Introduction **Walking a Tightrope**

The image of François Hédelin as a tightrope walker is an amusing one, given the *abbé*'s reputation as a stern and inflexible dramatic theoretician in seventeenth-century France. Nevertheless, it is this comparison that accurately represents abbé d'Aubignac's philosophical attitude towards the female sex. What is striking about all of Hédelin's fictional output is that the principal focus of his work is women – women of high political and social standing. One may speculate that the composition of these works is, in part, a manifestation of the *abbé*'s fantasies about women, however subtle and innocent these notions appear to be.

Why then the image of the tightrope walker? D'Aubignac's attempt to articulate his philosophy about the female sex is very much an intricate balancing act. While he is clearly interested in women, placing them on a pedestal in many of his writings, the *abbé* imposes limitations on their perceived innate qualities and often embraces the notion of the female as a societal scapegoat. Our book explores how these ideas were influenced by the socio-political conditions of d'Aubignac's time, resulting in a complex interrelationship between the notions of power and misogyny in the author's fictional and critical works.

The terms "power" and "misogyny", which are used in the subtitle of this book, must be defined. Let us firstly consider the word "power". A number of theories with respect to this concept have been put forward over the years. For the seventeenth-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, "the Power of a Man (to take it Universally), is his present means, to obtain some future apparent Good".[1] He defines the concept of natural power as the power that derives from personal qualities, such as physical and intellectual strength, and that of instrumental power as the desire to rule over others in order to acquire more power. Hobbes defines "manners" as "those qualities of mankind that concern their living to-

[1] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or The Matter, Form & Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiastical and Civil*, London: A. Crooke, 1651, chapter X, p. 41.

gether in peace and unity", mediating between power and fear.[2] Friedrich Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power emphasizes the fundamental human desire to be independent and to dominate. This will, according to Nietzsche, is the fundamental driving force of change in the world.[3] More recently, Michel Foucault points out that power is present at all levels of social relations, that it is the driving force of change in society and in individuals, and that it is productive as well as constraining.[4] Social psychologists John R. P. French and Bertram Raven identify six categories of power: coercive (which uses the threat of force), reward (which involves the concepts of reward and penalty), legitimate (which includes the notion of authority or the acceptance of power exercised by others), referent (which originates from shared beliefs in a group or an affiliation), expert (which is derived from the power of qualifications, talents or skills) and informational (which is based on the concept of the influence of information).[5] Our study will rely most heavily on the concept of legitimate – sometimes called positional – power in the social and political realms of seventeenth-century France. This category of power derives from the acceptance that the holder of a particular position or title has the right to make decisions that direct or influence the course of events or the behaviour of other people.

From the ancient Greek word μισογυνία (misogunía), the term "misogyny" is often defined as the hatred or dislike of the female sex, but it is a far more complex notion than that. It is a belief system and a form of prejudice that is manifested in many different ways, some more subtly than others, and practised by both men and women.[6] The charge of misogyny has been leveled at both Aristotle and Plato because of their perceived contempt for women, as well as the limitations they place on

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2 *Ibid*., chapter XI.

3 Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufman, New York: Vintage Books, 1974; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ed. Robert Pippin, trans. Adrian Del Caro, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

4 Cf. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

5 Cf. John R. P. French and Bertram Raven, *The Bases of Social Power*, in *Studies in Social Power*, ed. D. Cartwright, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959: 150-167.

6 Michael Flood, Judith Kegan Gardiner, Bob Pease and Keith Pringle, ed., *Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities*, New York: Routledge, 2007, p. 443.

the female sex.[7] Misogynistic elements have also been found in the mythology of the ancient world and in the stories of the Judeo-Christian tradition. For example, the first woman – Pandora of Greek mythology and Eve of the Old Testament – is blamed for the release of the evils of humanity as a result of the perceived inherent weaknesses of women.[8] Because of the nature of Eve, female sexuality is seen as wicked and is, therefore, the source of Original Sin. The early Christian church counter-balances this view of womanhood with the unattainable ideal of the Virgin Mary, a woman who is with child without having lost her virginity. Misogynistic principles are therefore seen by some as being an integral part of Catholic doctrine.[9] Modern feminist theory broadens the definition of misogyny to include attitudes and behaviours that are interpreted as deriding women as a group.[10] According to this definition, an individual who is interested in women, socially and/or sexually, may still demonstrate misogynist behaviours by virtue of the limitations he or she places on the female sex. A person may therefore practise phylogeny (the love or fondness of women) and misogyny at the same time. And this is where our abbé d'Aubignac enters the scene.

