ANNE OF FRANCE AS
MADAME LA GRANDE:
THE STRATEGIES OF A SELF-FASHIONED WOMAN 1483-1522

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ANNE OF FRANCE AS
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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2022

ABSTRACT
A century and a half before Elizabeth I was the “Virgin Queen,” Anne of France created her own image in the form of “Madame la Grande,” a moniker specially formed to denote Anne’s high status and authority. Born in 1461 to King Louis XI and Queen Charlotte of Savoy, Anne seemed destined to be a great lady. Just twenty-two years old in 1483, Anne of France became the guardian and de facto regent for her younger brother, King Charles VIII. Previous scholars examined Anne and found her to be either power hungry, cold, and calculating, or politically savvy, competent, and fair, depending on the century in which the assessment was written. Male scholars of the twentieth century account for the majority of disparaging remarks on Anne’s image, while female scholars of the twenty-first century have focused on Anne as a role model for future female regents. Rather than litigate these judgements of her image, this thesis focuses on Anne of France as an image maker. In particular, it will focus on how Anne cultivated the image of a virtuous noblewoman to debunk questions of legitimacy regarding her guardianship over the young king. Focusing on the conduct manuals written by Christine de Pizan and Louis IX, paintings, odes, and letters, this thesis will explore the different ways that Anne adapted models of virtue to her circumstances. By successfully cultivating an image of herself as Madame la Grande, Anne
held a position of authority through secular power and as a model noblewoman, creating a lasting legacy.
The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, have examined a thesis titled “Anne of France as Madame La Grande: The Strategies of a Self-Fashioned Woman 1483-1522,” presented by Solveig Alexis Klarin, candidate for Master of Arts in History degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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I would like to thank my boyfriend Nathan, who, despite not having any interest in history, continued to listen to me talk about Anne for hours on end with a patience I could not match.

Finally, I would like to thank Anne of France herself for being a fascinating woman and for allowing me to piece together her life.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Just twenty-two years old in 1483, Anne and her husband, Pierre de Beaujeu (b.1483-1503), became the guardian and de facto regent for her younger brother, King Charles VIII (b.1470-1498), upon the death of her father, King Louis XI (b.1423-1483). While a handful of historians have engaged with Anne’s unusual circumstances, the depth of Anne’s active involvement in her image-building as well as her political strategies for maintaining her authority remains unclear. Anne came from a long line of female regents, including her grandmother Isabeau of Bavaria, who also created images of themselves in order to reinforce their public persona as capable and effective custodians, a fact that makes the lack of investigation into Anne’s own creation of a new persona all the more puzzling.

In 1481, Anne received the commune of Gien, situated on the Loire about midway between Orléans and Nevers, along with all its profits, as a gift from her father.¹ She and Pierre had lived there for only two years when they received news of Louis’ illness. Louis XI intended that Charles would inherit the throne upon his death in 1483, but as Charles was only thirteen at the time, Louis felt his son needed guidance. To this end, according to historian Pauline Maud Matarasso, “he took the course of committing Charles...to the care of his son-in-law, Pierre, Sire de Beaujeu, knowing this was the surest way of placing the boy in the capable hands of his daughter Anne, in whom he saw his own likeness looking back at him.”² Many of Anne’s near contemporaries likewise commented on the similarity between father and daughter, with one Pierre de Bourdeille Brantôme remarking that she was “the true

¹ Pauline Maud Matarasso, Queen’s Mate: Three Women of Power in France on the Eve of the Renaissance (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 2001), 11.
² Matarasso, Queen’s Mate, 10.
image of King Louis.” Upon her ascension to the guardianship and regency, Anne faced a
slew of troubles from angry nobles who questioned the legitimacy of her power. In spite of
these obstacles, Anne managed to forge a fearsome feminine public identity: Madame la
Grande.

Most of the historiography on Anne of France comes from male historians writing
during the twentieth century. John S. C. Bridge’s 1921 work, *A History of France from the
Death of Louis XI*, is frequently cited even in modern works concerning Anne, despite his
bias against Anne’s power. Most of Bridge’s sources come from the previous work of
French historian Paul Pelicier, who likewise does not always use flattering language to
describe her, in addition to various contemporary accounts ranging from state papers to
Italian diplomats’ personal letters. From these sources, Bridge is forced to give Anne some
credit for political acuity, but even in his Table of Contents, he misrepresents her actions by
labelling Anne “controlling,” a stereotypical label for women in power during medieval and
early modern times. Previous male historians writing in the seventeenth century, such as
Pierre de Bourdeille Brantôme, whom Bridge also frequently cites, similarly describes Anne
as “greedy,” “sly,” and “full of deceit.” Comments ascribing negative attributes to Anne—and
other women in political power—is not an uncommon phenomenon coming from male

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historians before the twenty-first century. Modern historians, both male and female, are now working to rehabilitate the negative assessments of female rulers.

From the beginning of the twenty-first century, female historians focused on reinterpreting Anne’s life by ushering in a more positive image of Anne. The first, and one of the only, comprehensive biographies of Anne’s life, by Pauline Maud Matarasso, was published in 2001. She praises Anne’s power and influence in the political realm but is equally quick to point out flaws and sins committed in Anne’s personal life. She developed a much more nuanced image of the complex woman. Female historians such as Sharon Jansen and Tracy Adams describe a politically savvy, intelligent, well educated, and well-meaning woman in Anne. Some authors have a tendency to focus more on Anne’s triumphs rather than her tribulations, her virtues rather than her vanities. While this is a welcome break from the blatantly negative portrayal of Anne as written by twentieth-century men, there is also the tendency for some of the modern female historians to paint Anne as almost proto-feminist—something Anne was assuredly not.

7 Matarasso, *Queen's Mate*.


Anne was, however, a woman who carefully cultivated and crafted her own image. Scholars Cynthia Brown, Katherine Crawford, Susan Bell, and Alexa Sand do not address Anne, but they do focus on image making at court, as well as in manuscripts. They show, by examining literary works, paintings, and contemporary accounts of ceremonies, that through the use of patronage and performance, noblewomen enhanced their public image. In the article “Remembering Christine de Pizan,” Lori Walters examines the continued historical fascination with the literary works of Christine de Pizan, a writer in the royal French court during the reign of King Charles VI. In particular, Walters examines Christine’s defense of women with power. Walters carefully dissected an ode written to Anne of France in a fifteenth-century manuscript that shows direct comparison to Christine’s works; though Walters makes innumerable valuable points, she skirts around Anne’s deliberate image making.

This thesis demonstrates the extent to which Anne of France’s cultivation of the image as Madame la Grande, a title used by her contemporaries to acknowledge her authority and high status, allowed Anne first to gain legitimate political power, and second to hold


onto that authority.\textsuperscript{15} Anne’s introduction to image-making likely occurred at a young age through her exposure to de Pizan’s literary works from her mother, Charlotte of Savoy, and even perhaps through stories of her grandmother, Isabeau of Bavaria, as well as other ancestors like Blanche of Castile. This paper begins with Anne’s ascension to the role of guardian in 1483 and ends with Anne’s death in 1522. Arguably, it is during these decades that Anne forged and maintained the persona of Madame la Grande. In this thesis I use a variety of primary sources such as paintings, chronicles, conduct manuals, and letters to examine Anne’s transformation from the daughter of Louis XI to de facto regent. The conduct manuals and literary works are of particular importance, as two of them, de Pizan’s \textit{The Treasure of the City of Ladies}\textsuperscript{16} and Louis IX’s \textit{Enseignements},\textsuperscript{17} greatly influenced Anne’s decision making in almost all aspects of her life, from how she prayed to how she raised her daughter. Anne herself wrote the other conduct manual, \textit{Lessons for my Daughter}, for her only child, Suzanne.\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Lessons}, provides sage advice on matters of everyday life while simultaneously giving insight into Anne’s maternal role and life experiences.

I begin the exploration of Anne’s transformation into Madame la Grande by examining the tools Anne had at her disposal to educate herself on the politics of power, starting with the works of Christine de Pizan and Louis IX, as these provided the pillars of

\textsuperscript{15} Unfortunately, I have not been able to find either the origin, or a literal translation of this moniker. From my research, Anne seems to have received the title after assuming guardianship over Charles and continues to be referred to as Madame la Grande until her death. While it is possible this moniker began as an insult, I believe it is more likely a reference to her unusual role as guardian over her younger brother. Since Anne was the first sister to rule for a brother, it seems to me that Madame la Grande acted as a way to denote Anne’s unusual status as both a French princess, and as pseudo-regent.


\textsuperscript{18} Sharon L. Jansen, \textit{Anne of France: Lessons for My Daughter} (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK, 2004).
virtue to which Anne aspired, and ending with the lessons Anne learned at her father’s court. Both *Treasure of the City of Ladies* and *Enseignements* were written in the shadow of strong French women, Isabeau of Bavaria and Blanche of Castile, women with whom Anne would have been familiar and probably aspired to emulate. Learning her lessons from both the historical actions of said women and from the conduct manuals provided Anne with a solid foundation for her position at court.

The second section of my thesis discusses Anne’s political strategies for gaining legitimacy in the face of adversity, and how she was able to maintain her hold on that authority once she got it. Gift-giving, conducting marriage alliances, and her guarding the body of the king, Charles VIII, allowed Anne a degree of power that, even when her regency ended, continued until her death, through the reigns of three separate French kings.

The final section of this thesis discusses Anne’s legacy by delving into images of Madame, both in a book of hours belonging to her, as well as two paintings, an encomium (or ode) written to her, and finally her own writings. Just before her marriage to Pierre, Anne’s mother commissioned a book of hours for her daughter. This piece of devotional literature includes a small number of illuminations containing Anne’s image. Images of her piety likely acted as inspiration for Anne’s future self-reflexive imagery. There are also two paintings by artist Jean Hey commissioned by Anne: *Anne of France, Lady of Beaujeu, Duchess of Bourbon, presented by St. John the Evangelist* (1492) and *St. Anne Presenting Anne and her Daughter Suzanne* (1497-1501).19 Both of these works show Anne consciously adopting a religious posture and attitude of devotion. Anne commissioned them after her regency ended,

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suggesting that these paintings were to act as a further extension of her power, not merely as a political figure, but also as a virtuous woman in God’s favor. As Anne specifically requested and paid for these portraits, they provide an insight into how Anne wanted people to physically see her, particularly as an embodiment of the ideal as a chaste and pious woman.

