

Mother-Daughter Digital Dialogues: Madame de Sévigné's Epistles in the Era of Social Media

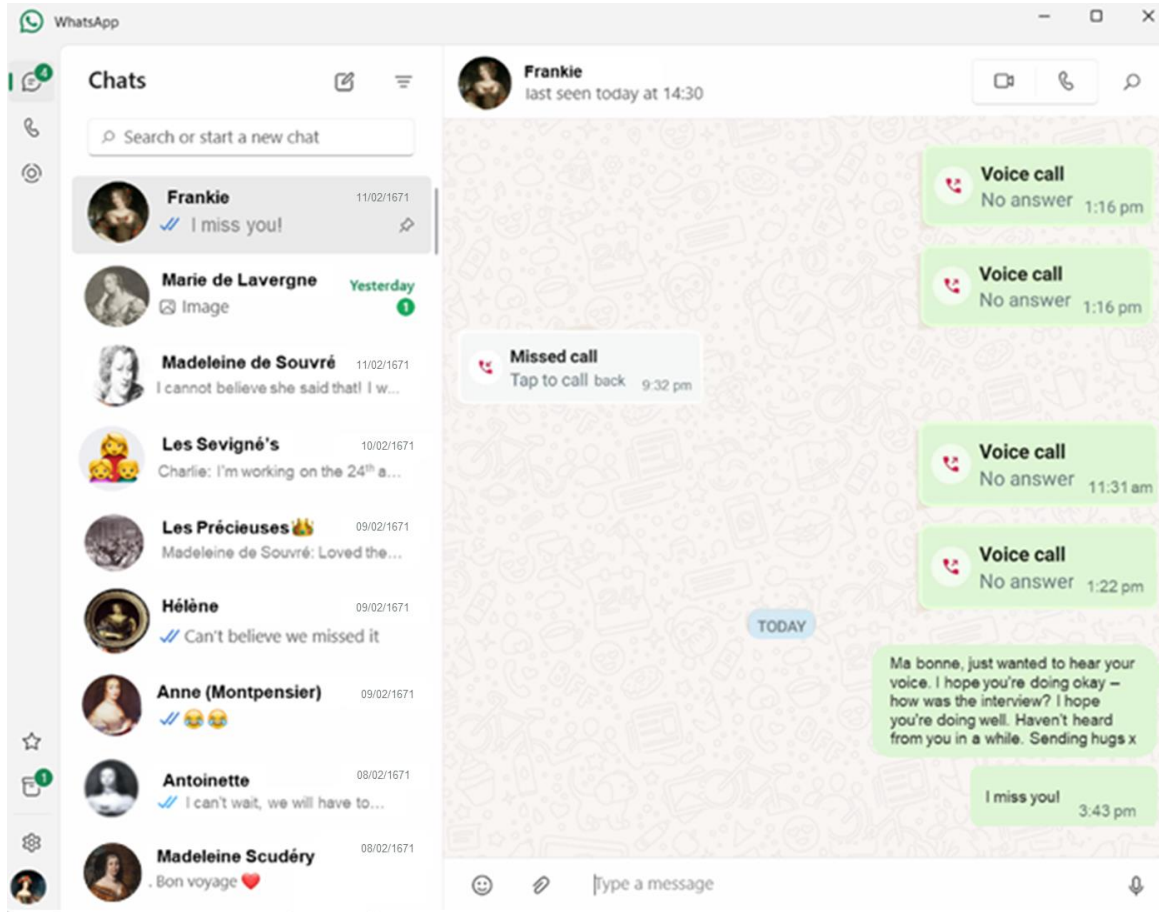
FR245:In the Family Way: Birth Sex & Death in French 17thc Culture & Text