Why focus on François Hédelin for a study on power and misogyny? Firstly, d'Aubignac's writings were abundant and they spanned across different genres, including plays, novels, dramatic theory and literary criticism. As a playwright, d'Aubignac's success was hardly something to write home about. Yet his three prose tragedies, all of which focus on powerful women, are revelatory of the interplay between power and misogyny that existed in seventeenth-century France. As a novelist, d'Aubignac's appeal was equally dismal. Yet, once again, his works in this genre reveal important information about the way in which women were perceived and how that perception was influenced by the socio-political conditions of the day.

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7 Cf. Cynthia A. Freeland, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998; Morag Buchan, *Women in Plato's Political Theory*, London: Routledge, 1999.

8 Cf. Jack Holland, *Misogyny: The World's Oldest Prejudice*, New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006.

9 Cf. Vladimir Tumanov, "Mary versus Eve: Paternal Uncertainty and the Christian View of Woman", *Neophilologus: International Journal of Modern and Mediaeval Languages and Literature*, 95 (2011): 507-521.

10 Cf. Andrea Nye, *Feminism and Modern Philosophy*, New York: Routledge, 2004.

If the 1660's can be called d'Aubignac's "novelist" decade, they can also be identified as the years in which our *abbé* made costly mistakes, at least with regards to his own reputation, due to his adversarial involvement with Pierre Corneille. Taking on the great dramatist was ill-advised. The *Querelle de Sophonisbe* (quarrel of *Sophonisbe*), during which d'Aubignac published four essays (1663) that were highly critical not only of Corneille's work but also of the dramatist himself, resulted in the *abbé* being "ridiculisé et meurtri, du moins pour la postérité"[11] (ridiculed and wounded, at least for posterity). D'Aubignac referred to Corneille's defenders as "la Vermine qui rampe aux pieds de cette pénible montagne" (the vermin that slithers at the foot of this hard mountain) and who live off the dramatist "en frippant ses Ouvrages" (by licking his works). In his most vivid metaphor, he compared these lackeys to "ces petits poissons qui s'attachent aux grands et merveilleux montres de la mer pour vivre de leurs excréments"[12] (these small fish which attach themselves to the great and marvellous sea monsters in order to live off their excrement). D'Aubignac's vindictive nature even led him to edit the work for which he is best known, *La Pratique du théâtre* (The Whole Art of the Stage), chopping off sections that in the original version of 1657 had heaped abundant praise on France's successful playwright. The planned new edition was never published, existing today only in manuscript form.[13] D'Aubignac's critical essays are important to our study, as they provide further insight into the author's philosophy of women.

Our second reason for focussing on d'Aubignac is that he was a man connected with his times. Of course, he was not the only literary personality in seventeenth-century France with social and political connections, but he had as many such associations as others. His

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[11] Hélène Baby, "Introduction", in *La Pratique du théâtre*, ed. Hélène Baby, Paris: Champion, 2001; reprint 2011, p. 16. All references in our book to *La Pratique du théâtre* are from Baby's edition.

[12] Abbé d'Aubignac, *Seconde dissertation sur le poème dramatique en forme de remarques sur la tragédie de M. Corneille intitulée Sertorius*, in Nicholas Hammond and Michael Hawcroft, ed., *L'Abbé d'Aubignac. Dissertations contre Corneille*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1995: 17-68, p. 67. All references in our book to d'Aubignac's four essays against Corneille are taken from Hammond and Hawcroft's edition.