Anne’s contributions to literary culture include an encomium found in a manuscript written in 1498, and believed to be written by Jacques de Brézé. While the ode does not necessarily give an accurate portrayal of Anne, as there is evidence to suggest she acted as a patron of de Brézé at one point, which undoubtedly colored his depiction of her, it does allow for comparisons between Anne’s actions, and the actions an ideal noblewoman should take according to de Pizan and Louis IX. Another contribution to late medieval French literary culture was produced by Anne herself, Lessons for my Daughter, a conduct manual written for her daughter Suzanne. Lessons provides a rare insight into the mind of Anne and gives final hints as to her strategy for building up her image and how she used that to maintain her hold on authority.

In examining Anne’s actions through a feminist theoretical lens, I rely on early modern gender historian Katherine Crawford’s investigation into Catherine de Medici. Crawford examines the ways in which women used their femininity to project themselves as successful regents. She argues that women able to “correctly” perform a gendered female role, allowed female regents to retain power legitimately. As she states, “in a society in which hierarchy and status were demonstrated in public performance, regents reassured

20 Paris Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 24392 folio 215v.

21 Jansen, Anne of France.
observers with ‘normal’ gender behavior to imply that their only ‘abnormal’ behavior was the public exercise of authority.” 22 Anne created an image of herself as the epitome of a virtuous woman, and as such, this feminine image allowed her to keep a tight rein on the power she had. This thesis shows that Anne of France cultivated the image of herself as Madame la Grande, which in turn allowed her to hold a position of authority through secular power and as a model noblewoman, resulting in the creation of a lasting legacy.

22 Crawford, Perilous Performances, 9.
CHAPTER 2

ANNE’S PROCESS OF AUTO-EDUCATION:

BECOMING “MADAME LA GRANDE”

In 1461, Louis XI, King of France and his wife, Charlotte of Savoy welcomed their first child into the world, a daughter named Anne, frequently referred to as Anne of France. Historians know very little about Anne’s childhood, except that she was primarily raised in Amboise, France with her mother, sister Jeanne, and brother Charles. As the daughter of a king, Anne likely received a formal education, though perhaps not one as thorough as she would later give her own students.\(^1\) Anne gained most of her knowledge from the books she read and the interactions she observed. Still, Anne proved herself to be intelligent and shrewd. In 1473, at the age of twelve, Anne married Pierre de Beaujeu, a man more than twenty years her senior, and the pair subsequently moved into her father’s royal court. It was at her father’s court where Anne, as the “least foolish woman in France,” learned how to navigate the perilous politics of court life and how to rule as a master over the quarreling nobles.\(^2\)

As part of her informal education, Anne of France likely read a variety of conduct manuals. The genre of conduct manuals came out of the earlier literary works, so-called mirrors for various figures, both public and private. These mirrors were often written by clergy members for secular rulers as guides to how they should act or conduct themselves, hence the later name of conduct manual. While this literature was initially intended for members of the male ruling class, later iterations included books written by mothers for their

\(^1\) Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any primary or secondary sources that discuss Anne’s childhood or her education.

\(^2\) Tracy Adams, “Anne de France and Gift-Giving,” 68.
sons, and even husbands for their wives. In fact, noblewoman Dhuoda of Septimania wrote one of the oldest known conduct manuals for her son, William, in the ninth century. The authors of late medieval conduct books often discussed manners, proper dress, and the management of households and servants, as well as devotional practices, scriptural learning, and ethics. These early self-help manuals gained popularity throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Earlier versions, however, proved just as popular with French royalty for the tradition they followed. Anne would have received many of these manuals, such as Louis IX’s *Enseignement a Ysabel* and Christine de Pizan’s *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, from either her mother or her father.

Before works by the likes of Christine de Pizan, however, came Louis IX’s lessons for his children. King Louis IX, who was canonized soon after his death—the only French king to be so honored—died in 1270 in Tunis, of dysentery, while on his second vowed crusade, the last major European war to recover the defunct Kingdom of Jerusalem in the Middle Ages. In life, many associated Louis with his incredible piety, which he tried to pass down to his children, including his daughter Isabelle, through his writings. Sometime before his death, Louis wrote a series of *enseignements*, or lessons, to both his daughter and his son. Later French Kings frequently read the life story and lessons that Louis IX left for his son, Philip. Even Anne is reported to have gifted Charles with a copy of the text. Mentioned less often are Louis’ lessons to his daughter Isabelle. However, it is Louis’ *Enseignement a*

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4 O’Connell, *The Instructions of Saint Louis*.

5 Christine de De Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*. 
**Ysabel** that Anne used as a model for herself, just as her brother, Charles imitated the piety of Louis IX.

In Louis’ text to his son, advice pertaining to God is immediately prevalent, such as Louis reminding Philip to attend church often and confess regularly. He also emphasized how to be a good king. For instance, Louis cautions Philip that if he has any quarrels, he should “bring the quarrel before your council.” More than that, he advises Philip to thoroughly question each council member, “until you know the truth, because those of the council may hesitate to disagree with you, a thing you should not want.” Charles himself later followed this advice during the so-called Mad War (1483-1488), when many noblemen questioned his sister’s guardianship over him. Charles could have remained in the room, as he was king, but he instead left the decision up to his Estates General.

Louis’ religious advice to his daughter Isabelle is remarkably similar to the religious advice he gave Philip. For example, Louis instructs both children “willingly to hear the services of the Holy Church, and when you are in church keep yourself from dawdling and from speaking idle words.” Other passages, such as how often to confess, and the types of people they should keep in their circles, are also the same. However, unlike the secular advice on ruling Louis offers his son, Isabelle receives only spiritual education. Isabelle’s

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8 The term is first used by Paul Emile in his *Histoire des faicts, gestes et conquestes des roys de France*, published in 1581 and refers to the power struggle of the nobles in France against the central power-- Anne.


instructions contain surprisingly little about how she should dress, educate her children, or run her household, as one might expect for a French princess. Rather, Louis emphasizes Isabelle’s spiritual well-being. In fact, Louis’ first lesson to his daughter states: “I instruct you to love Our Lord with all your heart and all your strength.”\textsuperscript{11} He goes on to explain that without God’s love, “nothing has any value.”\textsuperscript{12} Of the nineteen lessons the father leaves his daughter, twelve pertain to Isabelle’s expected interactions with God and the church.\textsuperscript{13} Only one lesson focuses on how Isabelle should educate and command the ladies in her household, and even then Louis only says, “Daughter, take care as much as you can that the women and the rest of your household who stay with you most often and most privately are of good and saintly life, and avoid as much as possible all people of bad reputation.”\textsuperscript{14} Anne herself was very particular about the behavior of the women around her, whether it was the governess of her daughter, Suzanne, or the young noblewomen whom she raised at court. Not only did Anne advise all of the women on their manners and dress, she also wrote parables about ill-behaved young women who embarrassed and shamed their families.\textsuperscript{15}

The content of \textit{Enseignement a Ysabel} appears to contain a written assumption that, while Louis believes his daughter to be capable of improvement and pleasing God, she would do it because it was in her feminine nature to want to fulfill her role “under the rule of the father’s or husband’s authority.”\textsuperscript{16} This is most clearly evidenced in the introduction of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11}O’Connell, \textit{The Instructions of Saint Louis}, 78.
\item \textsuperscript{12}O’Connell, \textit{The Instructions of Saint Louis}, 78.
\item \textsuperscript{13}There are twenty-two numbered stanzas in O’Connell’s edition, as he includes the introduction and conclusion of Louis’ text. Of the twenty-two stanzas, nineteen are lessons or demands.
\item \textsuperscript{14}O’Connell, \textit{The Instructions of Saint Louis}, 80.
\item \textsuperscript{15}Jansen, \textit{Lessons for my Daughter}, 41-43.
\item \textsuperscript{16}Glenn Burger, \textit{Conduct Becoming}, 31.
\end{itemize}
Louis’ lessons where he states, “I believe you will retain things more willingly from me, out of love for me,” thereby invoking his authority as her father.\(^{17}\)

The lack of secular advice for his daughter appears all the more absent given how capable his mother was of completing secular tasks. Blanche of Castile, mother of Louis IX, was regent for her young son from 1226 until 1234 and then once again in 1248-1252 while her son Louis was on the seventh Crusade. Blanche’s political ability is largely the reason for her son’s ascendancy to the French throne. When her husband, Louis VIII, died in 1226, his son was only twelve years old, and while he was legally proclaimed King of France, it was his mother who ruled and made sure to keep his kingdom intact. Among the long list of her remarkable feats are the Treaty of Paris in 1229, which forced Count Richard (VII) of Toulouse to swear allegiance to the young king, shutting down other rebellious nobles, choosing Marguerite of Provence as his bride, and maintaining peace in France while Louis was away on Crusade. With Blanche doing much of the early heavy lifting of running a government, and running it smoothly, it is perplexing that Louis IX’s own daughter Isabelle does not receive any council from her father about affairs of the state.\(^{18}\) This lack of secular advice suggests a gendered expectation that Isabelle will marry a nobleman who will be in charge of running the estate, while Isabelle will tend to her piety and any children she and her future husband have together.

Blanche likely would have approved of her son writing these *enseignements* for his children, as she herself had educated all of hers. In spite of the absence of advice or lessons

\(^{17}\) O’Connell, *The Instructions of Saint Louis*, 78.

on governmental duties, the religious and spiritual tone is likewise something Louis likely received from his mother. According to historian Kathleen Nolan, *Le Miroir de l’Ame*, a book instructing queens to practice Christian virtues in daily life, was dedicated to Blanche.19

Perhaps inspired by the authority of Blanche, Christine de Pizan started her literary career beginning in the late fourteenth century after the death of her husband, when she joined the French court of King Charles VI (r. 1380-1422) and Isabeau of Bavaria (r. 1385-1422), to whom Christine dedicated many of her works. Much of what Christine wrote was in defense of women, particularly the virtues women possessed. In *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, finished sometime around 1405, Christine offers an abundance of advice about how virtuous women should behave.20 While many conduct manuals were written for a noble, if not a royal, audience, this text contains advice for women of every station in life, from princesses and duchesses to merchant’s wives, all the way down to homeless prostitutes. Christine separates *Treasure* into three parts. The first, she dedicated to princesses, the second to ladies and maidens who live at the court of either a princess or a great lady, and the third pertains to women who live in towns and cities. Addressing of a wide range in socio-economic statuses, Christine offered certain pieces of advice that remain strikingly similar, regardless. Christine reminds the reader to dress modestly, to behave with humility, and pray to God and the Saints on a regular basis in each section. Other advice, such as how to manage a ducal household,21 how to advise your husband and his royal counselors, and how to

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20 De Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*.