Cathy Hampton

Referencing Style: MHRA

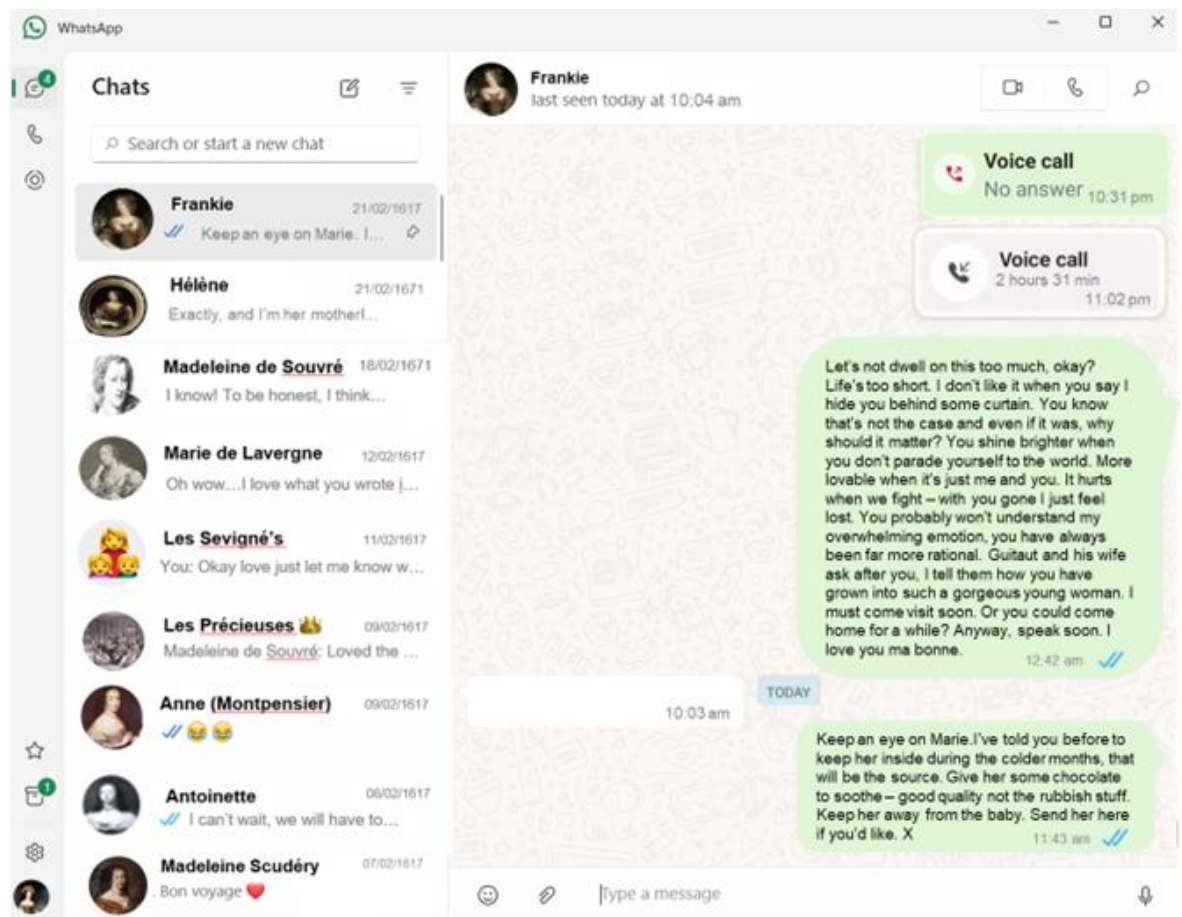
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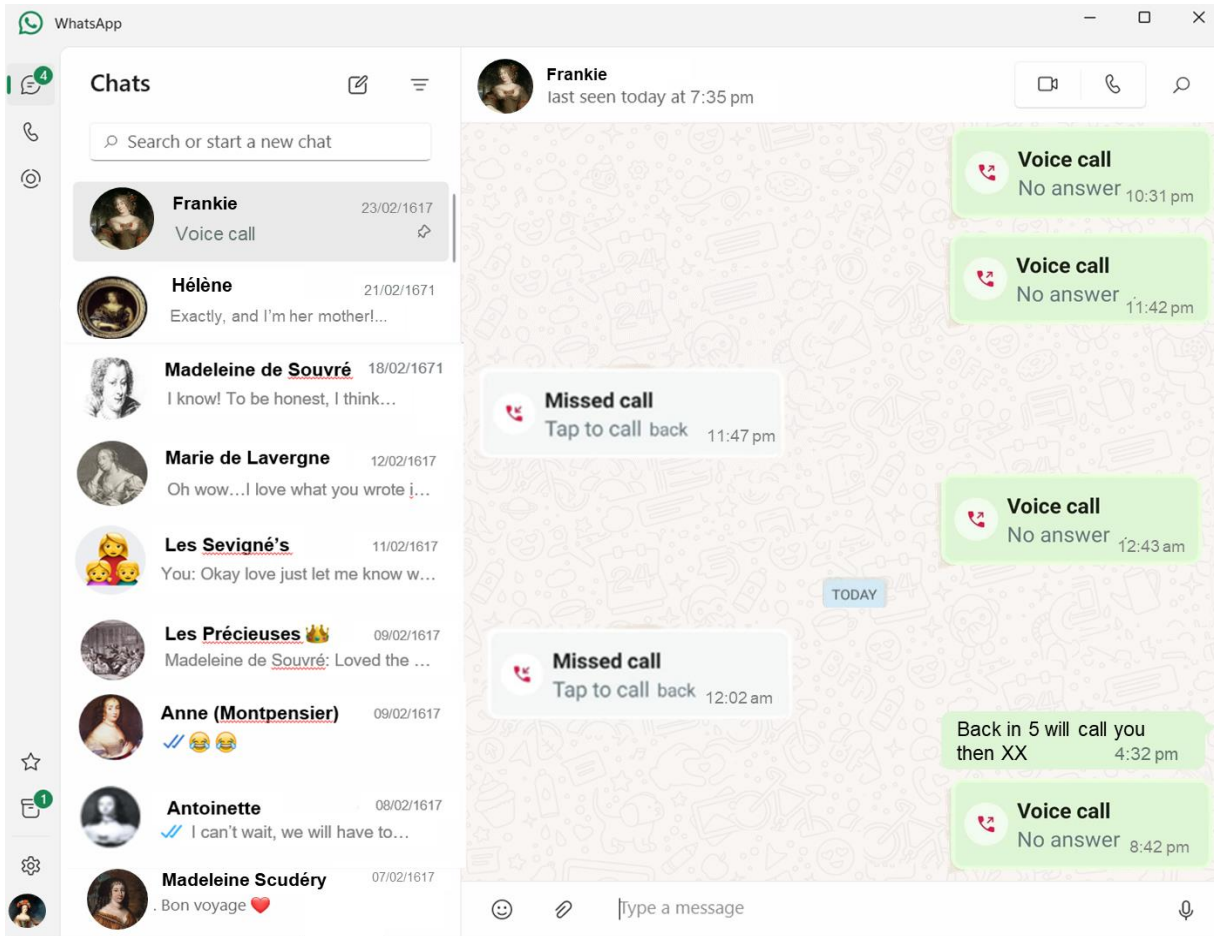
February 1617: A Relationship Rewritten



Conversation 1

Conversation 2





Conversation 3



Late February 1671: Maternal Control and the Filial Body

WhatsApp

Chats

Search or start a new chat

Frankie 27/02/1617
I hope you're doing okay, s...

