Friendship and Politics in Post-Revolutionary France

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Because women could not vote or hold office during the post-revolutionary political regimes, they could not serve as proxies or allies in the way that male friends could. Yet despite this, many of the women studied here performed vital functions within the political system throughout the period of parliamentary monarchy. This chapter concentrates on three of these roles: helping politicians get along with one another, ensuring that factions remained united, and forming alliances. While none of these functions was an easy task in the fractious political climate of the time, politicians of the new parliamentary system needed to find ways to cooperate with one another. In order to do so, they relied on women’s facility with male emotions and male interiority, as well as women’s ability to socialize men. The fact that women could maintain personal ties that spanned political divides also helped them connect different factional groupings to one another. In essence, the particular nature of women’s friendships made them especially able to build the trust and cohesion that allowed the parliamentary system of the post-revolutionary era to function. Hence, just as men gained access to the social and emotional through the women around them, women entered politics through their male friends.

To examine these issues, I focus primarily on the political negotiations of Guizot and Chateaubriand. If Béranger and his allies on the far-left are largely (although not entirely) absent, this is due to the nature of the documentary evidence, not to differences in how women functioned in republican circles. Guizot and Chateaubriand’s maneuvers are especially easy to track because they often lived abroad as either exiles or ambassadors and so conducted many of their negotiations through correspondence. In contrast, while Béranger’s
friend Hortense Allart was instrumental in forming alliances during the Restoration, she largely did so orally and therefore left fewer traces of her political activity.

The scope of female political activity seems at odds with the idea of a strict separation between a private, female realm and a public, male one. Indeed, prominent political figures of the time voiced a desire to keep women out of politics. For instance, the duc de Richelieu, who was prime minister during many of the early years of the Restoration, thought that women had no business interfering in political matters. Mme de Montcalm, his sister, was inclined to agree with him. She regarded politics as a dirty, unpleasant business of which she wanted no part. Guizot also maintained that women should refrain from any involvement in public life. At a speech in the Chamber of Deputies in 1842, he stated that women could not participate in politics because they “are dedicated to the family; as individuals, they are destined to develop through the affections of the home and through social relations.”

This is as clear an articulation of the notion of separate spheres as any: women are domestic creatures who are connected to the emotional and the social and so cannot take part in public life. Yet both Richelieu and Guizot were dependent on women throughout their political careers, and Mme de Montcalm was highly active in politics—and quite successful at it. Whatever these men and women might think about the prospect of female political activity, they recognized that this was how the game was played.

Women’s political roles arose in part from the legacy of the Old Regime when elite women served as crucial brokers and political intermediaries. Post-revolutionary politics did not see the elimination of female political activity so much as its transformation, as the functions of broker and go-between became feminized in the early nineteenth century. The new contours of early nineteenth-century politics and gender also facilitated the dimensions of female political engagement. Indeed, the seeming contradiction between women’s official exclusion from public life and their de facto involvement in politics can be reconciled by recognizing that it was precisely the fact that women were outside of politics that gave them such important roles in parliamentary life. As private actors, they were connected to the emotions and so could use discussions of sentiment to spur men to action. Likewise, men could do the same with women, but not with one another. And because women were removed from political concerns, their networks could span factional divisions, which made them able to facilitate alliances between different political groupings. Yet the fact that women were regarded as private
beings also limited the scope of their political activity. Because women accessed politics through the men around them, all final authority belonged to men. Women could offer advice, but it was up to men to decide whether to take it. Men’s attitudes about the political activity of their female friends varied greatly. In some cases, they saw women as important and powerful political actors, but in others, they called on women to engage in politics only to help them achieve their own ends. Yet despite the limits on the degree to which women could exert influence, the roles they played were invaluable, as women made cooperation between politicians—and therefore the parliamentary life of the time more generally—possible.