21 De Pizan, “How ladies and young women who live on their manors ought to manage their households and estates,” in *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, 161-164.
negotiate a peace between your husband and his nobles, is more specific to princesses.22 Interestingly, despite the seemingly diverse audience of women the book covers, it is more likely Christine’s defense was aimed at a male audience. Rather than actually intending for uneducated women to read her work, the inclusion of prostitutes and servants instead served as a conceit to demonstrate the fact that women were unjustly maligned because of the stigmas attached to the jobs they were forced to perform by men. Christine de Pizan sought to show that even though women had been pushed into these degrading positions, they could still maintain their dignity.

Isabeau of Bavaria as Queen-Regent Par Excellence

Christine de Pizan’s literary works were widely read and distributed. Anne of France owned several copies of different works by Christine, according to a “1523 inventory of the Bourbon library at the château de Moulins, made the year after Anne’s death.”23 Anne’s mother, Charlotte of Savoy, with whom she resided in her youth, reportedly left Anne her own copy of The Treasure of the City of Ladies, which Anne then used as her model. Because Christine dedicated her works to the French queen Isabeau of Bavaria, much of her work centers on the praise of feminine virtue with a particular emphasis on defending female regency. This defense was likely part of the reason Anne modeled herself so closely to the elite ladies of The Treasure.

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23 I have not been able to gain access to the original document so this information is obtained from Lori Walters, “Remembering Christine de Pizan,” 20.
Born in 1370, Isabeau became queen of France in 1385 when she married the seventeen-year-old Charles VI. Only a few years into her marriage, Charles had his first bout of insanity in 1392, leaving Isabeau in a difficult court where two major factions, each led by one of Charles’ uncles, vied for power any time Charles was incapacitated. During his brief recovery in the early 1390s, Charles used a law enacted by his father Charles V, which gave the queen mother power to protect and educate any heirs to the throne, to appoint Isabeau as the “principal guardian of the Dauphin,” until the boy turned thirteen.²⁴ Shortly after, Charles continued giving Isabeau more power and rights over their children when, in 1393, he named her co-guardian of all their children. While Isabeau shared the guardianship with royal dukes and her brother, her status as the king’s choice gave her more political power on the regency council. Unfortunately for Isabeau, the lengths she went to protect her children and their rights as heirs left her standing accused as being the woman who signed away France in the Treaty of Troyes in 1420, which established Katherine of France and her husband, Henry V of England as heirs to the throne in the wake of the disastrous defeat at Agincourt in 1415.²⁵ Despite later gaining a negative reputation, Isabeau seems to have been considered politically competent and deserving of Christine de Pizan’s praise.

The France that existed after 1453 and the end of the Hundred Years War was far less fragmented than what existed after the Treaty of Troyes, solving some border issues but creating still more problems for later kings to solve.²⁶ Louis XI became king in 1461, right

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²⁵ Tracy Adams, “Medieval Mothers and Their Children,” 265–90.

²⁶ The war essentially ended in 1453 but a formal treaty was not signed until 1475, in the reign of Louis XI—the Treaty of Picquigny.
after the birth of his daughter Anne. Almost upon his ascension, Louis continued the work of his father: limiting the power of the nobles and barons in his kingdom.\textsuperscript{27} According to the memoirs of Philippe de Commynes, who came into the king’s service in 1472, Louis was a crafty and complex man whose quirks made him admirable and unrelenting. Amid almost constant civil war, Louis also worked to modernize France by developing a new system of royal postal roads that helped keep him abreast of any news or development. As much as the king worked to minimize bureaucratic offices, promote trade, and lift up the middle classes, according to Phillipe de Commynes, “He had also taxed his subjects more than any of his predecessors.”\textsuperscript{28} When Louis eventually subdued his quarrelsome nobles, often after breaking a truce or peace treaty, he treated them fairly. Commynes noted that, “some lost their offices and others he exiled,” but rarely did he ever execute captured nobles or soldiers.\textsuperscript{29} Louis XI’s greatest coup was the Treaty of Picquigny in 1475, following the failed invasion of King Edward IV of England, who attempted, along with his allies the dukes of Burgundy and Brittany, to retake France. This treaty effectively ended all English territorial claims in France, except for the Pas de Calais, and made it possible for the king to consolidate his own territorial claims as monarch over all of France.

Anne lived at her father’s court after marrying Pierre de Beaujeu and, although Louis was often away fighting his nobles, she seems to have learned several strategies from watching her father’s interactions: both what worked and, perhaps more importantly, what


\textsuperscript{29} Commynes, \textit{Philippe de Commynes Memoirs}, 91.
did not work. For instance, Pélicier states that in late 1483 Anne “worked out in advance the reforms that were expected to be demanded in Orleans,” in order to have peace. These reforms included dismissing the Swiss mercenaries her father hired and reducing the number of troops, as well as submitting for the review of the Council a list of abuses. Unlike her father, however, Anne had no interest in war and the petty politics of minor nobles. Instead, she worked hard to gain the support of her father’s former enemies and maintain peace as much as she was able.

From the practical lessons at her father’s court to the conduct manuals she read as a child, and likely also as an adult, Anne learned a great deal about how to promote herself and project her image. Through their conduct books, Louis IX and Christine de Pizan taught Anne to make a performance out of her daily acts. Every action from praying to getting dressed, to educating the ladies in her court and interacting with nobles and visiting dignitaries needed to be a display with which Anne could show off her virtues as a French princess.

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30 Pélicier, *Essai Sur Le Gouvernement de La Dame de Beaujeu*, 63.

31 Pélicier, *Essai Sur Le Gouvernement de La Dame de Beaujeu*, 63.
CHAPTER 3

ANNE’S POLITICAL CAREER:

MADAME LA GRANDE AS REGENT, ADVISOR, AND VIRTUAL RULER

In 1483 and on his deathbed, Louis XI made the unprecedented decision of handing over guardianship of his thirteen-year-old heir, Charles, to his twenty-two-year-old daughter Anne and her husband. By choosing Anne, Louis bypassed the two obvious and logical choices: the heir presumptive Louis duc d’Orléans, and Charles’ mother, Charlotte of Savoy. Choosing either of the two individuals would have made far more sense and caused less of an uproar than selecting Anne. It is unlikely that either Louis XI or his nobles would have selected Louis duc d’Orléans because, as the heir presumptive, he would have had the most to gain in the event of Charles’s death. It would have been a more typical move to name Charlotte of Savoy as guardian or regent, especially as she was still alive and seemingly healthy. Even though Salic Law was written to exclude female rulers, it ended up having a long history of allowing for female regencies.1 Because women could not inherit, they were often preferred as regents over uncles who might try and usurp the king to keep the throne for themselves. It helped that authors like Christine de Pizan characterized mothers as wanting the best for their children, so it was unlikely that a mother as regent would do anything to jeopardize her son’s reign.

According to historian Pauline Maud Matarasso, “Anne of France’s assumption of power affronted many because it infringed a male prerogative without the justification of precedent.”2 If Louis suspected that nobles would contest the guardianship, why did he

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1 Adams and Rechtschaffen, “Isabeau of Bavaria, Anne of France,” 124.

2 Matarasso, Queen’s Mate, 19.
choose Anne? A letter Anne wrote to Louis in 1483, months before his death, gives insight into their relationship. While the relationship appears very formal with phrases like “My lord” and “From the hand of your very humble & very obedient daughter,” other sections of the letter point to a level of intimacy. Early on, Anne mentions her father’s gout, specifically stating that she had received information “from the letters of your doctors.” That Louis’ doctors wrote to Anne of her father’s health demonstrates two things: first, that Anne and her father continued communicating regularly even after Anne and Pierre moved to Gien in 1481, and second, that Louis trusted Anne’s discretion. In this letter, there is no mention of Louis’ son and heir Charles, or Charlotte, Louis’ wife. While it is possible that Louis or his doctors wrote letters of his condition to both the heir and his wife, it remains significant that one of Louis’ doctors wrote a letter to Anne, who, other than being a devoted daughter, would have no need of specific information pertaining to her father’s health. The letter ends with Anne wishing her father a speedy recovery, noting that she is “praying God to give you health & long life.” Months later, however, Louis XI died, naming Anne and Pierre as guardians, and leaving Anne struggling to prove her legitimacy and capability.

Louis duc d’Orléans quickly set about gathering supporters to challenge Anne and Pierre’s new role, calling for a meeting of the Estates General in 1483. Anne obliged but asked for three months to prepare. One of the first and most difficult obstacles Anne had to

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4 Jean Marie de La Mure, *Histoire Des Ducs de Bourbon et Des Comtes de Forez*, 430.

5 Jean Marie de La Mure, *Histoire Des Ducs de Bourbon et Des Comtes de Forez*, 430.

6 Jean Marie de La Mure, *Histoire Des Ducs de Bourbon et Des Comtes de Forez*, 430.

7 Interestingly, Anne’s mother, Charlotte of Savoy was among Louis duc d’Orléans supporters. However, only a few months into the preceding, Charlotte died and was buried next to her husband.
overcome came from the noble enemies her father had made. To rectify this, “she put the time to effective use, touring the territories of Louis duc d’Orléans with the young king by her side to convince the people of her good will and lack of menace.” Very early on in her tour, Anne used the political strategy of gift-giving to help win the cooperation of the nobles she visited.9

Gift-giving was a common practice among French royalty and included a wide variety of objects from jewelry and land to offices and marriages. This action, called don in French, created a bond and obligation between the gift-giver and receiver. As Tracy Adams notes, it served as a euphemism for patronage and clientage: the receiver of the gift, in addition to the gift itself, also received the protection of the giver, and in return was expected to provide loyalty or a favor at another time.10 Anne used her authority to free several noble prisoners like René, Duke of Alençon, and Count of Perche and Prince of Orange, Jean de Chalons, as well as returning confiscated property and goods. Others, like her brother-in-law, Duke Jean de Bourbon, “was made connétable [constable] and given governance of the Languedoc.”11 Also among Anne’s political strategies were several marriage contracts she wrote; three involved young girls raised in her household. One of the most important marriages Anne orchestrated was between French general Louis de la Trémoille and her niece Gabrielle de Bourbon. During the French-Breton War (1487-1491), Trémoille served as Anne’s eyes and ears when she was unable to be present herself, often sending letters

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several times per month. It is also important to note here that not all of the gifts were given to men or could be seen as extravagant. Anne often raised young girls at her court, training them to be the next generation of influential noblewomen. In training and cultivating these young women, Anne as Madame la Grande also built up a strong female network that she later used to her advantage.