Hélène 27/02/1671
I feel like I don't understand h...

Marie de Lavergne 27/02/1617
I saw Madame de Montespan y..

Antoinette 26/02/1671
✓ I am hoping to attend tom...

Madeleine de Souvré 18/02/1671
I know! To be honest, I think...

Marie de Lavergne 12/02/1617
Oh wow...I love what you wrote j...

Les Seigné's 11/02/1617
You: Okay love just let me know w...

Les Précieuses 09/02/1617
Madeleine de Souvré: Loved the ...

Madeleine Scudéry 07/02/1617
Bon voyage ❤️

Frankie
last seen today at 7:35 pm

12:03 pm

0:21 5:53

TODAY

I hope you're doing okay, sweetheart. I've been feeling a bit anxious about what you've been telling me lately, and I just need to get this off my chest. After everything you've been through, especially with the miscarriage, I can't help but worry about the idea of you getting pregnant again. It's been on my mind constantly, and I can't shake the feeling. Have you talked to François? I know he'd only have the best intentions for you. Honestly, I'm just waiting on news, hoping and praying that you're not expecting. I know it's ultimately your decision, but I can't help but feel this way. Please take care of yourself, okay? Your health is the most important thing. Love you lots x

01:06 pm ✓✓

Type a message

Conversation 4

WhatsApp

Chats

Search or start a new chat

François 27/02/1617
Hi my love, just wanted a quick...

Frankie 27/02/1671
We have been through this ma...

Hélène 27/02/1671
I feel like I don't understand h...

Marie de Lavergne 27/02/1617
I saw Madame de Montespan y..

Antoinette 26/02/1671
✓ I am hoping to attend tom...

Madeleine de Souvré 18/02/1671
I know! To be honest, I think...

Marie de Lavergne 12/02/1617
Oh wow...I love what you wrote j...

Les Seigné's 11/02/1617
You: Okay love just let me know w...

Les Précieuses 09/02/1617
Madeleine de Souvré: Loved the ...

François
last seen today at 9:09 pm

12:05 pm

TODAY

Hi my love, just wanted a quick chat about something. I know you both have expressed a desire for another child, and that's wonderful. But I want to make sure you're fully aware of the potential consequences, especially to her health. I'm not trying to scare you or anything, but I think it's important to have all the information before making any decisions. Remember we both want the best for her. Let's talk more about this, okay? Call me when you can. S x

6:07 pm ✓✓

8:05 pm

Type a message

Conversation 5



françoisemargueritedesè vignè
Provence, France

françoisemargueritedesè vignè All I ever need <3#FamilyTime #BeachDay

charlottedebussy-rabutin What a vision of bliss! Pure happiness! 🌞

jean-baptiste.fassola-de-rasa Soaking up the sun and making memories with your boys—what could be better? Sending you all our love! 😊

madamedevins Quite the beach ensemble! Keeping it bold and breezy, I see 🌊

— Hide replies

mariederabutin-chantal @madamedevins Tell me about it!!

françoisadhémardemonteildegrignan @mariederabutin-chantal 😊😊

Liked by **madeleinedesouvré** and others
27 February

Add a comment... Post

Post 2 – by Madame de Grignan

WhatsApp

Chats

Search or start a new chat

- Frankie** 27/02/1617
Sweetheart, just saw your rece...
- François** 27/02/1617
I'm trying to talk to her about it n...
- Marie de Lavergne** 27/02/1617
I saw Madame de Montespan y...
- Antoinette** 26/02/1671
✓ I am hoping to attend tom...
- Madeleine de Souvré** 18/02/1671
I know! To be honest, I think...
- Marie de Lavergne** 12/02/1617
Oh wow...I love what you wrote j...
- Les Sevigné's** 11/02/1617
You: Okay love just let me know w...
- Les Précieuses** 🙌 09/02/1617
Madeleine de Souvré: Loved the ...
- Madeleine Scudéry** 07/02/1617
Bon voyage ❤️

Frankie
last seen today at 9:09 pm

12:05 pm

TODAY

Sweetheart, just saw your recent post. You know I love seeing you and your family so happy and I want nothing more than for you to be seen in the best light possible. I just can't help but feel a little uneasy seeing you display your body so openly. As much as I respect your freedom, I can't shake the feeling that such public displays may invite unwanted attention or judgments. Just make sure you're thinking about how these things will be received. Women are so much more attractive when they leave things to the imagination! Anyway, how is everything between you and Francois? Not that I've noticed anything wrong, I just wanted to check. You know hearing about your lives together brings me so much happiness. He told me he worries about you getting bored in Provence, with which I didn't disagree. Make sure you keep yourself busy, not just with work but with friends and hobbies too. Love you x

7:09 pm ✓✓

8:05 pm

Type a message

Conversation 6

WhatsApp

Chats

Search or start a new chat

Frankie 24/03/1671
My dear, I hope you're in good...

Les Sevigné's 23/03/1671
Charlie: Please do not worry...

François 22/03/1671
You flatter me Frank, I hope...

Les Précieuses 22/03/1671
Catherine de Vivonne: Ladies...

Antoinette 20/03/1671
✓ He told me that he had s...

Madeleine de Souvré 18/03/1671
Would be lovely to see you...

Marie de Lavergne 18/03/1671
Tell me all about how Louis is g...

Hélène 17/03/1671
✓ Honestly the whole thing was...