ENSURING FACTIONAL UNITY

In the early nineteenth century, an era beset by anxieties about atomization and the anomy of public life, political thinkers often puzzled over what held factions together. After all, factional unity was necessary to the functioning of the political system, but there were no political parties to structure political life or enforce cooperation. What was it, theorists wondered, that allowed politicians to work in concert with one another? Was it a set of shared ideological positions? Or did interest and the pursuit of power lead men to unite with one another?3 In practice, this matter was less perplexing, for women kept factions cohesive through their ability to maintain social networks and manage emotions.

One key female function was the circulation of information among politicians in the same camp. When he was ambassador to the United States, Hyde de Neuville received long letters from Mme de La Trémoïlle filled with news about the other ultra politicians with whom he was allied.4 Likewise, Mme de Broglie’s correspondence with Guizot contained important political news and information about her husband’s activities.5 Both women were highly partisan and committed to advancing the politics of their particular factions (the doctrinaires in Broglie’s case and the ultras in La Trémoïlle’s).6 One way to do this was through conveying information between male allies, an extension of women’s roles as communicators of affection and personal news between male friends.

At crucial moments, the unity of these women’s political groupings also relied on Broglie and La Trémoïlle’s abilities to access and manage emotions. For instance, in 1816, when Hyde de Neuville was in the United States, he was
concerned about the state of the ultra camp. He was a relatively moderate ultra, but this was a moment when his more conservative and intransigent allies were making the most noise, unleashing a torrent of hostility onto Richelieu’s centrist government. He wanted those who were like him and more inclined to compromise with the ministry to come to the fore. He also saw that an alliance between the far-right and the center-right would place the newly established government on a more secure footing. This was the task he gave to La Trémoïlle. In a letter from 1816, he wrote her with the following request: “It is you, Madame, who must guide our friends, and calm the impetuosity of some and the indecision of the others.”

In order to accomplish Hyde’s goal, La Trémoïlle was to play on the emotions of the other men in this camp. She was to pacify those on the extreme right so that they would give up their intense hostility to the ministry—to manage their emotions, in essence. At the same time, she was to reassure moderate ultras that they were on the correct course and move them away from their hesitancy.

This was an intelligent reading of the political situation, for, as will be discussed below, there was considerable common ground between moderate ultras and the center-right government; the real problem was precisely the ultras’ overheated and rancorous tone. However, this was not a terribly good understanding of La Trémoïlle’s personality or politics. She was famous for being intransigent and was aligned with the immoderate ultras of whom Hyde was so critical. That Hyde made this suggestion indicates that he was either unaware of her political leanings or that he thought that whatever her views, she would still take his advice. The former possibility is unlikely. She was his friend and frequent correspondent, and, from all accounts, she was not shy about voicing her political views. More probably, it is that he understood her role as ensuring that the ultras were united, and that this task was to outweigh her desire to promote her own politics.

Mme de Broglie was another highly partisan woman who used her close connections to the men of the doctrinaire circle to keep them united in order to advance their position. This is particularly visible in a letter to Barante written in 1820 after a government led by the center-left Decazes fell to a more conservative one. Barante, who was allied with Decazes, was removed from his position in the government, thereby depriving him of an important source of income. As a consolation, he was offered the ambassadorship to Denmark. Unsure of whether to accept this posting, Barante wrote to Mme de Broglie asking for her advice. Her response was an impassioned plea for him to stay in France. She stated that she could understand if he needed to
accept the position due to financial exigency, but that otherwise he should not take the posting. Doing so would make him dependent on an increasingly conservative government and would remove him from France, where he was badly needed. In her account, the rapid shifts in the political terrain meant that the doctrinaires occupied a vital and necessary place in the political spectrum, as they were uniquely able to fight against the excesses of both the right and the left. In her words, “If we unite, if we draw together, we can become a core that attracts all those who love order and liberty.” In other words, what she wanted was for the doctrinaires to be a cohesive faction that provided a voice of moderation. If Barante left France, this would be impossible. Such a desire was obviously close to her heart, and there is little doubt that her description of the doctrinaires as loving order and liberty was a statement of her own views. As a member of this political grouping, she was defining herself as a political actor, one attempting to exert influence on Barante to achieve her own aims. For personal and political reasons, she wanted to keep Barante in France and called on the emotions to do so. Toward the end of the letter, her prose became especially passionate. She wrote, “You have so many good reasons to give outside of political ones! Separate yourself from your loved ones, your family! Lead your wife to a terrible climate or be far from her! Your four children, to separate yourself from them or to take them who knows where! Even if the ministry did as much for you as it did against you, it would not merit such a sacrifice!” Broglie’s sentiments were here indicated by the liberal use of exclamation points and sentence fragments, as if she were so overcome by feeling that she could not write in full sentences.