Early on, Anne was given the role of integrating Charles’ first fiancé, Margaret of Austria, into the French Court. Later, after the French-Breton War ended, Anne negotiated a marriage contract between Charles and Anne of Brittany, breaking Charles’ earlier contract. Madame had the difficult task of not only ending a war, but also trying to evoke some affection from Anne of Brittany for a people that had just conquered her duchy. To do that, Anne purchased her new sister-in-law’s wedding clothes, and cancelled her and her father’s debts. Most extraordinary, however, was the added clause that stipulated, in the event of Charles’ death before her, Anne of Brittany would remain queen by marrying the next king of France if he were free to marry. In return for these gifts, Anne expected loyalty and service, both of which she would need to retain her hold on power and on Charles.

While later historians like John Bridge tried to interpret this action as an example of corruption, the act of gift-giving was typical of medieval kings. Anne, as guardian of Charles,


13 Perhaps unsurprisingly, Brantôme sets the two women against each other as rivals in *The Book of the Ladies*. He noted, in particular, the disdain and lack of respect Anne of Brittany held for Madame (240-241). Given other accounts of the interactions between the women, however, it is more likely the “rivalry” between the two women was made up as propaganda by men who were uninterested in more than one woman having power.


was in this instance claiming to act on behalf of the young king. Anne was always careful to
mask her authority behind the legitimacy of Charles. Indeed, Pélicier notes, “It seems that
she took as much care in hiding the power as others take in showing it.” By January 1484,
Anne hoped she had gained enough support for the Estates General to be called in her favor.

Once the meetings began, tensions quickly became clear. When Anne stayed out of
the room, allowing the delegates privacy to make their decision, Louis duc d’Orléans and his
allies leaned more towards a strategy of veiled threats to intimidate the members into
choosing Louis as regent. A young Charles VIII followed his sister’s lead, as he so often did,
and left the delegates to do their work, telling them he did not want to bother them. In doing
so, “the Beaujeus and the king were on their way to reassuring the assembly of their good
will.” Swayed by Anne’s patience and earlier gift-giving strategy, the Estates General
concluded that there was no need to change the status quo, especially, as historians Tracy
Adams and Glenn Rechtschaffen state, “the conclusion seemed all the more reasonable given
that Jean de Reli, a notary, explained that the king [Charles VIII] was mature enough to
compose all letters, patents, rules and ordinances.”

Unsatisfied with the way the Estates General had voted against him, Louis called for
a Parliament in Paris during the winter of 1484-1485, where he staked all his claims as a
“personal appeal to Charles himself,” urging the young man to “throw off his sister’s
shackles.” Soon after Louis’ performance, Charles signed off on a response, likely written

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16 Pélicier, Essai Sur Le Gouvernement de La Dame de Beaujeu, 199.
17 Adams and Rechtschaffen, “Isabeau of Bavaria, Anne of France,” 141.
19 Adams and Rechtschaffen, “Isabeau of Bavaria, Anne of France,” 143.
20 Matarasso, Queen’s Mate, 26.
by Anne, in which he reiterated his love for his sister and his admiration for her guidance and loyalty.  

By examining this letter, as well as looking at Louis duc d’Orléans’ reputation as a womanizing drunkard, the context of Jacques de Brézé’s reference to Anne as Esther fully comes to life. Should Louis have gotten his hands on young, impressionable Charles, who knows what he might have done? Under Anne, his loving and dutiful sister, however, Charles was saved from any bad advisors who were clearly working in their own self-interests.

A large part of Anne’s strategy for holding onto power was having exclusive access to the body of the king and being able to act as intermediary between the king and his subjects. Anne was able to do this in part by remaining by his side both at court and during war. The few times she had to be away from the king, she relied on her extensive network to keep Charles away from any undesirable influences. Certain nobles like Louis II d’Orléans, Charles d’Angoulême, René d’Alençon, and François de Dunois were forbidden from having access to the young king. As Aubree David-Chapy notes, “this proximity had a double meaning.” It at once gave considerable political power to Anne and her husband, but also served to symbolize the couple’s authority to the masses. In her constant presence by her brother’s side, Anne was able to guarantee her authority.

Anne’s treatment of Louis duc d’Orléans deserves a brief explanation. Even though Louis tried multiple times to usurp her position, Anne made continuous overtures of peace to her brother-in-law. In part, this is another instance of Anne following Christine de Pizan’s model, which teaches mercy towards one’s enemies. However, the public forgiveness Anne

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21 Matarasso, *Queen’s Mate*, 26.


23 Louis duc d’Orléans was married to Anne’s younger sister Jeanne. In 1498, Anne agreed to back his annulment of her sister so that he could marry Anne of Brittany.
practiced also served as a way for Anne to perform the role of intercessor, which was a vital aspect of queenship. According to historian Theresa Earenfight’s study of queenship, “the role as intercessor functioned in three ways: first by supplying the intercessory function lacking in a male-dominated institution of monarchy; second, by permitting royal reconsideration; and third, by affirming the masculinity of the monarchy.”

In forgiving Louis, Anne acted as mediator between the king and his noblemen, as well as performing the act of motherly peacemaker. It should also be acknowledged that by making these continued public performances of kingship, the acts of forgiveness against a traitor, such as her father Louis XI did, Anne further showed her natural aptitude for ruling as regent. Anne knew that if she continued acting like a regent, the more likely it would be that people would continue to see her as an authority figure. One can imagine the advice of Christine de Pizan running as a mantra in Anne’s head: “The princess will maintain a discreet manner towards those who do not like her and are envious of her.”

As soon as Anne quelled Louis duc d’Orléans, she faced a new battle in the name of her husband, Pierre, for the Bourbon titles and inheritance. In 1488, Anne was already mistress of Gien, as well as other smaller domains, but upon the death of Pierre’s older brother, she went to work persuading Charles that Pierre should be the next heir to the ducal crowns of both Bourbonnais and Auvergne. Anne had her brother sign an act “plainly designed to secure the Bourbon lands and titles to Anne and any children she might have by Pierre de Beaujeu, or, in the event of his death, by a second marriage.” Only Anne as


26 Matarasso, *Queen’s Mate*, 42.
Madame la Grande, at the height of her power, could have pulled off this feat, as it involved cheating the royal family out of the lucrative property of the Bourbon duchy. Anne’s reasons for working so hard to secure these rights were threefold. First, Anne wanted Pierre to have the inheritance she felt he deserved, and she was able to make sure that happened, fulfilling her role as dutiful wife in the process. Second, Anne wished to maintain some status when she eventually left the royal court, which she knew would be coming once Charles was eighteen. Third, Anne wanted something to leave for her daughter Suzanne, or other potential future children, by way of a legacy.

Though she was young when she married Pierre, the twenty-year age gap appears not to have been an issue. Anne respected Pierre, and by all accounts Pierre adored and doted on his wife. Unfortunately, like with many other items belonging to Anne, letters between the couple are lost to history so there is no way to examine how the couple truly felt about one another, or to see how their relationship worked. There are, however, accounts that hint at the dynamics between Anne and Pierre. Anne herself wrote that marriage is, “a state of such beauty and so prized, provided it is honestly regulated, that it seems as if it cannot be honored enough or praised too much.”  

The affection in this description of marriage, which Anne wrote in *Lessons*, is almost tangible. Christine de Pizan also wrote of honoring one’s husband, and for Anne, honoring one’s husband meant doing what was necessary to secure the Bourbon titles for Pierre.

One of the few instances of Anne directly committing an act against Pierre’s wishes was in the name of preserving her daughter’s inheritance. Before his death, Pierre arranged a marriage contract between their daughter Suzanne and a young Charles IV, Duke of

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Alençon. Although Anne managed to get Louis XII to agree that Suzanne would inherit all of her mother and father’s lands and titles, Anne did not trust that Louis would keep his word, especially as Pierre’s closest relation Charles, Count of Bourbon-Montpensier, had close family ties with Anne of Brittany, Louis’ new bride. Thus, despite Pierre’s deathbed insistence on the wedding between Suzanne and the Duke of Alençon, Anne managed to persuade the Count of Bourbon-Montpensier to petition the king for the Bourbon lands and for Suzanne’s hand in marriage. Normally, breaking off the marriage with the Duke of Alençon would have been unimaginable, as he was considered a “prince of the blood,” however, by marrying the Count of Bourbon-Montpensier, not only would Suzanne remain the heir of her father’s fortune, but the entire Bourbon lands would also be united. Before taking the petition to Louis, Madame paved the way with a one hundred thousand livres payment to the duke. Even with that, Louis XII would not have agreed had it not been for his wife, Anne of Brittany, sister-in-law to Anne of France, persuading him to do so. Madame’s earlier cultivation of Anne’s affection via her gifts and support likely secured her agreement. All of Anne’s previous networking and overtures to the young queen, whose marriage to her brother Charles VIII she had orchestrated to end the French Breton War, had paid off. Anne went through great trouble to safeguard the Bourbon lands and titles, cleverly keeping them from royal hands. After the early death of her daughter, Suzanne, in 1521, Anne signed all of her possessions over to her son-in-law, still determined to keep them in the family she chose.


29 Matarasso, Queen’s Mate, 234.

30 Matarasso, Queen’s Mate, 246.
CHAPTER 4

ANNE’S SELF-FASHIONING:
MADAME LA GRANDE AND HER LEGACIES

Anne Illuminated

Around the year 1471, Anne’s mother, Charlotte of Savoy, commissioned a book of hours from artist Jean Colombe of Bourges for her daughter. The final manuscript, finished around 1474, contained 107 full-page miniatures, twenty-four calendar illustrations, and illuminated borders on every page. It is likely, though not entirely provable, that the book was commissioned as a wedding gift for Anne.¹ Early on, many women acquired books through their fathers or husbands, but, as historian Susan Groag Bell notes, increasingly women began receiving books from and exchanging books with other women.² Often books, especially psalters, were passed from mother to daughter, as mothers were in charge of their child’s education, just as Charlotte commissioned this book for Anne. These works acted as the child’s first alphabet book and their earliest introduction to biblical stories and their obligatory religious practices in general. Donor and owner portraits were frequently included in such works, not only to indicate ownership, but also as visible expressions of piety. In Vision, Devotion, and Self-Representation, historian Alexa Sand examines owner portraits situated within devotional texts from the thirteenth century to the mid-fourteenth century,

¹ The Morgan Library’s Curatorial Description document over this manuscript first makes the suggestion that Charlotte commissioned this work as a wedding gift given the timeframe. “Curatorial Description of MS M.677” (The Morgan Library, 1948), http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/description/77067.