[13] In her outstanding critical edition of *La Pratique du théâtre*, Hélène Baby identifies these deleted sections.

affiliation with Cardinal Richelieu who, in 1624, had become Louis XIII's chief minister and who became known for his patronage of the arts, went beyond the mere social formalities associated with being a man of letters. In 1631, Hédelin had been named the private tutor for Richelieu's nephew, Jean Armand de Maillé-Brézé, who later became duc de Bronzac. His appointment that same year as abbé d'Aubignac was likely due to the favour that he enjoyed with His Eminence.[14] In 1637, at Richelieu's request, d'Aubignac accompanied the cardinal's niece, Marie-Madeleine de Vignerot, duchesse d'Aiguillon, in her visit of Loudun's "possessed" Ursuline nuns.[15] Charles Arnaud asserts:

> Cette entrée de François Hédelin dans la maison de Richelieu fut l'événement capital de sa vie ; il y noua des relations, y reçut des conseils, y subit des influences qui déterminèrent la direction de ses travaux, et qui, en même temps, développèrent en lui la personnalité et la vanité dont sa première éducation avait déjà tant favorisé l'éclosion.[16]
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> François Hédelin's entry into the house of Richelieu was the most important event of his life; he cemented relations there, received counsel, experienced influences which determined the direction of his works, and which, at the same time, developed in him the personality and the vanity which his first education had already encouraged.

After Richelieu's nephew received the title of *grand maître de la navigation* (grand-master of navigation) at the age of seventeen, it appears that d'Aubignac was involved for a time in important matters dealing with naval issues. In *Le Roman des lettres*, which will be the focus of chapter 3 of our book, we read the following about the *abbé*:

> Vous ne savez donc pas, répondit Cleonce, qu'il a travaillé longtemps dans les affaires de la mer, et que sur le fait des armées navales, de la fabrique des vaisseaux, de la clôture et de l'ouverture des ports, et des événements qui suivent les divers

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[14] Charles Arnaud, *Les Théories dramatiques au XVII^e^ siècle : étude sur la vie et les œuvres de l'abbé d'Aubignac*, Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1888; reprint, Geneva: Slatkine, 1970, pp. 15-16.

[15] The Loudun possessions involved a group of Ursuline nuns who falsely accused Father Urbain Grandier of bewitching them. In 1634, Grandier was found guilty by a Royal Commission appointed by Richelieu and was burned alive at the stake. For an analysis of the events in this alleged case of demonic possessions, see Michel de Certeau's work *The Possession at Loudun*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

[16] Arnaud, p. 16.

mouvements de cet élément impitoyable, il a beaucoup de lettres qui sont parties, non seulement de son esprit et de sa main, mais du cabinet des Ministres, et pour des négociations importantes.[17]

You are not aware then, answered Cleonce, that he worked for a long time in the affairs of the sea, and that on the matter of naval forces, of the construction of vessels, of the closure and opening of ports, and of events that follow the diverse movements of this merciless element, he has many letters which came not only from his mind and from his hand, but also from the office of ministers, and for important negotiations.

Thanks to the young admiral, d'Aubignac was named *conseiller du roi* (counsellor of the king).[18] In addition, Richelieu had a high regard for d'Aubignac's judgement in all matters relating to dramatic composition and representation:

Quand une pièce lui déplaisait et lui paraissait irrégulière, il chargeait l'abbé de la corriger. C'est ainsi qu'il lui donna « l'ordre exprès » de refaire certaines parties de la *Panthée* de Tristan, notamment « le quatrième acte et la catastrophe. » Il lui demanda aussi, – faveur plus grande mais plus dangereuse, – d'assister à une répétition générale de *Mirame* et de donner son avis sur la pièce.[19]

When a play displeased him or seemed to be irregular to him, he charged the *abbé* to correct it. It is thus that he gave him the "express order" to redo certain parts of *Panthée* by Tristan, notably the "fourth act and the denouement". He asked him as well – a greater, but more dangerous favour – to attend a general rehearsal of *Mirame* and to give him his opinion of the play.

It was at Richelieu's request that d'Aubignac began writing *La Pratique du théâtre*, a work intended to teach the craft of the dramatist. In addition, the cardinal commissioned him to devise a plan for the general reform of theatre in France. The result was the document *Projet pour le rétablissement du théâtre français* (Project for the Restoration of French Theatre), which outlined measures to improve the physical structure of theatre halls, including decor and seating, as well as to address the problem of unruly spectators and to maintain control of the quality and moral content of plays.[20]

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17 Abbé d'Aubignac, *Le Roman des lettres*, Paris: J.-B. Loyson, 1667, p. 493.