Such an outpouring relied on Broglie’s ability to express emotion, for the men of the doctrinaire camp could not have used such impassioned words to make the case that Barante should stay in France. Similarly, she also called on her ability to discuss his personal life. The last sentence provides a political reason why he should not go to Denmark—that he owed nothing to a ministry that had sacked him. But before that, she spoke of the personal sacrifices he would have to endure were he to go. Either he would be separated from his family or he would have to bring them to Copenhagen, a city that must have seemed like the back of beyond for a woman like Broglie. Given the norms of male correspondence, Barante’s male friends could have supplied political justifications as to why he should stay in France. But she could make a fuller and more complex case, one that called on the political, the personal, and the emotional. As an argument for factional unity, this was bound to be more successful than one based solely on political considerations. In the end,
Barante refused the posting to Denmark, and while we do not have his response to Broglie’s letter, his biographer states that her arguments may have had something to do with his decision to turn down the offer.¹¹

La Trémoïlle and Broglie undertook the same task in the early years of the Restoration for much the same reason—because they believed ardently in the causes with which their factions were aligned. But these two instances show two different relationships between women’s political activity and their ideological positions. For Mme de Broglie, her advice to Barante was a way to promote the doctrinaire cause and ensure that her male friends were effective in political life. In the case of Hyde de Neuville’s letter, he sought to get La Trémoïlle to back his own vision of ultra politics, one that was dissimilar from hers. She was to facilitate his political program, not her own. These two instances show two models of female political engagement that will be seen throughout this chapter—that of women who exerted influence and achieved their own ends, and that of women who were called on to act as facilitators who could transmit information and cultivate politically useful emotional states in the men around them.

MANAGING POLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Female friends also played vital roles in helping politicians get along with one another in the Restoration and July Monarchy, a task that was often intimately bound up with the practice of ensuring factional cohesion. For instance, Chateaubriand relied heavily on the women around him to smooth over his relations with other politicians. Given his notoriously difficult personality, he was hardly beloved by the other political figures of the day, including Richelieu and Villèle, and so needed women to manage his relationships and thus advance his political career. Hence, during a term as ambassador to Prussia, he was desperate to return to Paris. To do so, he needed to have the support of Richelieu, the head of the cabinet, and so he turned to his friend Mme de Pisieux, who was also friends with Richelieu. In a letter from January 1821, he told her to “continue to look after my friendship with your prominent neighbor [Richelieu] if you want to see me returned to France.”¹² If she could make Richelieu like him more, he would be able to end his glorified exile.

Similarly, Mme de Duras often reached out to Villèle on Chateaubriand’s behalf while Mme Récamier ensured that Chateaubriand and her friend
Mathieu de Montmorency maintained a functional working relationship with each other despite their mutual antipathy. This was especially important in 1822, when Chateaubriand was ambassador to London and Montmorency was minister of foreign affairs and thus his superior. Yet Récamier was no ultra. Considerably more moderate than either Chateaubriand or Montmorency, she did her best to prevent a breach between them out of a personal loyalty to these two men. Likewise, in the 1830s, Guizot called on his friend Mme de Castellane to facilitate his relationship with Mathieu Molé, then Castellane’s lover. Although the two men were occasionally allied with each other, they hated each other and needed her to keep the peace between them.

