a line of Kings traditionally considered to be divinely ordained, occupied the throne. Campan's defense of religion against pressure from a former administration whose policies were no longer in favor would have certainly helped her cause as she sought to justify her behavior during the Revolution.

Despite the very real possibility that Campan exaggerated the scolding and despite the superior tone that she took in her interactions with Directory-era soldiers, accounts written by contemporaries familiar with St. Germain confirm that Campan emphasized religious education and that she accommodated Protestant pupils. German author Frédéric Meyer is one such eyewitness. His *Fragments sur Paris*, published in French translation in 1798, recount Meyer's visit to St. Germain during his travels around France. He highlighted that "the religious instruction is free and reasonable, the parents themselves decide on the religion in which they want their children to be raised."<sup>198</sup> Given that the French translation was published in 1798 and Campan only opened her doors in 1795, Meyer glimpsed the very earliest version of the soon-to-be "celebrated" headmistress's academy. The very fact that he mentions the school's religious instruction reveals that Campan was incorporating Christian worship into her curriculum at a time when the Catholic Church had not yet been re-established in France. However, Meyer's willingness to record this aspect of life at Campan's seminary also suggests that Campan did not feel herself to be in danger of experiencing serious repercussions for this pedagogical decision.

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<sup>198</sup> Friedrich Johann Lorenz Meyer, *Fragments sur Paris*, vol. II., trans. General Dumouriez (Hamburg: 1798), 274.

Harriet Preble, who attended the school almost a decade after Meyer would have visited, provides a Protestant student's perspective. In her memoirs, Harriet recalled that "A Romish chapel was annexed to the establishment, but we were seven or eight Protestant girls, who never attended. Madame Campan used to call us jokingly '*her little heretics*,' and we must thank her at least for leaving us perfect liberty of conscience."<sup>199</sup> The memoir's editor, Professor Richard Henry Lee, passed his own judgment on Campan's decision, enthusiastically approving of the headmistress's policy as "praiseworthy," "enlightened," and "truly Christian."<sup>200</sup> Campan's behavior continually proved to American onlookers that she was not a corrupting influence on American students. The woman in charge of a system that provided a good foundation for Preble, who was lauded in later life for her exemplary Protestant piety, was surely an appropriate figure from whom to take advice, even if that advice had been originally delivered in French.

American preachers recognized Campan as a kindred spirit early in the century. In a review of a published sermon on "The Excellence and Influence of the Female Character" given by Pastor Gardiner Spring to the New York Female Missionary Society in 1825, the reviewer discusses "the influence which a pious female exerts in community [sic], and especially which mothers exert over their children and domestics."<sup>201</sup> This discussion is followed by an extremely early citation of the "Mothers" quote in an excerpt from the sermon itself, which describes

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<sup>199</sup> Harriet Preble to Mr. Williams, March 4, 1844 in Lee, *Memoir of the life of Harriet Preble*, 253.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>201</sup> "Review: 'The Excellence and Influence of the Female Character; a Sermon preached in the Presbyterian church in Murray-street at the request of the New-York Female Missionary Society by Gardiner Spring, Pastor of the Brick Presbyterian church in said city. 1825. pp.32.,'" *The Methodist Magazine* 8, iss. 7 (July 1, 1825): 266.



Campan as an “intelligent and accomplished Lady.”<sup>202</sup> Published in *The Methodist Magazine*, the review references Campan in a flattering light despite her Catholic faith, placing more importance on her role as an almost divinely inspired advocate for maternal influence. Indeed, both Pastor Spring and the article’s author consider Christian virtue to be inextricably linked not only to ideal motherhood, but also to the health of their civil society. A year later, the *New Hampshire Statesman and Concord Register* also paired the “Mothers” passage with a preacher’s observations, although not within the context of a sermon. Campan’s conversation with Napoleon is followed by a long quote from Unitarian minister Joseph Buckminster (1784-1812), who expressed his opinion that female opinion ought to be improved to nurture “intellectual furniture and vigor,” as part of a “plan of more liberal and extensive female education...devised to form the mothers of your children’s children.”<sup>203</sup> While Buckminster himself did not make the connection between his own beliefs and Campan’s, evidently the article’s author felt that the two individuals, French schoolmistress and American Minister, shared complementary philosophies. Mentioning Campan in close proximity to Buckminster’s observation on the need for a new and improved form of maternal education in America certainly implies that her system would be beneficial for Americans to draw from.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Americans had transformed subtext into text and confidently ascribed Campan symbolic importance as an international advocate for all Christian mothers. Mrs. E. P. Dudley worries in her 1883 *Western Christian Advocate* article “Who is Responsible?” that Americans needed to reassess their reading habits, avoiding frivolous and