Madeleine Scudéry 16/03/1671
Mercil <3

Frankie
last seen today at 9:09 pm

12:05 pm

12:05 pm

12:06 pm

TODAY

My dear, I hope you're in good spirits, I don't mean to weigh you down with depressing messages, but I can't stop crying! I have travelled with Helene and Herbert to a Catholic retreat at the Abbey in Livry. I'm staying here for Holy week to try and rebuild my relationship with my faith – but all I can think of is you. I miss you so much. It's lonely here. I hate how weighed down I am by my anxious thoughts. Please tell me how you are, I want to know everything, every detail to pass the time. I love you ma bonne X

7:09 pm ✓✓

8:05 pm

type a message

Conversation 7

WhatsApp

Chats

Search or start a new chat

Frankie 24/03/1671
My dear, I hope you're in good...

Les Sevigné's 23/03/1671
Charlie: Please do not worry...

François 22/03/1671
You flatter me Frank, I hope...

Les Précieuses 22/03/1671
Catherine de Vivonne: Ladies...

Antoinette 20/03/1671
✓ He told me that he had s...

Madeleine de Souvré 18/03/1671
Would be lovely to see you...

Marie de Lavergne 18/03/1671
Tell me all about how Louis is g...

Hélène 17/03/1671
✓ Honestly the whole thing was...

Madeleine Scudéry 16/03/1671
Mercil <3

Frankie
last seen today at 9:09 pm

0:10 7:12

0:21 5:53

4:51 8:24 1.5x

Hello, I have just got home. Sorry I haven't replied to your lovely messages. I will sit down and listen to your voice notes now, I can't wait to hear about what's been going on. X

7:09 pm ✓✓

I don't know why you keep saying you don't tell stories well, I love every story you tell me. You have such wit and intelligence beautiful girl x

7:32 pm ✓✓

TODAY

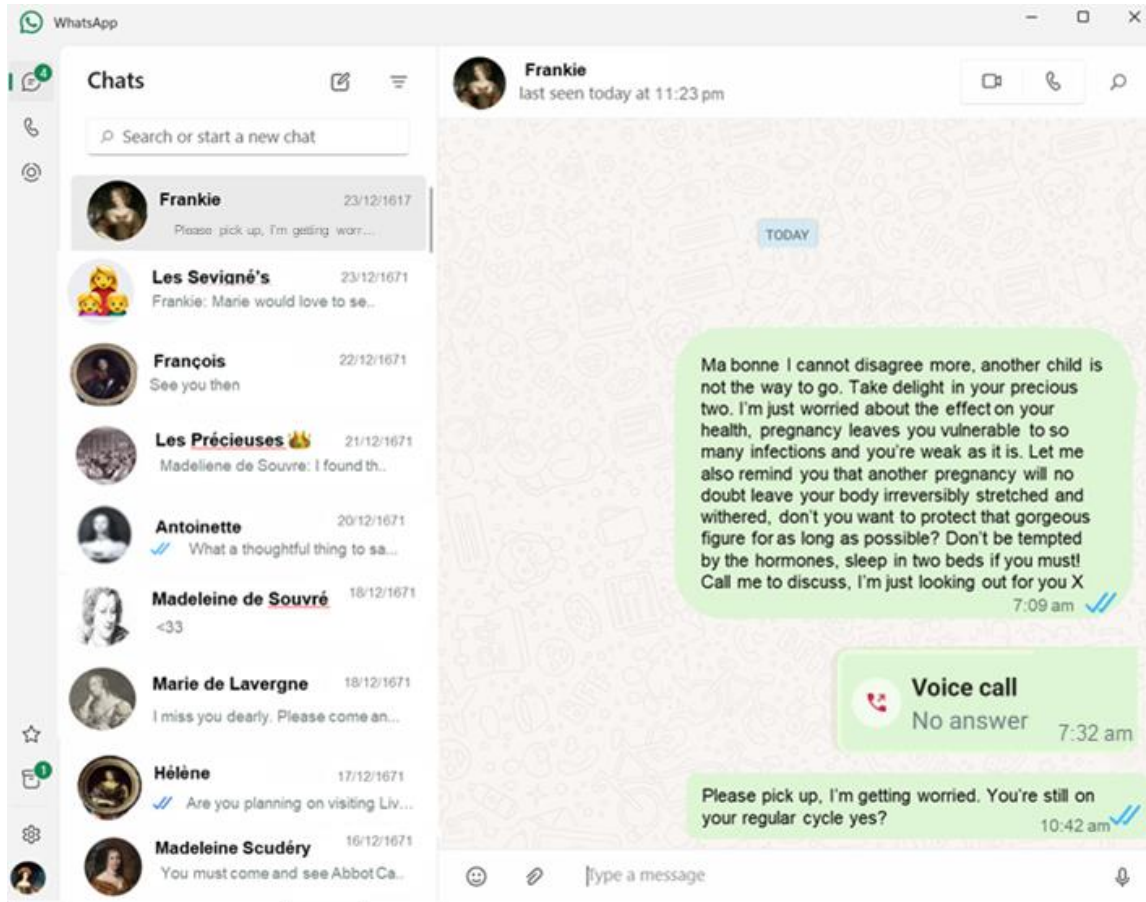
Your daughter is in a foul mood, I wonder who she gets that from? Please give her a call and tell her to lighten up a bit!! 😂😂