Two relatively well-documented instances provide substantive glimpses into this type of female political activity. The first comes from Chateaubriand’s career and shows how his friend Mme de Montcalm tried to control his emotions in order to facilitate his relationship with her brother, the duc de Richelieu. In the second we can see how one member of the doctrinaire circle manipulated notions about female emotionality for political ends.

Chateaubriand and Richelieu were two prominent politicians of the Restoration who had a highly troubled relationship. The latter was a center-right moderate, while Chateaubriand was an outspoken ultra. Strictly speaking, the two men’s political views were not that dissimilar. Unlike other ultras, Chateaubriand supported the Charter of 1814 and believed strongly in freedom of the press; in this respect both he and Richelieu were monarchists who accepted some of the gains of the Revolution. The real problem between the two men was one of tone. Richelieu was conciliatory, whereas Chateaubriand shared the ultras’ inflammatory style of politics.

In 1821, however, these two men wanted to reconcile with each other. Richelieu was head of a government that looked to the ultras for support, and he included two members of this camp—Villèle and Corbière—in the cabinet. He was considering replacing them with Chateaubriand, who was for his part desperate for a ministerial position. To effect this swap, Richelieu relied on his sister, Mme de Montcalm. She wrote Chateaubriand a note in which she said, “In the name of the friendship that I have for you, be careful and moderate in your speeches in the Chamber of Peers. You must not heighten party spirit at this moment. . . . I can assure you that if the two men leave [the cabinet], it will be good for you.” In essence, Montcalm was indicating that Richelieu was open to including Chateaubriand in the ministry if Villèle and Corbière were no longer a part of it. In order to join the government, though, Chateaubriand would need to change his behavior in
the Chamber of Peers. He would have to moderate his tone and become less adversarial in public toward Richelieu and the political center. His devotion to his faction needed to give way to a more conciliatory attitude.

Here, Montcalm was not trying to change Chateaubriand’s politics but to restrain his hostility. He was to do this both because this would get him the result he so badly wanted and because it would please her, for she began her note with a request that he moderate his tone for her sake. This was an act of emotional management as Montcalm attempted to cultivate Chateaubriand’s positive emotions for her while at the same time tempering his aversion toward political moderation. Montcalm’s advice was bound up in her gender, for as a woman she had access to his emotions. Her ability to maintain personal ties to both ultras and moderates made her able to argue that whatever their political differences, Chateaubriand should be a loyal friend and act in a way that made her happy. Unfortunately for Chateaubriand’s sake, Montcalm’s efforts did not bear fruit, and he was never included in any Richelieu-led cabinet. Nevertheless, the significance of this incident lies in how she made her case to Chateaubriand and how she tried to work between him and her brother.

One considerably more successful act of emotional management occurred in 1840, when Charles de Rémusat cultivated a friendship with a woman to secure his relationship with Adolphe Thiers after the latter became head of a new, left-leaning government. To win the support of the center-right doctrinaires, Thiers made Rémusat minister of the interior. In 1840, Rémusat knew that he might not be able to maintain his allegiances to both Thiers and Guizot. As discussed in chapter 5, he went to Broglie to secure his right flank. But he was also concerned that he would end up in a difficult position if Guizot and the other doctrinaires came to oppose Thiers’s cabinet. In order to make sure that Thiers would continue to trust him whatever the other doctrinaires did, Rémusat went to Mme Dosne, Thiers’s salonnière, mistress, and mother-in-law (!). In his memoirs, he writes that he spoke “for a long time about gratitude and friendship” and “beseeched her to be the bond of concord between us [i.e., between himself and Thiers] and the guardian of our mutual trust.”

What Rémusat wanted was a back channel to Thiers and a way to communicate with him in an unofficial fashion. He also needed to make sure that he had an advocate in Thiers’s inner circle, someone who could smooth over any difficulties the two men might have. If he could make Dosne into his
friend, she could be this figure. In this instance Rémusat’s efforts were successful and the ministry did not founder over the question of factional loyalty. Indeed, in 1840, Rémusat moved from the doctrinaire camp into Thiers’s center-left one.