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<sup>202</sup> This quote is an extremely early example of an author citing the “Mothers” quote in a piece unrelated to the *Private Life of Marie Antoinette*, although the passage was still new enough to readers that the author does mention the memoir in a footnote. *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>203</sup> “Miscellany. Education,” *New-Hampshire Statesman and Concord Register* (March 4, 1826): 4.

secular fiction whenever possible and instead seeking works that would help forge their intellect and good character. This society-wide reading program is clearly an example of the “maternally managed literature study” imbued with the practical civic significance that Sarah Robbins identifies in *Managing Literacy, Mothering America*.<sup>204</sup> The responsibility for actually implementing this program ought to fall, in Dudley’s opinion, on:

1. Intelligent mothers; 2. Teachers; 3. Leading minds of society. Well did Madame Campan know whereof she affirmed when she gave utterance to that grand idea, accredited to Napoleon wrongly, though through him it was made useful to France, that... “France needs mothers.” Only a woman could realize, as Madame Campan did, what a mother may do, and what a mother must do for the elevation and eternal good of humanity.<sup>205</sup>

The scope of the “Mothers” quotation has expanded; from France to America, now the mothers of whom Campan speaks have a duty to humanity itself. By referencing Campan immediately after listing the three responsible parties, the author suggests that she embodied all three roles. Her name would have evoked a clear mental image of an individual who exemplified the abstract traits that the author just listed, clarifying how readers could hope to take on the role of the “maternal literacy manager” by following the guidance of an intelligent, maternal teacher (who was also a leading mind of her day).

Although Campan does not explicitly discuss how mothers would help France, it is implied that Christian teachings would be an important tool in the mothers’ arsenal, essential for ensuring the “eternal good” of an entire country’s immortal souls. In fact, this article attempts to minimize Napoleon’s role in the anecdote and give credit to Campan for teaching the male ruler about the potential benefits France might derive from a population supported by pious mothers.

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<sup>204</sup> Sarah Robbins, *Managing Literacy, Mothering America*, 16.

<sup>205</sup> Mrs. E. P. Dudley, “Who is Responsible?” *Western Christian Advocate*, 50, iss. 29 (July 18, 1883), 226.

In contrast to Emma Willard and Sarah Hale's argument that Napoleon did not do enough to help Frenchwomen with his Legion of Honor school, this piece does recognize the academy as "useful." Campan's words reveal her to have been a particularly perceptive woman, and American women are encouraged not to focus on her nationality but rather to identify with her on the basis of their shared maternal wisdom. The article also uses explicitly religious language when discussing the mother's central duty, namely to nurture examples of "pure manhood, and womanhood that shall be the restoration of that was [sic] lost by sin."<sup>206</sup> The imagined American republic fostered by proper reading material, as well as by women with Campan's morals and vision, would, the author imagines, be a second Eden.

Campan's saintly American persona is all the more surprising in light of the fact that many Americans simultaneously stereotyped Frenchwomen as immoral and lacking in Christian virtue. *The Catholic World* published a particularly judgmental review of Octave Uzanne's *The Frenchwoman of the Century* in 1887. The reviewer sees the book, a collection of biographies of various Frenchwomen who lived during and after the Revolution, as "a warning from history as to the depth of frivolity and luxury womanhood may reach when the elevating influence of religion is disdained."<sup>207</sup> We study history, as the saying goes, to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. This is certainly the only use that *The Catholic World's* book reviewer sees for Uzanne's book. America, after all, would not want to find itself at the mercy of a generation of fallen women, no longer safely governed by the sensible strictures of Christian morality. Campan, however, is held up as the opposite of frivolous, shallow femininity.

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<sup>206</sup> Dudley, "Who is Responsible?" *Western Christian Advocate*, 226.

<sup>207</sup> "A Chat About New Books," *The Catholic World, A Monthly Magazine of General Literature and Science*, 44, iss. 263 (February 1887): 711.