10:42 am ✓✓

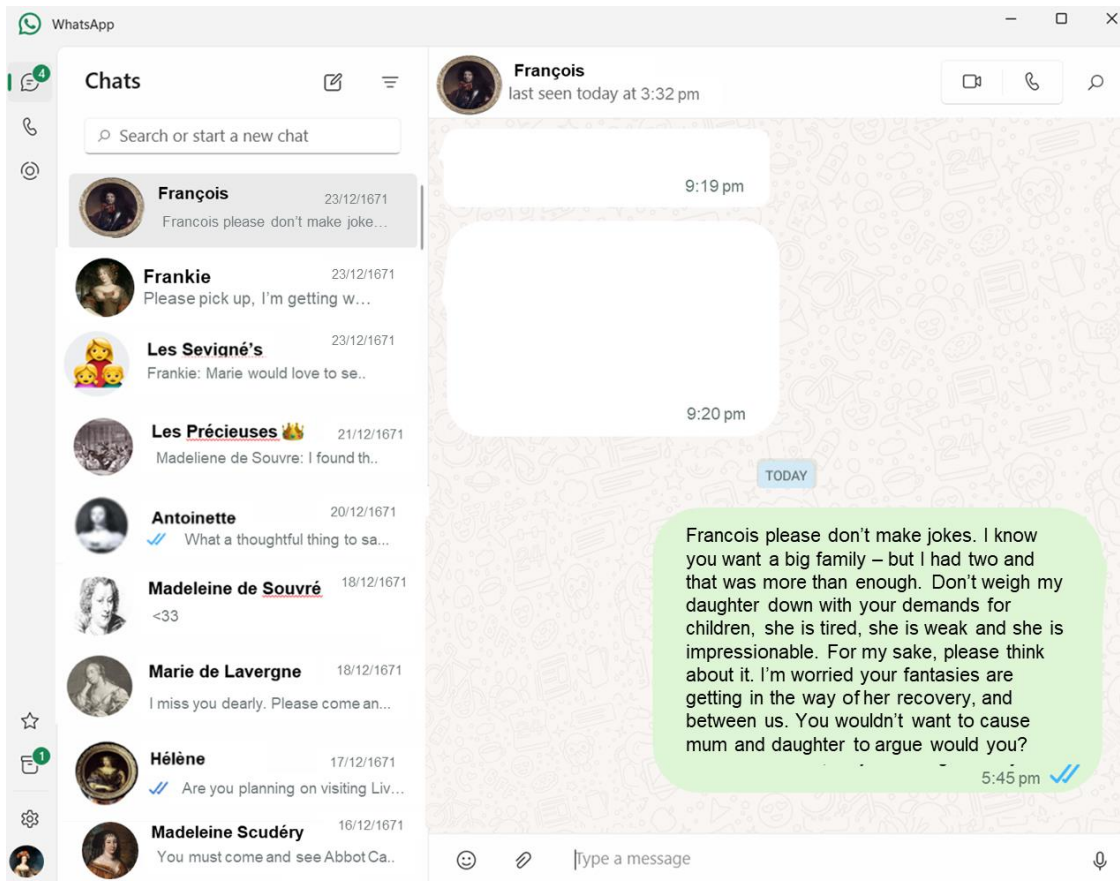
type a message

Conversation 8

December 1671: Maternal Control and the Filial Body Part 2 FR245



Conversation 9



Conversation 10

WhatsApp

Chats

Search or start a new chat

Frankie 12/05/1679
I feel the need to clear the...

François 12/05/1679
I don't understand why she talk..

Les Sevigné's 12/05/1679
Charlie: I hate watching you two fight...

Charlie 12/05/1679
I'm sure she will come round. She is...

Hélène 12/05/1679
You two are so alike in your stub...

Les Précieuses 🙌 09/05/1679
You: Corneille's most recent...

Madame Paul 09/05/1679
You should come with us to the c...

Montgobert
Hello! Did my daughter say anyt...

Georges de Scudéry
How is your little sister doing?...

La Voisin
It was like her ashes were floatin...

Frankie
last seen today at 5:42 pm

I slept awfully. I can't stand the way you talk to me sometimes, it's like I don't know you. But when I tell my friends what you say they remind me how brave you are and how much you do love me, despite often not liking me. You say that I only see flaws in you which isn't true – I am just trying to show you how to be the best version of you. You say that I rely too much to my friends – but who else can I speak to?! You're gone, I'm completely alone and it's not like I tell them private things... You say I like you better when you're away – you must be blind to ignore the sadness I get when you leave. Something has changed between us and I'd like to know what it is, I cannot keep being seen as the bad person when all I do is care for you. The cardinal feels the same btw – he thinks you are more distant and cold recently. Perhaps it is not just me driving people away... Reach out to him please, I assume you are still looking for his financial generosity. 10:21 am ✓

I feel the need to clear the air. We can both be hot headed. Though all our "brawls" as you love to call them, know this – my love for you will not change. Remember that our differences are things that should make us closer, not drive us apart. Your happiness means the world to me. Please call me X 3:42 pm ✓

Type a message

Conversation 11

WhatsApp

Chats

Search or start a new chat

Charlie 5/1679
I feel the need to clear the...

Les Sevigné's 23/12/1671
Frankie: I'm feeling a little bett..

François 16/05/1679
It's not my fault!!

Frankie 15/05/1679
Yup. Fine.

Hélène 12/05/1679
You two are so alike in your stub...

Les Précieuses 🙌 09/05/1679
You: Corneille's most recent...

Madame Paul 09/05/1679
You should come with us to the c...

Montgobert
Hello! Did my daughter say anyt...

Georges de Scudéry
How is your little sister doing?...

La Voisin
It was like her ashes were floatin...