² Bell, “Medieval Women Book Owners.”
exploring their use as a reflexive means of performing piety, focusing on primarily upper-class laity in French-speaking regions of Northern Europe.³

As both Bell and Sand discuss, more women owned devotional literature than men, and often the noblewomen commissioning or receiving these texts, required inclusion of portraits of the women themselves.⁴ These donor portraits, as Sand calls them, portrayed women kneeling in prayer. As the author argues, many of these paintings were used as means of reflexive meditation to help the viewer emulate the physical performance of devotion like the posture and the vocalization of prayer. By seeing themselves in paintings, physically acting out prayers, or spiritual meditation, the female owners of these texts could more easily emulate the behavior themselves. Among the hundreds of illuminated images in Anne’s book of hours, there are several that depict her, both as a figure watching momentous scenes from the Bible and as an active participant in spiritual life.⁵

One split image, folios 42v and 43r (figures 1 and 2), depicts a young Anne kneeling demurely behind the archangel Gabriel as he delivers the news to a kneeling Mary that she is carrying the son of God.⁶ The canopy’s fleur-de-lis pattern, as well as the iconic widow’s peak on the young female denote Anne and her status as a French princess. Anne herself appears with her hands clasped in prayer and seems to watch the proceedings, close to the floating Gabriel as he delivers his prophetic message to Mary. Of interest is the open book that Mary was seemingly interrupted from reading; in this moment of interruption, she

³ Sand, Vision, Devotion, and Self-Representation in Late Medieval Art.
⁵ Sand, Vision, Devotion, and Self-Representation in Late Medieval Art, 29.
⁶ New York, The Morgan Library, MS M.677, f.42v-43r.
Figure 1 THE ANNUNCIATION, ca 1474, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.677, folio 42v
Figure 2 THE ANNUNCIATION, ca 1474, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.677, folio 43r
appears to be looking directly at Anne, acknowledging her presence at this sacred moment. It is likely a book of hours or psalter, much as Anne probably read this one. It is unclear if the scene takes place in Anne’s bedroom, or is supposed to take place elsewhere, though the thought of the interaction taking place in Anne’s bedroom is an intriguing one as it would create an even more intimate relationship between Anne and the mother of Christ. Catherine of Cleves’ (1417–1479) famous book of hours likewise uses the imagery of Gabriel interrupting Mary reading in the illuminator’s rendition of The Annunciation (figure 3). So while that aspect of Anne’s own book of hours is a common trope to appear in depictions of The Annunciation, the addition of Anne herself kneeling behind Gabriel makes the image unique.

Susan G. Bell notes several other portraits of the Virgin Mary in which she is surrounded by books. She also discusses a painting in which Saint Anne is teaching a young Mary to read, connecting both saints with devotional literature, as well as enhancing the connection between mothers as spiritual guides to their children. She argues that this imagery provides, “yet another ingenious artistic confirmation of women’s close involvement with devotional literature.” These images suggest, in addition to the traditional connection between the risen Christ and the Word, a growing awareness on the part of artists and book producers alike of the close relationship between laywomen and book ownership. The linking of the Virgin Mary with so many books had the added benefit of increasing the respectability of noblewomen who also read. This image of Anne kneeling in prayer is perhaps a hint from

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7 New York, The Morgan Library, MS M.917/945, ff. 31v.
8 Bell, “Medieval Women Book Owners,” 761.
her mother, who commissioned the book, that emphasizes Anne’s practice of a form of self-reflexive prayer, one that reinforces the image of Anne as pious performer and perfect model of religious observance. That this image also links Anne directly to the mother of Christ in such an intimate setting also serves to set up Anne’s future self-image production.

It is also interesting that of the 107 full-page miniatures in the manuscript, this is one of the few in which Anne is directly depicted. Elsewhere there are images of young women, but there is no indication these represent Anne. Is it to establish an early connection between Anne and the Virgin Mary, who is arguably one of the most holy women in Christianity? Did Charlotte perhaps hope that by associating Anne with Mary and the yet unborn Christ it would help Anne’s chances of producing a son with her soon-to-be husband, Pierre? While it is, unfortunately, impossible to know, this image is far from Anne’s only association with either saints or prominent holy women.

Further in the manuscript there is an image on fol. 252v (Figure 4) of a woman assumed to be Anne leading a procession of women into a cathedral.10 The 1948 curatorial description notes that the church resembles the west facade of Bourges cathedral. Anne’s father, King Louis XI was born in Bourges, so it is unlikely the similarities are a coincidence. Though there is no definitive inscription stating the leading woman is Anne, this position would fit with her role and with her mother’s interest in reinforcing her daughter’s obligations in the performance of it. As a princess at the French court, it would have been up to her to set an example for the women in her company, much as Louis IX and Christine de Pizan stress in their conduct manuals.

10 New York, The Morgan Library, MS M.677, f.252v.
Figure 3 THE ANNUNCIATION, ca 1440, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS M.917/945 folio 31v.
Figure 4 A RELIGIOUS PROCESSION, ca 1474, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.677, folio 252v.
Madame as She Chose to Be

While it is difficult to ascertain Anne’s personal and private faith through the examination of her book of hours, commissioned as it was by her mother Queen Charlotte, there are other sources, such as the two portraits by Jean Hey, which Anne herself commissioned, that can tell us about Anne’s public posture of piety.\textsuperscript{11} The first is a portrait of Anne with St. John the Evangelist, and the second depicts Anne and her daughter Suzanne with St. Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary. Both paintings portray Anne meditating in a theatre of devotion where she can more easily display her outward posture of piety.

The painter Jean Hey lived from 1475 to 1505 and is an Early Netherlandish or Flemish Primitive painter who reportedly studied under Jan van Eyck and later worked in France, particularly in the Duchy of Burgundy.\textsuperscript{12} The artist is frequently associated with the Bourbon Court where Anne and her husband Pierre lived in their palace, Moulins. While there, Hey became known as the “Master of Moulins,” because of the triptychs he painted of Anne and Pierre. The fact Anne chose Hey to become part of her court at Moulins was not a coincidence; even before Hey gained his nickname he was famous for portraits and religious scenes like \textit{The Virgin in Glory, Surrounded by Angels} painted in 1489.\textsuperscript{13} Based on Anne’s other strategic decisions, it is likely that Anne knew exactly who Jean Hey was before she hired him to paint herself, her husband, and her young daughter.

\textsuperscript{11} Jean Hey, \textit{Anne of France, Lady of Beaujeu, Duchess of Bourbon, presented by St. John the Evangelist}, Oil on panel, 1492, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels, Belgium; see also Jean Hey, \textit{St. Anne Presenting Anne and her Daughter Suzanne}, Painting on triptych, 1498-1501, Louvre, Paris.

\textsuperscript{12} Lawrence Gowing, \textit{Paintings in the Louvre} (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1987), 53.

\textsuperscript{13} Jean Hey, \textit{The Virgin In Glory, Surrounded By Angels}, Oil on panel, 1489. Painting is currently located in the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, in Brussels, Belgium.
The location of both paintings Anne commissioned is significant: having the two different triptychs displayed within the palace chapel that Anne renovated served several purposes. First, it reminded visitors to the church who had paid for the building and the clergy, showing off Anne’s status as a religious and artistic patron. Second, it acted as a physical demonstration of Anne’s cultivation as the embodiment of both Louis IX and Christine de Pizan. Here was Anne, painted kneeling, humbly dressed, in a position of supplication, not allowing herself to be distracted. Her palace at Moulins, where the chapel holding these paintings is located, was primarily where Anne held her own court after stepping down from the regency. Anyone coming to visit Anne, or even just passing through Bourbon, likely would have seen these paintings. By gazing at images of Anne with prominent saints, viewers likely had the image of Madame la Grande as an authority or person of high status reinforced. Finally, Anne used these paintings as a constant reminder for herself to maintain her posture of piety, thereby reinforcing her own self-image as the ideal noblewoman.

Hey painted the first portrait, shown in Figure 5, in 1492, as the left panel of a triptych that likely depicts the Virgin Mary and infant Christ in the center panel and Pierre presented as a supplicant opposite Anne’s portrait. ¹⁴ This particular painting depicts a kneeling Anne, dressed in black with a red and green clad St. John standing near her, and a large palace in the background. Anne, in this position appears to be facing forward and looking at something not present in the painting’s frame. In fact, it is as if she does not even

¹⁴ Jean Hey, Anne of France, Lady of Beaujeu, Duchess of Bourbon, presented by St. John the Evangelist, Oil on panel, 1492, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels, Belgium. This painting is likely a triptych, but unfortunately, I cannot find the center painting.
know that St. John is present. Her black, velvet, dress is lined with white ermine fur, and though fabric covers most of her head, her iconic widow’s peak and high forehead are clearly
Figure 5 ANNE OF FRANCE, LADY OF BEAUJEU, DUCHESS OF BOURBON, PRESENTED BY ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST, ca 1489, Oil on panel, Jean Hey, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels, Belgium. Image from Wikki Images
visible. Both the color black and the ermine fur are a powerful show of wealth and of Anne’s status as a French royal, as medieval paintings typically used ermine to distinguish royalty from nobility.\textsuperscript{15} While her black dress is a sign of wealth, as black fabric was difficult and expensive to produce, it is also a color typically associated with piety, soberness, and mourning. As no one in Anne’s life had recently died, the black is more likely used to show a connection between the piety of the clergy, who wore black habits, and the piety of Anne, kneeling with her hands pressed together in prayer or supplication.\textsuperscript{16} The humility of Anne’s posture is palpable, especially coupled with her black dress and mostly covered hair. However, the addition of her hefty gold necklace inlaid with pearls and precious stones, the ring she wears on her pinky, and the palace painted into the background, suggest that Anne, while demonstrating her religiosity, also could not help but show her wealth and status too. The grand structure nestled amongst the hills and greenery is likely Moulins, the ducal palace Anne renovated in Gien. After her guardianship of Charles officially ended, Anne and Pierre moved back to Moulins, where Anne made expensive renovations, using costly but sturdy materials to make the palace even more grand.\textsuperscript{17}

In contrast to Madame, St. John is looking directly at the other person in the room, Anne, making the sign of the cross as if he is about to bless her with his right hand, while holding the golden chalice and snake in his left hand. The addition of the chalice and serpent is typical of the iconography associated with St. John, possibly a reference to one legend.