In his memoirs, Rémusat suggested that he recruited Dosne through emotional manipulation, as he stated that he greatly exaggerated his anxieties about his place in the new cabinet in order to win her over. Here, he was playing on the idea that men could reveal their innermost thoughts and feelings to women. If he could manipulate Dosne into thinking that he was deeply concerned about his relationship with Thiers, she could quell any of Thiers’s suspicions about Rémusat’s loyalty. As a woman she could claim to know Rémusat’s true feelings toward her son-in-law, whereas Thiers would have less access to them—and so would be inclined to rely on Dosne’s understanding of Rémusat’s intentions. This self-conscious performance of emotion suggests that Rémusat’s success was due in part to his ability to manipulate the emotional codes of the time for political ends. His calculations also lay bare the fact that he recognized the power of women’s capacity to manage emotions, for he saw that Dosne’s real role was not to be his confidante, but to keep the peace between himself and Thiers. Indeed, elsewhere in his memoirs he stated that he did not like her. He did not want a friendship with her in any real sense of the term, but rather wanted her to act as female friends did in the political realm.

In both instances, what women did or what they were asked to do was create and manage trust between political figures so that ministries could function. This is most obvious in the case of Rémusat and Dosne, when he asked her to be the “guardian” of the trust between him and Thiers. After all, Thiers had plenty of reasons to be suspicious of Rémusat, for while the two men were friends, shared politics and long-standing bonds tied Rémusat to the rival doctrinaire camp. Indeed, his affiliation with Guizot was one principal reason Thiers selected him for a cabinet position. To make sure there was no breakdown in his relationship with Thiers, Rémusat needed to resort to Dosne, who had a facility with social ties and the emotions. Likewise, Chateaubriand and Richelieu had reasons to distrust each other, for Richelieu and the ultras had been opposed to each other’s politics for years. But Montcalm could claim to be her brother’s confidante who had access to his true thoughts and feelings, and in this way she could help these two men cease their mutual antipathy and work in concert with each other.
In the Montcalm/Chateaubriand and the Dosne/Rémusat negotiations, women helped politicians from different factions get along with one another. These female interventions came after an alliance between different political groups had been established, and when politicians were concerned about their ability to sustain the relationship. This task of alliance formation was crucial to the functioning of the parliamentary system. Indeed, most of the cabinets in the period between 1815 and 1848 were coalition governments. There were times when one faction dominated politics, as during the period from 1821 to 1828, when the ultras were in power, or from 1840 to 1848, when Guizot’s ministry had the backing of deputies from the juste milieu. But even these governments occasionally needed to reach out to factions in the opposition to shore up their support in the Chambers, while political groupings that wanted to come to power had to secure the backing of other factions to do so. The problem is that coalitions require trust and assurances that the members of the factions who are allies will not betray one another. Moreover, the lack of a party system and the number of different political groupings engendered lengthier and more complex negotiations over both legislation and the composition of any new cabinet. In order to form a ministry, for example, one had to negotiate with politicians from many different factions, whereas in a two-party system, as in Britain, it was much easier to determine who would be included in a new government. As a result, the stability of the parliamentary system relied on individuals who could work among factions and build trust among them; it was rare that politicians themselves could do this, as their political and social loyalties were typically too circumscribed. This was not the case for women, however, and it was they who created cohesion between factions and built chains of trust that made alliances—and thus the political system that depended on them—viable.