Charlie
last seen today at 5:42 pm

Charles, hello my sweet boy. How are you? How is the wife? I hope you two are getting along. I feel like I haven't spoken to you in forever! Your sister is not doing well so I'm staying with her here in Grignan. Her blood loss has made her very weak and she's now struggling with stomach issues that are making it hard to eat anything. It's a delicate balance that is very hard to prescribe medication for. We are constantly fighting about what she's going to do with herself – she wants another baby if you can believe it, and thinks I'm being controlling. You've never thought that have you? Keep her in your prayers and give her a call if you can, I'm sure she'd love to hear from you. I asked for those books you wanted from Trappe, but they told me they wouldn't be able to get a hold of them – maybe try in Paris? I know you're probably far too busy to talk to your mother, but call me if you get a moment. Don't worry if not, I know you're busy making me proud! Keep me in the loop and don't hesitate to reach out if you need anything. Mum x 10:21 am ✓

TODAY

Type a message

My intention in constructing this piece was to recontextualize Madame de Sévigné's iconic letters within a modern-day framework, drawing parallels and distinctions between mother-daughter relationships in the 17th century and today, while commenting on the evolution of language across communication platforms. I aspired to create an online dialogue that mirrored a realistic, modern-day conversation between mother and daughter, whilst exposing the same grievances that Madame de Sévigné and her daughter faced. This, in turn, has the ability to highlight the somewhat immutable nature of mother-daughter relationships.

My research was inspired by Katharine Ann Jensen's analysis of mother-daughter mirroring within Madame de Sévigné's letters, a text that elucidates issues ever-present today – filial lost identities, maternal obsession and the preordained estrangement of mother and daughter. Jensen argues that as genetic co-extensions of each other, there is often no differentiation between mother and daughter, resulting in the dissolution of the Westernised idea of a healthy relationship.¹ In my selection of letters for analysis and transcription, I specifically chose those that shed light on the nuanced dynamics of mother-daughter relationships, focusing on excerpts that delve into discussions about pregnancy, health, and the emotional toll of separation.

There are various limitations in using letters as primary sources for historical research, therefore impacting the methodology employed in my investigation. Rarely do archival letters include coherent runs of exchange, often restricting the development of feeling and characters. An illustrious exception, Madame de Sévigné wrote around 1,799 letters over her lifetime, 1,386 of which were published by her granddaughter Pauline de Simiane between 1734-1754. The letters span from 1669-1694, an impressive range that facilitates the elaboration of storyline, characterization, and interpersonal connections.² The meticulous detail that Sévigné commits to paper allows historians to build a picture of the network of friends, intellectuals, and confidants she cultivated during her widowhood, as alluded to by the ongoing Whatsapp conversations seen alongside those with her daughter, the Comtess de Grignan. The collection's inevitable flaw lies in the absence of responses from the daughter, attributed to Pauline's act of burning the letters upon their initial publication.³ Author Louise K. Horowitz argues that the lack of reciprocity creates a vacuum in which the reader is forced to “capture the daughter's view of the world, of herself, of her mother, and of letter writing only from the missives of Madame de Sévigné.”⁴ In

¹ Katharine Ann Jensen. 2004. ‘Mother-Daughter Mirroring in Madame de Sévigné's Letters: Identity Confusion and the Lure of Intimacy’, *L'Esprit Créateur*, 44.1: 108–20 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26288701>>

² Eva Marcu. 1960. ‘Madame de Sévigné and Her Daughter.’, *Romantic Review*, 51.3: 182–92 (p. 182) <<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1290866108?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true&sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals&imgSeq=1>>

³ Jensen p.108

⁴ Louise K. Horowitz. “The Correspondence of Madame de Sévigné: Letters or Belles-Lettres?” *French Forum*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1981, pp. 13–27 (p. 13) www.jstor.org/stable/41429462?sam1_data=eyJzYW1sVG9rZW4iOiI4ZDhmMzlkZi0wMjU5LTQwODYtOGJkMS0wZDAzY2FiM2I0MGUiLCJpbmN0aXR1dGlvbkklkeYl6WyIzZGVlYmI1NC0yMDMwLTQ3YjgtYjhjNi0wN2E3NzQ3NDFlZGEiXX0&seq=3. Accessed 6 Apr. 2024.

considering whether I should additionally imagine the responses of Grignan, I ultimately deemed it more advantageous to focus solely on the available material. Our image of the Comtesse is artistically crafted by Sévigné herself and to fabricate an imagined personality for her would be to adopt, and not analyse the role of the epistolist. Retaining the framework of the letters as they are available to us more faithfully reflects the disillusioned, one-sided reader experience. Nevertheless, I have included a public post from Grignan not to grant her a voice, but rather to highlight areas of tension and stimulate reaction from her mother.

Since the birth of technology, social media, instant messaging and digital profiles have surpassed epistolary culture, allowing for much speedier communications to bridge absence.⁵ Superficially, the accessibility and alacrity of text messages replace the detailed poignancy of letters - less thoughtful, considering the resources and time devoted to letter writing and more artificial, considering the ability to write and rewrite messages. Nevertheless, they have facilitated the creation of a new language to convey sentiment in fewer words and less time. In this online exchange, within the confines of a text box, Sévigné's pages of emotion are condensed to convey the same pain of separation through words left unspoken. In my assessment, the contemporary "call me, I miss you" resonates equal emotion to the seventeenth-century, "si j'avais autant pleuré mes péchés que j'ai pleuré pour vous depuis que je suis ici, je serais très bien disposée pour faire mes pâques et mon jubilé," due to the depth of emotional intelligence that social media users are compelled to cultivate.⁶ Utilising social media as a platform for this relationship allowed me to visually showcase the nuances of mother-daughter interaction across multimedia platforms. Additionally, it allowed me to bring the characters of her chronicles to life, situating her within an online community that paralleled her support system in Paris.