The reviewer laments the degenerate behavior of French society during the Directory, when “All the old refinement and cultivation which had culminated in that perfect system of social and courtly etiquette which Madame Campan so fondly regretted, and which Napoleon I. tried so hard to imitate, had disappeared.”<sup>208</sup> “Frivolity” is here associated with the Directory and post-revolutionary era, while a certain elegant propriety is nostalgically attributed to the Old Regime court of Versailles. The reviewer also implies his belief that piety and appropriate respect for the “elevating influence of religion” were characteristic of the former lady-in-waiting’s own personal philosophy. Perhaps the tumult and clear lack of order and feminine obedience inherent in the upheaval of the Revolution presented too dangerous a model for American women to blindly read about in the Reconstruction period after America’s own civil war. Unswerving in her devotion to teaching and helping her nation, regardless of the regime in power, Campan represented a far more admirable patriot than her fellow countrywomen, even if her loyalties were to the French rather than the American government.

Just as Campan’s theory of education and the “Mothers” quote were successfully used to support sweeping, patriotic arguments about national unification and improvement, specific religious groups found the quote to be extremely applicable to their smaller communities. An article published in 1863 by the *German Reformed Messenger* worried that inadequate attention was being paid to the institutional religious education of the young women in the Eastern Synod of their American branch. The author, who goes only by “Mary,” muses that:

If Napoleon was convinced, by Madame Campan, that France needed properly trained mothers, more than all else beside, in order to have France rank high among the nations of the globe, do we not, in a more exalted sense, require *educated* Christian mothers, to enable us to occupy the place among Christians, which “Our Church” should maintain in this land as in that of our ancestors?<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> “A Chat About New Books,” *The Catholic World*, 711.

<sup>209</sup> Mary, “Our Church,” *German Reformed Messenger* 28, iss. 21 (January 21, 1863): 1.

Mary's loyalty to the German Reformed Church is very nationalistic in tone, and she wants to help her denomination achieve the recognition she believes it deserves in the United States.

Campan's Catholic faith did not faze these members of the German Reformed Church, perhaps encouraged by the headmistress's nondenominational emphasis on the importance of religion in female education as a touchstone for moral development. Mary sees the headmistress's teaching as motivated by a combination of patriotic pride and competitive instinct. By educating good mothers, Mary's version of Campan was far more concerned with French national prosperity than with making money or providing young women with the skills to take care of their own families. However, by imbuing the "Mothers" quote with competitive implications, the passage also serves as encouragement to other countries (or religious groups) who choose to invest resources in training their mothers.

Campan's association with patriotic maternity was also cited in support of female missionary work and imperialist ideas of American racial superiority. A *New York Evangelist* article from 1875 sings the praises of Mrs. Lai Sun, a Chinese woman currently running a school for young Chinese immigrants in San Francisco. However, the Chinese headmistress is not given real credit for her own success, as she was apparently "prepared for her work...by a disheartened woman who had given the golden days of her life to missionary work" and believed that this work had been "to little purpose."<sup>210</sup> American women were quickly reminded that faith and patriotism (presented as coequal and inextricably linked) are always rewarded. The author describes Mrs. Lai Sun as

a living testimony to the self-renouncing faithfulness of one devoted woman, and an encouraging example to such as labor for the civilization and evangelization of the

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<sup>210</sup> "Church Work.: Letter From San Francisco., Woman's Mission to Chinese Women and Children," *New York Evangelist* 46, iss. 9 (March 4, 1875): 6.

heathen nations of the earth. We have only to contemplate the results of the training of this *one* little Chinese girl...to see what wondrous bearing such training may have upon the future of an empire. There can be no more exalted work than that of instructing those who are to become the mothers of a race. “What is most needed to ensure the future greatness of the empire?” inquired Madame Campan of the great Napoleon. “Mothers!” was the terse and suggestive reply.”<sup>211</sup>

Rather than giving Mrs. Lai Sun credit for her intelligence or a natural desire to teach (like Campan), the article minimizes the Chinese headmistress’s agency by suggesting that the missionary teacher was entirely responsible for all of her pupils’ actions. Even the system itself, presumably intended to make young Chinese immigrants more employable in American society, assumes that American culture is superior to Chinese. The discussion of “mothers of a race” is particularly problematic, as it assumes that “heathen” (non-Western) nations did not even have a real culture, and that they were simply waiting for American missionary women to come and share Christianity and American values that would form a new, “better” version of their race. Thousands of years of Chinese history were summarily discarded as “not American” and “not Christian”—and, therefore, unimportant. Even a woman who felt frustrated or disillusioned by the realities of living in a foreign land might be in the process of teaching, like Campan, the “mothers of a race.”