One notable—and surprising—alliance was between the center-right and the liberal opposition at the end of the Restoration. In the closing years of the regime, Chateaubriand was the leader of a center-right faction made up of former ultras who now opposed the government and often collaborated with the left. His mistress Hortense Allart was a key facilitator of contact between Chateaubriand and her liberal friends. She put Thiers and François Mignet, then liberal journalists, in touch with her lover. She also orchestrated a meeting between Chateaubriand and Béranger, one that showed the strength of the opposition to the Polignac government. During the July Monarchy
Guizot relied repeatedly on women to help him form alliances. In 1840, just after the formation of the Thiers ministry, he asked Mme de Gasparin if any of the centrist politicians she knew were similarly opposed to the new government (he feared it was too bellicose) and whether he should write directly to any of them. Although Guizot did not spell out his precise intentions in this letter, he was undoubtedly trying to form an alliance with these men in order to topple the Thiers ministry. Five years later Lieven helped him reach out to Thiers to shore up his support in the Chamber of Deputies.

In all these instances, men called on women’s abilities to maintain ties across factional lines. Allart was Chateaubriand’s mistress and an ardent liberal; Gasparin was friends with Guizot and politicians to his left; and Lieven was friends with men to the right and to the left of Guizot. None of these negotiations left much of a paper trail, but there were two that did. Mme de Montcalm formed an alliance between ultras and moderates in the early years of the Restoration, while Mme Lenormant orchestrated another—among doctrinaires, Catholics, and legitimists—in 1848 and 1849. In both cases, men called on women’s extensive social networks and their ability to convey information about their emotions and interiority. Indeed, the correspondence surrounding the formation of these coalitions allows us to see how women established bonds of trust between factions that either were highly suspicious of one another or had little experience working together.

One particularly illustrative example of this mediating role of female friends is the relationship between Mme de Montcalm and Hyde de Neuville. Indeed, theirs was a friendship that was born out of a desire for political reconciliation. At the beginning of the Restoration, the two knew each other, for it was Hyde who suggested to Montcalm that she keep a journal. Yet according to that same diary, they were not close at the time. But starting in 1816, they began a friendship that sprang out of an effort to effect a rapprochement between ultras and moderates. By all accounts, the two had a real affection for each other, but their expressions of sentiment were also politically useful and in some cases strategically deployed.

Montcalm’s alliance between ultras and moderates was formed at a particularly difficult time. Early in the Restoration, factional tensions were at their height; this was when memories of the Hundred Days and White Terror were still fresh. One example of this is the division between the far-right ultras and the center-right moderates. The duc de Richelieu was the leader of the latter group; because of his conciliatory attitude, the ultras unleashed a torrent of hostility on him and his ministry. Yet there were some ultras,
like Chateaubriand, who were ideologically moderate. Hyde de Neuville was another politician who had liberal views but who was known for his fierce temperament and hostility to the cabinet. Nevertheless, he hoped that he could win Richelieu over to ultra politics; after all, Richelieu was an émigré from one of the great aristocratic families of France and had served the tsar of Russia during the Empire.

In March 1816, just before he took up his post as ambassador to the United States, Hyde visited Montcalm to ask her to approach her brother about collaborating with the ultra camp. In a letter written after their initial meeting, he deployed both a political and sentimental language to make his argument. He described the political difficulties ultras and moderates would face if the two camps could not agree. He also spoke about his affection and esteem for her and Richelieu. He wrote, “I do not know, Madame, if you realize the feelings that you inspire in me, my respect and attachment for you and for your brother.” Later in the letter he stated, “You are kind, you suffer, I know that you have a good heart, I do not need you, but I greatly desire your friendship.” (Montcalm was very sick at this point and essentially an invalid, hence Hyde’s references to her suffering.) Here Hyde used affection as a persuasive force. Because he liked her and her brother, she should try to reconcile the two men. He also used emotions to create trust. Montcalm and Richelieu had reasons to be suspicious of his efforts, given how opposed he was to the ministry, but by speaking of his feelings for her and Richelieu he indicated that he was acting in good faith and that his desire for an alliance was genuine. He was not yet friends with Montcalm, but he wanted to be so; he would therefore act as a friend would—with her best interests at heart. In this case, Hyde de Neuville’s words of affection functioned as a metaphor, for he was promising to behave with loyalty in political life. At the same time, the expression of his feelings may have been genuine, as the two became close soon after this incident.