Ever-present in long-distance communication is the gaping incongruence in tone, implication and language between public and private exchanges. This dichotomy is central to conversation around Madame de Sévigné's letters, facilitating debate around their publicity. For Horowitz, Sévigné's letters were intended to be private works, written exclusively to maintain a relationship with her daughter after her move to Provence. She explains that, according to critic Roger Duchene, Madame de Sévigné should be categorised as just an "épistolier" as opposed to an "auteur épistolier", such as Balzac or Flaubert.⁷ My research however, regards Madame de Sévigné as highly conscious of the publicity of her letters, and devoted to illustrating her literary prowess through them. It recognises the salonnière culture of the Parisian elite, in which she was heavily involved.⁸ It is clear that Sévigné wrote and received her letters

⁵ Liz Stanley. 2015. 'The Death of the Letter? Epistolary Intent, Letterness and the Many Ends of Letter-Writing', *Cultural Sociology*, 9.2: 240–55 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975515573267>>

⁶ Madame de Sévigné. 1671. 'Lettre 40'

[https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Lettres_choisies_\(S%C3%A9vign%C3%A9\),_%C3%A9d._1846/Lettre_40](https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Lettres_choisies_(S%C3%A9vign%C3%A9),_%C3%A9d._1846/Lettre_40)

⁷ Horowitz p.15

⁸ K. STEVEN VINCENT. 2007. 'ELITE CULTURE in EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE: SALONS, SOCIABILITY, and the SELF', *Modern Intellectual History*, 4.02: 327 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/s1479244307001229>>

in the company of her friends, and encouraged her daughter to do the same, viewing them not only as instruments of intimacy, but as works of literary art.⁹ As letters became less private, the only truly guarded space to express feelings, resolve tension and develop relationships was non-documented, in-person interaction.

This disparity between the public and the private is just as, if not more present in the world of hyper-connectivity. The letters of Madame de Sévigné's world are the Instagram and Twitter posts of today, the in-person interactions are the highly-encrypted WhatsApp messages and outmoded phone calls. Analogous to the seventeenth century, the public sphere remains reserved for the edited, superficially constructed versions of our lives. For Madame de Sévigné, the public exchange between mother and daughter was an opportunity to embellish and refine their relationship, rendering it seemingly perfect in the eyes of her fellow intellectuals and friends. This rewriting of mother-daughter bond is clear in the way she refrains from committing the potentially hostile details of their disagreements to paper, choosing to focus instead on their reconciliation (conveniently predominantly initiated by Madame de Sévigné herself.) For example, on 6th May 1671 she appears to take the first step in restoring "une parfaite intelligence" by promising "réparerai toutes les injustices passées, puisque vous voulez les nommer ainsi."¹⁰ The latter half of the sentence, imitated in Conversation 11, reflects Sévigné's denial of accountability, rendering the issues unimportant and arguably appropriating her daughter's voice. Madame de Sévigné employs this approach several times throughout her letters, providing readers with evidence of tension, while gliding over its substance and implication.

In my exchange, the public and the private are discerned by Madame de Sévigné's idealistic online presence, in comparison to her confidential conversations. For example, Post 1 is made 3 hours after a series of missed calls and read messages, elucidating an interval of emotional detachment between mother and daughter. This post exposes Sévigné's superficial construction of a benevolent and close relationship, which lies in stark contrast to their real lack of communication. The comments generated on the publication substantiate Sévigné's longing for validation and the need to maintain an untainted public perception. The use of a photo from Grignan's babyhood alludes to Sévigné's desire to relive the youth of her daughter, a time of constant maternal closeness and control. The post is prompted by her anxiety surrounding separation, neglect and change, resulting in the subtle infantilisation of her daughter.

⁹ Jensen p.109

¹⁰ Madame de Sévigné. 1671. 'Lettre 164'
[https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Lettre_164,_1671_\(S%C3%A9vign%C3%A9\)](https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Lettre_164,_1671_(S%C3%A9vign%C3%A9))

This anxious attachment is particular to her relationship with her daughter, considering the fact that approximately 767 – over half - of her letters are destined for Madame de Grignan.¹¹ With her daughter, she craves emotional exchange, demanding that she “répondez moins à mes lettres et me parlez de vous,” or “please tell me how you are, I want to know everything.”¹² For Charles, she uses far less emotive language, never begging for reciprocal affection because “c’est l’ordre, et je ne m’en plains pas.”¹³ The maternal need for control that spawns from this anxiety is elucidated in Jensen’s work, defined as an “accorded dominance” that works against mother-daughter intimacy.¹⁴ Viewing her daughter as a reflection of herself, her “chef-d’oeuvre”, Madame de Sévigné is bound to her daughter by a fervent, all-consuming need for control, manifested most visibly in her appropriation of her daughter’s body.¹⁵ Madame de Sévigné writes, “vous savez comme j’aime votre beauté. Mon amour-propre m’y fait prendre intérêt; je vous la recommande pour l’amour de moi. Il me semble qu’on me va trouver bien habile en Provence d’avoir fait un si joli visage.”¹⁶ Here she presents Grignan as her own work of art, framing their existence as two bodies that are intrinsically interconnected. This perspective seemingly gives her an inalienable right to control, regulate and parade Grignan’s body accordingly, as it exists as not only her creation, but a part of her identity. Though this right to control was especially prevalent in a world in which the purity of the body defined a woman’s worth, it is a framework that continues to instigate tension between mother and daughter today.¹⁷

The threat to this control is posed by the Comte de Grignan, the man who doomed her to life-long maternal separation and the husband to whom she has handed over her daughter’s physical, sexual and psychological autonomy. Both parties view Grignan’s conjugal body as emblematic of her cognitive autonomy, and both seek to exert influence over it, forcing Sévigné to engage in a psychological battle with her son-in-law for possession of the filial body.¹⁸ This confrontation is exposed through Madame de Sévigné’s pervasion into the intimate discussion of pregnancy and her unrelenting attempts to keep her daughter celibate. The conversation arises in 1671, following a miscarriage and the birth of Grignan’s first daughter in 1670.¹⁹ Her mother is overtly averse to her reproductive activity, meticulously tracking her monthly-cycle and demanding to know whether she is menstruating. She