\textsuperscript{15} Brown, \textit{The Queen’s Library}.


\textsuperscript{17} Matarasso, \textit{Queen’s Mate}, 107.
from the Acts of John, in which someone challenged John to drink a cup of poison to test his faith. ¹⁸ However, the imagery could also reference the Last Supper, specifically the words of Christ to John and James: “My chalice indeed you shall drink.” (Matthew 20:23) The red and green of St. John’s robes are also typical of the religious art of the time, with the red symbolizing the blood of Christ, and green usually associated with epiphany, but could also symbolize fertility, nature, bounty, and hope.¹⁹

Jean Hey’s, or more likely Anne’s, choice to depict St. John the Evangelist in this work is deliberate, as are the colors, the postures of both figures, and placing the palace of Moulins in the background. In this specific painting, Anne deliberately had Hey portray her as a humble—particularly in terms of her posture—yet powerful woman, in the favor of St. John the Evangelist, who Christ gives to Mary as a replacement son when he dies on the cross, who prays for and blesses her. The presence of symbols of wealth and abundance, such as her jewelry, color choices, and St. John’s chalice, as well as the image of Moulins in the background, demonstrate that this portrait was indicative of how Anne wanted people to see her. The careful addition of St. John the Evangelist possibly presenting Anne to his new mother, the Virgin Mary, signifies Anne’s special role as a pious daughter of France.²⁰

The 1498-1501 painting of Anne and her daughter Suzanne pictured with St. Anne, shown in Figure 6, is also indicative of Anne’s public image.²¹ The work operates as the left

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²⁰ While more could, and should, be said on the inclusion of St. John and what his role in Christianity meant in connection with this painting of Anne, there is not presently room in this thesis to do any real discussion justice.

²¹ Jean Hey, *St. Anne Presenting Anne and her Daughter Suzanne*, Painting as part of triptych, 1498-1501, Moulins Cathedral.
panel of a triptych in Moulins Cathedral that also depicts the Virgin Mary and infant Christ in the center panel and Pierre in the right panel with St. Peter opposite the image of Anne and her daughter. In this painting, Anne is once again kneeling with her hands pressed together in supplication to her namesake as well as to the Virgin Mary and Christ. A noticeably young Suzanne sits behind her, painted identically to her mother. With this posture and the inclusion of St. Anne specifically, Anne is framing herself as mother of a prized and special child: her daughter. Both mother and daughter are wearing the same ermine bodice with red fabric, the only difference in clothing is the addition of a blue skirt on Anne and Suzanne’s red brocade. Even their crowns are similar and painted to express wealth and power, although Suzanne’s is appropriately scaled down. As with everything Anne did, the similarities in the dress and posture of mother and daughter were deliberate, conveying a sense of continuity and legacy. By having Suzanne dressed in a near identical outfit, Anne appears to saying, “Here is my heir. This is my Legacy.” The dark blue of Anne’s skirt, a nod to the color of the Virgin Mary and symbolizing purity, is in range of the lighter blue which covers St. Anne, who appears covered head to toe in blue and purple with a white wimple covering her head.\textsuperscript{22} St. Anne’s purple is frequently associated with Lent, but also with royalty. The use of purple in this painting could be in relation to Anne’s royalty, or the saint’s own royalty as grandmother to Christ. All of St. Anne’s clothing symbolizes her purity, her fidelity, and her high status as the mother of Mary.

As with the painting of Anne and St. John, mother and daughter pay no mind to the saintly patron sharing the room with them. Rather they choose to look straight ahead, likely at the middle panel of the triptych. In contrast with St. John’s posture, however, St. Anne

\textsuperscript{22} Michael Camille, \textit{The Gothic Idol}, 58.
Figure 6 ST. ANNE PRESENTING ANNE AND HER DAUGHTER SUZANNE, ca 1498-1501, painting on triptych, Jean Hey, Louvre, Paris. Image from Wikki Images.
looks towards her daughter and an infant Christ, imagery common for the center of triptychs. In this case, the mother of Mary is perhaps fulfilling St. John the Evangelist’s role and presenting Anne and Suzanne as stand in children for the virgin. Here, St. Anne stands gesturing to Anne with one hand, and almost touching the top of Suzanne’s head with the other. The significance of this pose cannot be overstated. In medieval and renaissance paintings, St. Anne’s position is always in a gesturing position to the Virgin Mary and an infant Christ as if looking after them both. Anne of France’s choice of position for St. Anne in the painting she commissioned of herself and her daughter shows not only her cognizance of previous St. Anne paintings, but also her awareness of how the audience viewing this painting would connect her and Suzanne with the Virgin Mary and Christ. Additionally, this is the second known association between Anne and the Virgin Mary. Interestingly, the few scholars who have engaged with Anne of France have not examined either this portrait or the book of hours.

While the use of the Virgin Mary as a spiritual connector to the material world was not an uncommon occurrence for medieval or early modern women, Anne’s purposeful use of the mother connection was vital to part of her image as Madame la Grande. With this painting, Anne was not only connecting herself with three of the most holy figures in Christianity—Jesus Christ, Mary, and Mary’s mother Anne—and thus a posture of religious piety, but also with her maternal role. The inclusion of Suzanne, specifically in Anne’s portrait as opposed to being in Pierre’s, located on the right side, allows Anne to fulfill one of

23 While access to the full triptych is available, there is not room in this thesis to discuss the painting in its entirety.


25 I have been unable to find any scholarship on either of the paintings Anne commissioned from Jean Hey.
the most important aspects of motherhood according to Christine de Pizan. Looking again at Anne’s posture, she does not look back at Suzanne. Rather, with her head facing forward and her back straight, she is focused on modeling the behavior Suzanne is to emulate. Although educating one’s child played a leading role in a mother’s duties, Christine stated that first “she will ensure that they will learn first of all to serve God.”26 Anne may have even used the book of hours her mother commissioned for her to teach Suzanne how to read and how to enact piety in an appropriate manner. Achieving the goal of motherhood and establishing the familial connection gave Anne power, both in her own immediate family and over the people of France at large. Critically, however, motherhood also provided Anne with a sense of legacy as Madame.

Anne appears to have internalized much of the advice she gleaned from the conduct manuals written by Christine de Pizan and Louis IX. But, other than by gazing at the triptychs Anne commissioned, to what extent could the public view the virtues Anne worked to acquire? The encomium written in MS fr. 24392 shows Anne’s success in shaping her self-image.27 The encomium is among a fifteenth-century collection of other literary texts, three of which are attributed to Jean de Meun.28 According to historian Lori Walters, Jean de Meun was previously criticized for “misogyny, immorality, and incorrect interpretation of Church doctrine.”29 That an ode written to glorify the virtues of Anne, a woman in a strong position

26 De Pizan, Treasure of the City of Ladies, 77.

27 Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, MS fr. 24392 folio 215v. The Français 24392 is modeled on Arsenal 3339 according to Lori Walters. Both Manuscripts are copies of Roman de la Rose. Unfortunately the Digital Library of Medieval Manuscripts contains very little information on the contents of either Fr. 24392 or Arsenal 3339. According to Lori Walters, the manuscript includes Roman de la Rose, followed by three other texts: Testament, Codicille, and Tresor ou Sept articles de la foi. Fr. 24392 contains the additional encomium to Anne, as well as 117 Rose miniatures.

28 Walters, “Remembering Christine de Pizan,” 15.

29 Walters, “Remembering Christine de Pizan,” 16.
of authority, is found in this particular manuscript is puzzling. It is possible that this manuscript collection served as a way to rehabilitate his image into a loyal supporter of “France’s most Christian monarchy,” the house of Valois, of which Anne was a member. As such, specific pieces like the addition of the encomium dedicated to Anne, were carefully selected, resulting in a manuscript that celebrates Anne and the Houses of Valois and Bourbon.

The introduction to the ode reads: “This is addressed to Madame the Duchess of Bourbon, Anne de France, daughter of the best master who ever was, King Louis XI of this name, and sister of Charles, who presently is King, the VIII of this name.” Based on the information in the introduction it was written between 1488 and 1498, since the author calls Anne “Duchess of Bourbon,” a title she did not get until 1488, and states that Charles, who died in 1498, is king. When looking at the time frame in which the encomium was written, as well as the language used, Walters argues the author is Jacques de Brézé.

Jacques de Brézé (b. ca. 1440) was a member of one of the great houses in Normandy. In 1477, he was sentenced to death for the murder of his wife Charlotte and her lover, but his sentence was commuted by Louis XI, hence why he referred to Louis XI as “the best master who ever was.” Later in his life, Jacques de Brézé “served either as Anne’s officer or as a lord of her court.” During his time at Anne’s court in Moulins, he wrote at

30 Walters, “Remembering Christine de Pizan,” 16.
32 Walters, “Remembering Christine de Pizan,” 23.
least two poems praising his patron: *La Chasse* (1487) and *Loenges de Madame de Bourbon* (1488).  

According to Walters, the language used in *La Chasse*, in which he describes Anne as a successful huntress, and in *Loenges*, a more direct ode to Anne, is remarkably similar to the language used in the encomium written in MS fr. 24392.  

Specific references, which range from the comparison of Anne to specific biblical characters to praise of Anne’s eloquence and power, run through all three of the texts. While there is no way to accurately know if Anne of France served as patron to Jacques de Brézé at the time he authored the ode, it is likely. However, even with his obvious bias towards the woman who paid for his living, the poet’s words of praise should not be completely discounted as mere flattery rather than fact. Many of the lines in the ode reflect an awareness of specific events, literature, and imagery.