In her response to Hyde, Montcalm stated that she admired his loyalty to the monarchy and that she also desired a reconciliation between the ultras and her brother. However, she was quite clear that Richelieu should not be the one who did all the work, as both parties needed to come together. In other words, Richelieu would move to the right only if the ultras became more moderate. Although she offered advice to Hyde, she refused to intervene with her brother. She stated that she had no influence over him and that both she and Richelieu believed that women should not involve themselves in political matters. Less than ten days later, however, she wrote Hyde
another letter in which she conveyed an altogether different message. She reported that she had spoken with her brother and that if the ultras wanted to reconcile with him, they should be less hostile to him. In particular, they should visit him on a more regular basis. But she did not want Hyde to reveal that this suggestion came from her and indirectly from Richelieu, as that would demonstrate that Richelieu intended to ally himself with the far-right. Thus she asked him to “think about what I am telling you, but keep my secret; do not mention me in any fashion, and know that I am grateful for this trust which can only arise from a real attachment.”

Although we have no record of the conversation between Richelieu and Montcalm that precipitated this letter, she was clearly acting with his blessing. Brother and sister may have disliked the prospect of any female involvement in politics, but they also realized that women could be effective political actors. She could call on her social and emotional power for political purposes. By suggesting that the ultras should visit Richelieu more, she was organizing male sociability and telling men to behave with more courtesy. At the same time, by sending him a secret, she indicated that she liked and trusted him; in this respect, she was reciprocating Hyde’s movement toward friendship. All of this would make Hyde more invested in trying to end the ultras’ hostility toward Richelieu. If Montcalm and Richelieu felt friendly toward the ultras, shouldn’t they reciprocate by ceasing their attacks?

Montcalm was quite conscious of what she was doing here. In her journal she discussed Hyde’s character and focused on his hotheadedness. She hoped that his political passions would cool during his sojourn to the United States, allowing him to become a valuable ally. In her words, “his inherent loyalty could make him very useful when distance and time” calmed his head. This statement indicates that she was primarily thinking about Hyde as a political asset and that there was considerable calculation in her letter. She may have genuinely liked him, but she also wanted to win him over, something she could do by treating him with affection. In this case she was performing a set of emotions to effect political change. If men could manipulate norms of female emotional susceptibility, as in the case of the encounter between Rémusat and Dosne, women could in turn cultivate their own emotional expressions for political purposes.

When Hyde took up his diplomatic post in the United States, Montcalm continued her attempts at reconciliation. One way she did this was through sending news to him that was designed to bring him closer to Richelieu’s views. In one letter she spoke of Richelieu’s latest achievements and then
stated, “Your friends [i.e., the ultras], Monsieur, still want to remain estranged from a ministry which, by bringing the Church back to France and by strongly punishing conspiracies, proves definitively that it is not an enemy of the king nor of the altar.” Just as she used her account of events to attack the ultras and make the case for her brother’s position, she also called on her access to Richelieu’s emotions to convince Hyde de Neuville of her brother’s high opinion of him. In the same letter she reported that Richelieu, who was Hyde’s superior as minister of foreign affairs, was happy with his work. She writes, “My brother is very pleased with your letters and your reports. I continue to take a great satisfaction in hearing how highly he speaks of you.” Soon after, Richelieu himself wrote Hyde and praised Hyde’s diplomatic achievements. This was a semi-official letter and was without Montcalm’s professions of affection or warm tone. The contrast between the two letters is a further indication of how women were able to communicate in ways that men were not. Her letters were emotional and could use sentiment to create cohesion between the two men. Montcalm was also able to suggest that, as her brother’s confidante, she could accurately describe Richelieu’s mental state. This allowed her to build trust between these two men; not only should Hyde trust Richelieu’s policies, but he should also feel positively inclined toward her brother because Richelieu appreciated his work so much. As will be discussed below, Montcalm was highly successful in her efforts, for when Hyde returned to France, he showed an eagerness to work with moderates and with Richelieu.