¹¹ Meagen E. Moreland. 2012. “‘Madame Ma Chère Fille’: The Performance of Motherhood in the Correspondence of Madame de Sévigné, Marie-Thérèse of Austria, and Joséphine Bonaparte to Their Daughters” (unpublished Master’s Thesis, University of Massachusetts Amherst), pp. 1–136 (p. 6) <<https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1965&context=theses>>

¹² Madame de Sévigné. 1671. ‘Lettre 164’

[https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Lettre_164,_1671_\(S%C3%A9vign%C3%A9\)](https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Lettre_164,_1671_(S%C3%A9vign%C3%A9))

¹³ Madame de Sévigné. 1695. ‘Lettre 1251’

¹⁴ Jensen p.109

¹⁵ Jensen p.109

¹⁶ Madame de Sévigné. 1671. ‘Lettre 30’

[https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Lettres_choisies_\(S%C3%A9vign%C3%A9\),_%C3%A9d._1846/Lettre_30](https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Lettres_choisies_(S%C3%A9vign%C3%A9),_%C3%A9d._1846/Lettre_30)

¹⁷ Vered Shenaar-Golan, and Ofra Walter. 2015. *Mother-Daughter Relationship and Daughter’s Body Image*, pp. 547–59 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/health.2015.75065>>

¹⁸ Jensen p. 114

¹⁹ Jensen p.116

writes, “il est aujourd'hui le 6 de mars; je vous conjure de me mander comme vous vous portez,” and 16 days later “vous ne me mandez point si vous êtes malade ou en santé.”²⁰ Even after the birth of her grandson, she persists in her efforts to obstruct Grignan’s reproductivity, urging her son-in-law to prioritise her health and demanding that they sleep in separate beds.

Conversations 4 and 9 follow this interaction, serving as models of Sévigné’s constant concern. Her messages are interwoven with a thread of belittlement and infantilisation, especially surrounding her health. She surreptitiously portrays her daughter as fragile and dependent, therefore rendering herself the wiser, more resilient and dominant individual. She convinces Grignan, and herself, that these questions and concerns are in her best interest, using phrases such as “I’m just looking out for you,” to reinforce this narrative. She engages directly with the Comte in Conversations 5 and 10, indirectly accusing him of prioritising his child-rearing “fantasies” over the well-being of his wife. Sévigné asserts her authority in suggesting that, as her mother and creator, she holds superior understanding.

Furthermore, the battle for ownership of Grignan’s body is elucidated through the reactions of both her mother and her husband to Post 2. Sévigné’s disdain is painstakingly articulated in Conversation 6. The Comte publicly sides with Sévigné and her desire for modesty when he contributes to Madame de Vin’s comment thread. Though their criticism is tacit, barbed by an upbeat tone, they remain infused with patriarchal undertones reflective of the 17th century, in which modesty and propriety are synonymous with individual worth. These reactions are sustained despite the overtly non-sexual, non-provocative implication of the post, in which Grignan seeks to express gratitude and love for her growing family. The notion that Grignan is an extension of her mother, or possession of her husband impedes the cultivation of intimacy as it precludes a sense of individuality and therefore healthy subjectivity.

In my eyes, Madame de Sévigné’s letters tell a poignant and nostalgic love story between mother and daughter: a narrative of severance, shared admiration and heartbreak. It recounts the tale of a mother, who feels so physically and spiritually intertwined with her daughter, that her departure is the death of a piece of herself. The emotionally manipulative, threatening and superficial ways she clings to her daughter are manifestations of love, albeit potentially misguided. In retelling this story, and bridging past and present, I intended to illuminate timeless truths about maternal bonds that generations of mothers and daughters have and will continue to tackle. Simultaneously, I have drawn attention to how

²⁰ Madame de Sévigné. 1671. ‘Lettre 142’

[https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Lettre_142,_1671_\(S%C3%A9vign%C3%A9\)](https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Lettre_142,_1671_(S%C3%A9vign%C3%A9)) ; Madame de Sévigné. 1671.

‘Lettre 148’

<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=MezUAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA126&lpg=PA126&dq=%E2%80%9Cvous+ne+me+mandez+point+si+vous+%C3%AAtes+malade+ou+en+sant%C3%A9;+il+y+a+des+choses+%C3%A0+quoi+il+faut+r%C3%A9pondre.%E2%80%9D&source=bl&ots=YEl4RyM7yq&sig=ACfU3U2-c7HkhjTLmsju0FQBvPMrximR5g&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjEpfq2qcqFAxVwX0EAHUZaCBMQ6AF6BAGWEAM#v=onepage&q=%E2%80%9Cvous%20ne%20me%20mandez%20point%20si%20vous%20%C3%AAtes%20malade%20ou%20en%20sant%C3%A9%3B%20il%20y%20a%20des%20choses%20%C3%A0%20quoi%20il%20faut%20r%C3%A9pondre.%E2%80%9D&f=false>

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long-distance communication remains fundamentally unchanged, despite perpetual technological advancement. Whether written by hand or typed, whether spanning three pages or three words, the written word retains its capacity to convey profound emotion with precision and artistry. The visual normalcy of the exchange speaks volumes about the immutability of mother-daughter interaction, relationships that continue to wound, encourage and inspire girls in our generation and the next.

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