The “Mothers” quote itself is also quite unrecognizable from its original iterations. Campan is abruptly reimagined as an ambitious proponent of imperial expansion, and has switched dialogue with Napoleon. The emperor is characterized as wiser than his female companion, already aware of the potential benefit mothers might have to his program of imperial expansion. In a piece that ultimately hopes to convince American women to trust in God’s plan, perhaps the Emperor is intended to similarly serve as an all-knowing male figure affirming the

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<sup>211</sup> “Church Work.: Letter From San Francisco,” *New York Evangelist*, 6.

value of his female subjects' chosen profession. The version of Campan with which American missionary women were encouraged to identify needed to share their concerns and relationship to governmental and religious authorities in order to effectively inspire emulation.

***“[Her] advice... formed a whole generation of charming women”***

Campan's decidedly ambivalent personal opinion on the role of women in the public sphere, combined with her firm public position that ladies ought to have nothing to do with politics, meant that she was never destined to become a suffragette icon. However, that did not mean that her name was not brought into debates about suffrage and shifting roles for women at the end of the century. She receives one mention in Susan B. Anthony's *The Revolution* in 1868, albeit in an article reprinted from a London paper.<sup>212</sup> Anthony's decision to publish the piece, despite the fact that it was composed for British readers, indicates that she considered its message to be pertinent to her American audience. The article insightfully observes that Campan's refrain “is now the cry of the world,” as the role of women and their own expectations for their lives change.<sup>213</sup> At the end of the article, the author observes,

As yet, freedom means simply more slang, more jewelry, more selfish extravagance, less modesty. As we meet her on the stairs, as we see the profuse display of her charms, as we listen to the flippant, vapid chatter we turn a little sickened from woman stripped of all that is womanly, and cry to Heaven, as Madame de Campan cried to the Emperor — “Give us good mothers.”<sup>214</sup>

While the women reading this paper would have supported female suffrage, this did not mean that they wanted to abandon their families or communities. American women are warned not to confuse political freedom with the social freedom to be selfish. In fact, modesty, intelligence,

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<sup>212</sup> “Give them Good Mothers. From the London Saturday Review.” *The Revolution* 1, no. 20 (May 21, 1868): 315-316.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

and maternity are characterized as the defining traits of the ideal woman, apparently recognized by the insightful Campan (as well as the author and any readers who join him or her in crying to heaven for mothers). Far from incompatible with real participation in American political life, Campan's particular brand of motherhood was lauded—at least once—as necessary to the *right* kind of feminine freedom.

One central reason why Campan's name and memory faded from the American psyche, however, is that she had become associated with an older style of woman. This association cements Campan's place in the pantheon of influential American maternal teachers even as it limits her pertinence at the turn of the twentieth century. A critical review of Reverend Franklin Johnson's 1882 *True Womanhood. Hints on the Formation of Womanly Character* disdainfully dismisses the book as “a novelty in this enlightened age. It begins with ‘Character- Building’ and ends with ‘Piety,’ and, so far as we can see, the author has not said a word, from frontispiece to colophon, about the regenerating influence of the ballot nor of co-education.”<sup>215</sup> The chapter on “Piety” was the worst and “most terribly old-fashioned part... especially [Johnson's] quotation of Madame Campan's remark to Napoleon I, who had asked her what was required for the regeneration of France. ‘Mothers!’ said this awful woman, and Dr. Johnson is not ashamed to quote this reply with approbation!”<sup>216</sup> Suddenly an “awful woman,” Campan is no longer approvingly cited as a pious, maternal icon. The ideal American woman, at least according to this reviewer, had advanced far beyond the days when her value began and ended with maternal duty, when Campan's advice would be pertinent to their lives. It seems that Dr. Johnson's work was considered quite dated, and the list of feminine advice that might have been greeted with

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<sup>215</sup> [Untitled], *The Independent* 34, iss. 1738 (March 23, 1882), 11.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.



approbation in the 1830s or 40s no longer had a place on the shelves of women who wanted to vote or to be educated alongside men. Certainly, Campan did not advocate for either of these measures; her feminism (if it can be viewed as such) was of a far subtler kind, focused on giving women tools to help them succeed within the system rather than to try to drastically change the system itself. Yet denigrating Campan also obscured her real significance as an advocate for women to embrace motherhood as a way to expand their influence outside the home. Just as Campan's legacy was rewritten by American writers, so too could it be erased.