18 Cf. Arnaud, p. 24.

19 *Ibid*., p. 184.

20 In this outline, d'Aubignac dispels the notion that Christians should not attend plays, pointing out that performances are no longer ceremonies in honour of pagan idols, and

It was also during this period that d'Aubignac became known for his talents as a preacher:

> Chaque année sa réputation de prédicateur s'augmente ; les églises le recherchent, et il ne prêche guère deux fois dans le même lieu.[21]
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> Each year his reputation as a preacher increases; churches seek his services, and he hardly preaches twice in the same place.

In 1641, he was asked to deliver the funeral oration for the young Louis de Savoie, duc de Nemours, who had died following the siege of Aire-sur-la-Lys. In 1650, he gave the funeral panegyric in honour of Josias de Rantzau, maréchal de France, and in 1651 that of Charlotte-Marguerite de Montmorency, princesse de Condé. D'Aubignac was also well-known in the literary circles of seventeenth-century France. Boscheron writes of the *abbé* that in Paris, "le grand monde dans lequel il se trouva tout d'un coup répandu le mit en liaison avec les beaux Esprits de son temps"[22] (the high society in which he now found himself placed him in contact with the cultivated minds of his time). Like other intellectuals, he frequented the literary salon of madame de Rambouillet,[23] the "in" place to be for Parisian fashionable society from 1620 to 1650:

> Ce fut pendant plus de trente ans le rendez-vous privilégié des gens du monde et des gens de lettres soucieux de politesse et de beau langage. Être admis à fréquenter la « chambre bleue » correspondait à un diplôme de qualité mondaine et intellectuelle à

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that representations of immoral behaviour on the French stage had been banned by Richelieu. He indicates as well that the infamous reputation of actors, while once true, is no longer the case in seventeenth-century France. D'Aubignac acknowledges that some of the problems impeding the progress of French theatre include the generally bad quality of the acting, the mediocrity of plays created by new playwrights, the imperfections of stage decor and the disorderliness of spectators, particularly among the "jeunes débauchés" (debauched young people). Cf. D'Aubignac, *Projet pour le rétablissement du théâtre français*, in *La Pratique du théâtre*, pp. 698-703.

21 Charles Livet, *Précieux et précieuses, caractères et mœurs littéraires du XVII^e^ siècle*, Paris: H. Welter, 1895; reprint, Cœuvres-et-Valsery: Ressouvenances, 2001, p. 161.

22 Boscheron, "Lettre de Monsieur Boscheron à Monsieur de *** contenant un Abrégé de la vie de l'abbé d'Aubignac et l'Histoire de ses ouvrages", in Albert-Henri de Sallengre, *Mémoires de littérature*, 2 volumes, La Haye: Henri de Sauzet, 1716, vol. I, p. 288.

23 Thomas Frederick Crane, "Introduction", in Thomas Frederick Crane, ed., *La Société française au dix-septième siècle*, New York: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1889, p. xxix.

la fois ; on y venait donc d'abord pour y être vu, puis on y revenait parce qu'on s'y amusait.[24]

It was for more than thirty years the privileged meeting place of the worldly and of men of letters preoccupied with politeness and with elegant speech. To be admitted to the "blue room" corresponded to a diploma in worldly and intellectual quality; people came at first to be seen, then they returned because they enjoyed themselves there.

From 1652-1659, d'Aubignac was also a frequent visitor of the *salon* of Madeleine de Scudéry, which became very popular following the decline of the Hôtel de Rambouillet.[25] He visited the *salon* of vicomtesse d'Auchy and attended the lectures of Pierre Bourdelot, Louis de l'Esclache, Jacques Rohaut, François de Launay and Henri-Louis Habert de Montmor.[26] The list of d'Aubignac's friends – some of whom, it must be qualified, later became his foes – is a who's who of the literary world of seventeenth-century France. These writers included Antoine Furetière, Madeleine de Scudéry, Georges de Scudéry, Gilles Ménage, Valentin Conrart, Isaac de Benserade, Guillaume Colletet, abbé de Pure, François Ogier, César-Pierre Richelet, Nicolas Boileau, Pierre Corneille and Jean Chapelain.[27] Livet affirms:

L'approbation de l'abbé d'Aubignac avait alors grand prix. Il était dans tout l'éclat de sa réputation. Ses amis c'étaient Conrart, Chapelain, d'Ablancourt, Doujat ; il voyait la société qu'ils fréquentaient eux-mêmes, entre autres cette mademoiselle Le Vieux, pour qui Conrart fit maintes fois des vers, et à qui Patru écrivit plusieurs lettres sous le nom d'Olinde.[28]

The approval of abbé d'Aubignac was at that point highly valued. He was in the full glory of his reputation. His friends were Conrart, Chapelain, d'Ablancourt, Doujat; he saw the society that they themselves frequented, among them a certain Miss Le Vieux, for whom Conrart many times wrote verses, and to whom Patru wrote several letters under the name of Olinde.

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24 François Bruche, ed., *Dictionnaire du Grand Siècle*, 2nd edition, Paris: Fayard, 2005, p. 1299.

25 Cf. Faith E. Beasley, *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France: Mastering Memory*, Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006, pp. 228-248.

26 Cf. Boscheron, vol. I, p. 308.

27 Cf. Arnaud, pp. 34-35.

28 Livet, p. 188.

This is not to say that d'Aubignac was universally well-liked by his contemporaries. His reputation was that of a quarrelsome, pedantic author and dramatic critic who did not hesitate to point out the supposed flaws in the works of other writers, but who lacked sufficient literary talent, it was said, to produce great works himself. He engaged in quarrels, either of a literary or personal nature, with Gilles Ménage, Madeleine de Scudéry, abbé de Pure, Pierre Corneille and César-Pierre Richelet.[29] He had a falling out with his publisher Charles de Sercy, referring to him in his *Quatrième dissertation* as "le dernier des fripons" (the last of the rascals), "un méchant petit Libraire" (a malicious little publisher), "ce petit Hère" (this little, miserable wretch), "ce petit perfide" (this little, perfidious person) and "un pauvre idiot qui ne sait qu'à grande peine écrire son nom, un misérable escroc qui n'est propre qu'à vendre des Almanachs" (a poor idiot who barely knows how to write his own name, a wretched swindler who is only good for selling almanacs).[30] In 1659, Chapelain wrote of d'Aubignac:

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[29] D'Aubignac's literary quarrel with Ménage, which began in 1640 and which lasted close to 50 years (yes, even after the *abbé*'s death), had to do with the duration of the action in Terence's *Heautontimoroumenos*; his quarrel with Madeleine de Scudéry originated from an accusation of plagiarism on the part of Scudéry over the 1654 publication of d'Aubignac's novel *Histoire du temps, ou Relation du royaume de Coquetterie*; his quarrel with abbé de Pure concerned a passage in *La Précieuse ou Le Mystère des ruelles* (1656), in the first part of which de Pure had complimented d'Aubignac, incorrectly attributing a novel to Nidhélie, an anagram for Hédelin; his 1663 quarrel with Jean Donneau de Visé and Pierre Corneille, known as the "Quarrel of *Sophonisbe*", saw the publication of four essays by d'Aubignac criticizing Corneille and several of his works; his quarrel with César-Pierre Richelet was of a personal nature. Cf. Augustin Irailh, *Querelles littéraires, ou mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des révolutions de la République des Lettres, depuis Homère jusqu'à nos jours*, 4 volumes, Paris: Durand, 1761; reprint, Geneva: Slatkine, 1967; Livet, pp. 168-177.

[30] Abbé d'Aubignac, *Quatrième dissertation concernant le poème dramatique : Servant de réponse aux calomnies de M. Corneille*, in *L'Abbé d'Aubignac. Dissertations contre Corneille*: 115-146, pp. 140, 143. D'Aubignac accused Sercy of having allowed Pierre Corneille to take all the remaining copies of the *abbé*'s essay on *Sophonisbe* in exchange for copies of Corneille's translation of *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ* by Thomas à Kempis. Cf. Abbé d'Aubignac, *Première dissertation concernant le poème dramatique : À Madame la duchesse de R**, in *L'Abbé d'Aubignac. Dissertations contre Corneille*: 1-16, p. 3.