The use of historical comparisons within this ode are particularly interesting and give a sense of Anne’s public image and how she used it. The first is line two, where the author states that Anne has “The great virtues of Penelope of Greece.” By alluding to Odysseus’ wife, the author created a direct allusion to Penelope’s reported loyalty, cleverness, and her capable ruling skill while her husband was away to qualities that Anne possessed. Interestingly, one of Penelope’s most prominent scenes in *The Odyssey* is when she weaves her husband’s funeral shroud to prolong choosing a suitor from among the men gathered.

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34 Walters, “Remembering Christine de Pizan.”


Each day she works on the shroud in public, and each night she undoes some of her work. With this clever tactic, Penelope forestalls choosing a suitor for several years. Similarly, there are a handful of times during Anne’s guardianship of Charles where she commits herself to public actions and then goes back to the shadows to avoid suspicion. For example, as nobles questioned her legitimacy, Anne worked to gain allies, often by marrying nieces or cousins to powerful men such as Louis II de la Trémoille, who later served as a military general for Charles.37

In line eight of the encomium, Jacques de Brézé draws on other classical figures and records Anne as having “Of such a great heart as Penthesilea.”38 Penthesilea, an Amazonian queen in Greek mythology, fought in the Trojan War and was killed by Achilles. Greek historians and writers like Herodotus and Homer described Amazonian women as possessing “manly hearts.” Many of Anne’s contemporaries similarly praised Anne for “being like a man; bold, resolute, enterprising, and undaunted.”39 During the French-Breton War (1487-1491), Anne displayed an enterprising and bold heart. Though Madame la Grande never led an army during the war like the fabled Penthesilea, she did ride to the war camp with her brother Charles. She and her husband Pierre lived in military camps for days, sometimes weeks, at a time so that they might help Charles with battle strategies. Even after giving birth to her only child, Anne returned to Charles to help with peace negotiations. Anne’s role during this period was still as her brother’s advisor, and as the confident face of the reign. Anne might not have led an army into battle personally like her literary counterpart but, as

38 Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, MS fr. 24392 folio 215v.
39 Matarasso, Queen’s Mate, 12.
Madame la Grande, Anne did participate in several metaphorical battles and help her brother Charles with his military campaigns.

Along with the heart of a warrior and the cleverness of a loyal queen, the author postulates that Anne also had “the posture and bearing of Esther.”\(^{40}\) Not only does Jacques de Brézé associate Anne with a significant biblical figure, he links her with Esther’s qualities: piety, loyalty, humility, courage, and grace. In the biblical story, even after becoming queen, Esther stays modest and humble. Though she knows it could result in her losing her crown, and possibly her life, she convinces the king to spare the lives of the Jews.\(^{41}\) This reference could also be viewed as a political reference to Anne’s role as a trusted advisor to the king. At the tender age of thirteen, Charles could easily have been led astray by bad counsel were it not for Anne’s intervention. Jacques specifically makes this allusion in reaction to Anne’s conduct during the Mad War (1483-1488), where she saved Charles from the potentially disastrous influence of the hot-headed Louis duc d’Orléans. Notably, many of the female paragons of virtue to whom the author compares Anne are also present in Christine de Pizan’s *The Book of the City of Ladies* as well as *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, which, as noted above, Anne worked to model herself after. It is, therefore, unsurprising, that the author of the encomium referred to de Pizan herself in the next line.

Line ten of the ode brings the reader to the pinnacle of virtuous women by comparing Anne to the woman who wrote a manual which other women were encouraged to use to make themselves virtuous. Thus, Jacques de Brézé pays Madame the high compliment of

\(^{40}\) Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, MS fr. 24392 folio 215v.

\(^{41}\) Esther 2-9 (New Revised Standard Version).
saying she has “The profound eloquence of xpine.” As Christine de Pizan frequently signed her work ‘xpine’—χρ are the Greek letters that begin the word “Christos”—there is little doubt of the comparison. The specificity of this reference tells the reader several things. First, as scholar Lori Walters points out, it tells us that the author of the encomium “has read Christine’s texts, and … that he counts upon Anne’s familiarity with those texts.” Second, it tells modern readers something of the success Anne had in building her public image using de Pizan’s works and advice. In her own words, Madame la Grande stated: “The greatest gift that God has given to us is the gift of speech.” While Anne could not publicly perform certain male gendered characteristics, others, such as eloquence, cleverness, patience, and her role as advisor to Charles, could be performed.

Interestingly, despite the encomium’s usefulness in fleshing out Anne’s image-making capabilities, it is not a widely known or referenced text. In fact, one might be forgiven for not knowing of its existence at all, so seldom have historians used it. Its obscurity is worth noting, as this small piece of literature provides invaluable insights into Anne’s person. The author, Jacques de Brézé, likely received patronage for the creation of the ode, though there is no definitive way to know, yet historians should not simply wave this off as a simple piece of propaganda. Rather, with a close reading, the encomium sheds light on how Anne created the persona of Madame la Grande and the figures, both real and imagined, she used to do it. Equally as important, though also difficult to ascertain, is the audience’s perception of the text. Because there is little currently written on MS. Français

43 Walters, “Remembering Christine de Pizan,” 27.
44 Jansen, Lessons for my Daughter, 51.
24392, there is no way to conclusively state who read the manuscript or how widely it was circulated.

Anne of France fit into several of Christine de Pizan’s categories: she was a princess, a mentor to young noblewomen, and a manager of a duchy. With each new role Anne adopted, the advice she gleaned from Christine de Pizan became more important, and her cultivation of it more visible. The encomium written by Jacques de Brézé shows how Anne adopted Christine’s advice to fit distinct roles for different situations. As Madame la Grande, Anne tailored her behavior to fit the role she needed to play depending on her audience. For her husband, Anne transformed into Penelope: using her loyalty to secure the Bourbon lands and titles. For her brother she was Esther: the trusted and loyal advisor. For the public at large, Anne displayed her eloquence, patience, and modesty.

Anne in Her Own Words

One of Anne’s most vital roles, and one she took very seriously, after she ended her regency, was the role of mother. Anne gave birth to her daughter Suzanne in May 1491, during which time she was also counseling Charles about how to end the French-Breton War. Considering the stakes of the war, it is unsurprising that Anne quickly left Suzanne’s side after giving birth to return to Charles, leaving her young daughter with a wet nurse and a governess. While previous historians like Matarasso have characterized Anne’s treatment of Suzanne as cold, the extant letters between Anne and the governess show a level of care and oversight of which Christine de Pizan would have approved.45

Suzanne’s governess at that time, at least according to these letters, was a woman named Madame du Bouchage. No dates appear in the letters, but their contents suggest that

45 Matarasso, Queen’s Mate.
Anne wrote the letters soon after Suzanne was born.\textsuperscript{46} This timeframe could also illuminate why Anne was speaking to the governess as if she was not having any interaction with Suzanne herself, as at that time Anne would have been arranging the marriage between her brother, King Charles VIII, and Anne of Brittany, thereby putting an end to the French-Breton War. All the letters to Madame du Bouchage begin with the endearment “Ma Commere” meaning “My Comother,” suggesting the amount of faith Anne placed in Bouchage.\textsuperscript{47} The language used, along with the letter’s contents, suggest that Anne followed Christine’s advice that a mother must “be very interested in those who have charge of them [their children], and how they carry out their duties.”\textsuperscript{48} Throughout the series of the three letters available, Anne frequently asks the governess questions relating to Suzanne, and about the wetnurse, Catherine. Even if Anne was not physically present, she was still making it clear that she oversaw Suzanne’s health and well-being. In fact, much of the letters’ contents focus on Suzanne’s health, with Anne asking about Suzanne’s fever, incoming teeth, and how she is doing with breastfeeding.\textsuperscript{49} Some historians like Matarasso and Bridge previously speculated that Suzanne may have been a sickly child, having the same deformity or ailment as Anne’s sister, Jeanne.\textsuperscript{50} If this were the case, it could certainly explain Anne’s desire for frequent letters, and her charge to have the wetnurse checked for health issues as well.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{46} La Mure, 429–30.

\textsuperscript{47} La Mure, 429–430.

\textsuperscript{48} De Pizan, \textit{The Treasure of the City of Ladies}, 78.

\textsuperscript{49} La Mure, 429.

\textsuperscript{50} Authors and historians have suggested Jeanne may have suffered from a sever curvature to her spine, causing her to walk with a limp. Others have made vague references to her being “sickly.”

\textsuperscript{51} La Mure, 429–430.
However, it is also just as likely the case that, as a new mother, Anne simply wanted to be updated on the health and temperament of her first living child. This would negate earlier assertions of Suzanne’s poor health, chalking up Anne’s concern, or lack of real motherly affection, as coming from a male worldview.

There is another explanation for the frequent emphasis on Suzanne’s health. By the time of Suzanne’s birth, Anne was thirty years old, and would not have any more successful pregnancies, and there was a rumor that she had suffered a miscarriage previously. Knowing this, Anne may have feared Suzanne would be her only child and heir. A large part of Anne’s identity as Madame la Grande stemmed from the desire to leave a legacy, and as such it was vital to her to have someone to inherit what she and Pierre built and accomplished. Suzanne played an even greater role in her mother’s legacy than her mere survival through infancy however; by publishing her mother’s written work in 1517, she gave Anne’s memory a life that stretched centuries.

Anne of France created a legacy when she wrote *Lessons for my Daughter* between 1497 and 1498. At this time, a six- or seven-year-old Suzanne lived in Moulins with her mother and father, and spent much of her time with her governess, perhaps even the same Madame du Bouchage with whom Anne corresponded in 1491. This conduct manual served as a guide for Suzanne and it included many of the same lessons Anne learned from Christine de Pizan, as well as advice from her firsthand experiences in life at French court.

The introduction to the manual reads as follows: “My daughter, the perfect natural love that I have for you … gives me the desire and determination to prepare a few little

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52 Matarasso, *Queen’s Mate*, 11.
lessons for you while I am still with you.” Matarasso has looked at the manual and determined it lacks any motherly affection, this introduction alone counters that claim. In fact, following models of motherhood from this period reveal that Anne played her role as intercessor, mediator, and educator, all of which are present in this written work. Medieval fathers legally possessed more rights to their children, but it was the mothers who ultimately proved responsible for preparing children to enter the “fickle … unforgiving and strictly categorized society.” For Christine de Pizan and Anne of France, this meant mothers must contribute to and oversee their children’s education. For a mother like Anne to educate a daughter like Suzanne, she knew she must project “an image of self-control, training [Suzanne] through her own example in how to maneuver in a society that severely disadvantages [her].” However, worried that she may not have enough time to show Suzanne how to act in all situations, Anne took it upon herself to write these lessons down, so that Suzanne could look back on them when necessary.