Campan's presence and influence in American culture could not survive the changes wrought by the blossoming women's rights movement, and her name began to fade from periodical articles in the first decades of the twentieth century. In 1899, *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* published a piece on "Woman: A Phase of Modernity" acknowledging Campan's former prominence but firmly associating the headmistress with the country's past and not its future. The article contrasts "the new feminine type" or "modern woman" who boldly strove to implement "social, civic, and hygienic reform" (possibly while wearing trousers and chewing gum), with her charming and more retiring predecessors.<sup>217</sup> Campan appears as one of the symbolic figureheads of this vanishing group of women, described by the author as one "whose advice may be said to have formed a whole generation of charming women."<sup>218</sup> What better finish to a century of influence than this nostalgic recognition of Campan's former influence? Although the women whose characters she formed were succeeded by their far more outgoing granddaughters, these "new women" might never have begun to agitate for suffrage and coeducation, or begun to wear "bifurcated garments," without the foundation laid by their female

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<sup>217</sup> "Woman: A Phase of Modernity," *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* 64, no. 380 (August 1899): 295-298.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

forebears. Charm did not preclude strength, intelligence, or influence on civic life, even if this influence wore a genteel and maternal guise. Campan did not disappear entirely from American popular culture during the twentieth century, but her words and example no longer offered pertinent guidance to the daily lives of American women, and she settled into the less-demanding role of a historical figure. Nearly ninety years after Jeanne Louise Henriette Genet Campan died in France, her fictional American persona finally retired from the American stage.

## Conclusion

Search today for references to Madame Campan in American popular culture, and you won't find much. In the few appearances that she does make, the headmistress is no longer associated with virtuous maternity, at least if the most recent contribution to her American literary legacy is any indication. In 2012, author Susanne Dunlap cast Eliza Monroe, Hortense Beauharnais, and Caroline Bonaparte as the heroines of a historical romance for young adults entitled *The Académie*. In Dunlap's high school soap opera version of St. Germain, Eliza and her friends negotiate forbidden love affairs and sneak away to masquerade balls in Paris, while Campan gives lessons in conversation and comportment—her school is characterized as a training ground for socialites.<sup>219</sup> The blurb promises that “Before the term is out, one girl will find true love, one will be heartbroken, and a third girl's dreams will take a deadly turn.” It can be revealed at no risk of spoiling the novel that the danger Dunlap warns about is not the corrupting influence of French immorality on American virtue.

Campan's name no longer connotes patriotic maternity. Nevertheless, the headmistress's impact on the development of women's place in American civil society (and eventually, political life) is not lessened by this lack of modern recognition. France's contribution to American civic life can be better understood by writing Campan into the history of American female education and republican motherhood. French enlightenment philosophers inspired the founding fathers during the American Revolution and its aftermath. However, a Frenchwoman's personal philosophy about how to educate pious, resourceful, and patriotic mothers also influenced the structure of American girls' schools and the way that United States citizens thought about the relationship between women, their families, and the state.

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<sup>219</sup> Susanne Dunlap, *The Académie* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 9, 25-31, 70-71.

American republican motherhood is a concept with roots that stretch across the Atlantic. Ultimately, the differences between “uniquely American” values and those of foreigners—including the French (alternately criticized for their Catholicism or their frivolous immorality)—have not always been as clear as nationalistic Americans liked to imagine. American women read about Campan’s life, admired her accomplishments, and heeded her educational guidance—at home and at school. What’s more, they embraced Campan’s example because—with a single word of advice offered by a female teacher to an emperor—she affirmed that women had value to their nations, that maternal work ought to be supported by the government, and that a mother’s power extended far beyond the physical boundaries of her own home.

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