It is worth noting the unique structure of this work, which, upon first reading, appears to have no structure at all. Like most things Anne wrote, the words read just as one would speak them. Closer inspection reveals the cyclical nature of the lessons, beginning with things Suzanne ought to know in her childhood, and ending with advice for when Suzanne meets death. These words of wisdom start with Anne reminding Suzanne of her obligation to God and the church before advising her on the types of clothing she should wear as well as

54 Matarasso, Queen’s Mate, 194.
56 Adams, “Medieval Mothers,” 269.
appropriate activities to occupy her time with; the exact kinds of information one would expect a mother to give her young, unmarried noble daughter. Anne’s advice included details on interactions with suitors, courtship behavior, and how to flatter and respect one’s husband, before addressing the raising and educating of children. Finally, Anne discusses widowhood and how to prepare for one’s own demise. The nature of these lessons are such that Suzanne could refer to them at any point in her life as she aged and moved into various stages. Even after Anne would be dead and could not physically act out her role as mother, her words of wisdom would still be present and serve as a guide for her daughter.

One of the earliest lessons came from Anne’s own life experience, when she told her daughter, “Wise men say that you should have eyes to notice everything yet to see nothing, and a tongue to answer everyone yet to say nothing prejudicial to anyone.” Even before Anne built up the court that became synonymous with French royalty and nobles, she knew nobles watched every move she made, waiting for her to make an error. While this action proved true for anyone at court, it was especially true for women in positions of power. As a woman, Suzanne would have a public role to play: she would need to be docile and even-tempered to meet the gendered expectations of her sex. With this lesson Anne was reminding Suzanne that everything she did would be scrutinized, and that she must be deliberate and keep to her script in public by remaining passive and concealing her thoughts and feelings, a theme Madame repeats throughout the text.

Sections X and XI deal entirely with appearance, with Anne telling Suzanne to dress neatly in clothes that befit her station, but not anything too outrageous or showy. While this


is typical advice and seems to be pulled directly from Christine de Pizan’s *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, there is more here than a mother simply telling her daughter to preserve her modesty: this is about performance.⁶⁰ While her father, Louis XI, may have been known for wearing plain, rough clothing, Anne was aware that one’s attire said a lot about one’s position in life and was a vital part of the court performance.⁶¹ Every mention of clothing pertained to what Suzanne should wear in public, whether that be in her own Court of Ladies, meeting foreign dignitaries, or at church. There is nothing written about what she should wear to bed or when she is alone in her own chambers. Rather, in parallel to the paintings by Jean Hey, Anne reminded Suzanne that her clothing was part of a larger picture that people would view and judge.⁶² As Louis IX declared to his own daughter, Isabelle, centuries earlier, Anne reminded Suzanne that she must “be perfect in all qualities.”⁶³ Though Anne never repeats the phrase directly in *Lessons*, the implication that noblewomen like herself and Suzanne set the example for other women, is undoubtedly present. Outside of setting a good example, noblewomen like Anne and Suzanne had an obligation to meet societal expectations of their gender.

Anne spoke prettily about marriage as a state of beauty, but that did not stop her from explaining the realities of widowhood to Suzanne. On the topic of retaining property she said, “when it comes to sovereignty, they [widows] must not cede power to anyone.”⁶⁴ Anne went

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⁶⁰ De Pizan, *Treasure of the City of Ladies*.


⁶² Jean Hey, *Anne of France, Lady of Beaujeu, Duchess of Bourbon, presented by St. John the Evangelist*, Oil on panel, 1492, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels, Belgium; and Jean Hey, *St. Anne Presenting Anne and her Daughter Suzanne*, Painting on triptych, 1498-1501, Louvre, Paris.


on to urge Suzanne that while grief is natural and right, she must not rave and go mad with despair for the rest of her life. Christine de Pizan also mentioned the conduct of widows in her work, though her advice leaned more towards first following through with a husband’s will and testament and taking care of the children. Only after completing those tasks could a woman make sure to get what is her due—even by taking the matter to court if necessary. Anne, in contrast, explicitly tells Suzanne not to “cede power to anyone.”

In the medieval world, widows often enjoyed a significant level of autonomy, especially if they did not have any older male relative living. They usually inherited some property, or at least were caretakers of the family estates until their children were old enough to inherit. Anne personally worked extremely hard to gain the Bourbon titles for Pierre and herself, and there was no way she was going to allow someone to take them from her when Pierre died. For Suzanne, this advice must have been particularly important because, although she was technically recognized by the king as the Bourbon heir, should any male relations contest her rights after her husband died, her claim could be overridden. This would prove especially true if she had no male children. Then, Suzanne could be passed over as heir and the titles and lands would be given to a distant male relation. Anne was cautioning her daughter not to allow that to happen, encouraging her daughter to hold on to her inheritance, for Suzanne’s own sake, but also probably a little bit for Anne’s sake as well.

While Anne herself was a powerful woman who seems to have had more control and influence over the men around her than they had over her, she seems to have embraced a gendered expectation for her own daughter. In fact, many of the lessons she produced in the

65 Jansen, Anne of France: Lessons for My Daughter, 64.

66 Barbara J. Harris, English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers (Oxford University Press, 2002).
manual she wrote for her daughter appear in contradiction to Anne’s own actions. Section XVI shows one of Anne’s most interesting quirks. In it, she reminded Suzanne “you are a feminine and weak creature … conduct yourself graciously … to your lord and husband.”

This contradicts Anne’s later advice on widowhood to Suzanne where she told her not to cede power to anyone. It is tempting to speculate that Anne did not see herself as crossing her own gendered boundary, which proved that women were not weak creatures, or that she did not know if Suzanne had the physical or mental fortitude to handle the consequences of crossing those boundaries. Unfortunately, there is no way to truly know Anne’s mind about the condition of women. Regardless of her words calling women weak, Anne raised in her court several young noblewomen who learned how to exercise a considerable amount of power by imitating Anne’s actions.

Suzanne published Lessons for my Daughter in 1517 with her mother’s permission, and editions continued to be in print until 1521, allowing the work to circulate widely. Cynthia Brown notes, “the sharing, consumption and exchange of female culture among middle-class bookmakers and readers that the print industry facilitated may explain why Suzanne sought to venture outside of royal circles to propagate her mother’s work.”

Suzanne died in 1521, never having any children or reaching the stage of widowhood but adding to her mother’s legacy nonetheless. Anne followed Suzanne a year later, dying in 1522 at the age of sixty-one. Anne lived through the death of both her parents, both of her siblings, her husband, her daughter, her sister-in-law, and her enemy turned ally, Louis duc d’Orléans who became King Louis XII. Throughout her life, Anne worked hard to build an

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67 Jansen, Anne of France: Lessons for My Daughter, 44.

image, one that would last after death. Even though she had no grandchildren, her legacy did live on through her published work, her paintings, the encomium written to her, but also through the Court of Ladies she built and the next generation of powerful women she helped train.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Even as Anne’s reputation as a virtuous woman was tainted by early male historians, and then revived by twenty-first century female historians into something more heroic as a protofeminist, her legacy and image as a powerful and capable regent continues to live on. Despite the accusations of greed and ambition, few commentators or historians have denied Anne’s capable political skills. The same men who maligned her could not help but admire her. Pélicier grudgingly notes, “Whatever may have been the personal feelings of the princess later, it is indisputable that her transition to business had the happiest results for royalty.”

Even Brantôme admits, “but I have never seen any of our kings, and if I have seen many of them, speak and write so bravely and imperiously as she did, both towards the greatest and the least; and never signed anyone but Anne of France.”

Thanks to her guardianship and regency over her younger brother, her role as mother and wife, and more importantly, her acuity in image making, Anne achieved what she always wanted: a legacy. This legacy lies in the material artifacts she left behind, but also in the new political strategies she adopted to legitimize her power. After her reign as regent, France was at peace when it had been at war for her father’s entire reign. She added not only territory to the royal house via the marriage between Anne of Brittany and her brother Charles VIII, but also power and authority to the kingship itself, and legitimacy for later women to rule as regents. As historian André Poulet muses, “Medieval women did not escape from the connotations of these innate male rights responsible for the division of space and function;

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1 Pélicier, *Essai Sur Le Gouvernement de La Dame de Beaujeu*, 213.

and beyond the prestigious office that established her as a living role model, a queen was the archetypal woman of her time.”¹³ While Anne of France may not have technically been a queen, she was a French princess and as regent for her brother for over five years, Anne embodied the role of a queen to look up to. Part of her brilliance lay in her ability to adopt as many persona as she needed when the time called for it. If presenting herself as a weak and pious noblewoman would achieve her goals better than her presentation as Charles’ fierce and protective sister, then she shifted her image. By taking on a multitude of qualities and persona, Anne was able to present herself as regent, sister, mother, wife, mentor, duchess, and pious aristocrat.

Even after she officially left court in 1491, Anne remained a vital figure in French politics, returning as regent for her brother in 1494. Through the reigns of Louis XII and François I, Anne retained honors as Madame la Grande until her death in 1522. Anne’s political strategies and successes as a woman in power influenced a number of other bold women; some of her own students, Louise of Savoy and Margaret of Austria, later came together to create the Ladies’ Peace, or the Peace of Cambrai, in 1529, ending the war between France and the Habsburg Empire.⁴ Other women such as Marguerite de Navarre, Anne of Brittany, Renée of Ferrara, and even Anne Boleyn likewise learned political strategies from Anne and used the female networks they built to further their political authority. As Tracy Adams notes, “in the 167 years between Anne’s assumption of guardianship in 1484 and 1651, when Louis XIV came of age, bringing the regency of Anne

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of Austria to a close, France would be ruled for all practical purposes by women for about forty-two years.”

So while Anne is a remarkable woman and case study, she is not an anomaly in her conscious effort to create a public persona. Future historians would do well to further examine other overlooked female regents, or even male kings, in their capacity as image-makers and political strategists. By delving into the public participation and ceremonies rulers and regents alike took part in, historians can better grasp the performance aspect rulers used to their advantage. Often, the cultivation of the right virtues and vices allowed rulers the ability to hold onto their power and legacy, while failing to properly portray such ideals could lead to disaster.

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