Many of the same uses of women in politics are apparent in Guizot’s attempt to make a political comeback during the Second Republic. Examined here are his efforts after the end of the July Monarchy, but he was clearly using techniques that he had learned decades before. In May 1849, while in exile in Britain, he ran as a candidate for the Constituent Assembly of the new republic to which he was opposed. In order to win, he needed the backing of conservatives outside the doctrinaire camps and he looked to Catholics and legitimists for support, including the comte de Montalembert, Louis Veuillot, and the duc de Noailles. Here, Guizot was trying to ally himself with men who had been his opponents in the years of the July Monarchy on both the right (legitimists) and the left (the liberal Catholic Montalembert). Any animus now had to be turned into goodwill. It was his friend Mme Lenormant who made this possible and who forged this alliance. She was the adopted daughter of Mme Récamier, whose salon was a center of legitimist society during the July Monarchy. She was also married to one of Montalembert’s
friends and collaborators. Although Lenormant’s precise politics are unknown, her letters demonstrate that she was a monarchist who abhorred the Revolution of 1848.  

Lenormant aided Guizot in the formation of an alliance with other conservatives in a variety of ways. She put him into contact with them, showed them his pamphlets, and reported his views to them. Guizot and his newfound allies tended not to write directly to each other, but rather through Lenormant; she sent Guizot the letters she received from other conservatives about this alliance and in turn showed them the letters that he sent her. In this respect, her actions were similar to those of Montcalm over thirty years earlier. She, too, communicated between different factions, and both women used their personal correspondence with their male friends to convey political information. Similarly, as in the letters between Montcalm and Hyde de Neuville, Guizot relied on Lenormant to deploy emotions and build trust. One way he did this was by including statements in his letters to Lenormant about how much he liked and respected these other conservatives, information that Lenormant was to pass on. For instance, in a November 1848 letter, Guizot asked Lenormant to show Noailles a portion of his manuscript *De la Démocratie en France*. Then he went on to state how much he valued and trusted Noailles; in his words, “The more that I know him, the more I feel a solid esteem for him.” He then reported that he thought very highly of Noailles’s recent book on Mme de Maintenon.

In his letters, Guizot also repeatedly mentioned that he desired more than just a temporary political alliance with these conservatives—that he actually liked them and wanted to become friends with them. For example, in a letter from February 1848, he wrote the following to Mme Lenormant about a M. de Fontette with whom he was trying to align himself: “I am happy that he has taken up my cause and am greatly touched by the zeal with which he has undertaken it. I would very much like for more than an electoral rapprochement between us to come out of this one day.” Here, Guizot invokes emotional terms—“happy” and “greatly touched,” most notably—and indicates that he wanted to turn his political alliance with Fontette into a personal friendship. Similarly, in March 1849, Guizot wrote the following: “The *entente cordiale* with M. de Montalembert is more important to me than I can say, first for my own satisfaction, secondly so that conservatives can succeed. And I hope that when we are able to see each other more, this *entente cordiale* will become more than that.” The ability of Lenormant to make friends for Guizot called on the socializing power she had as a woman. In this case,
though, Guizot’s expressions of sentiment were functioning largely as tropes and should not be seen as the pure outpourings of his heart. His concern, after all, was with politics, not with expanding his friendship network. By using the language of affection, he could suggest that he was inclined to treat his newfound allies like friends in the political realm. In essence, he was offering promises of open communication and political—not personal—loyalty, and trying to convince Montalembert and Fontette that he had their best interests at heart. Conservative politicians also relayed their emotions and good intentions through Lenormant, although they tended to speak in terms that conveyed more distance and invoked less affection. For instance, in September 1848, Montalembert sent a letter to her that was then passed on to Guizot in which he stated the following: “Please tell M. Guizot how much I value his goodwill and respect. I have known and admired him for almost twenty years.”

These men could not communicate directly with one another both because of the codes of emotional restraint that governed correspondence between men and because they did not know each other particularly well. But as a woman with close connections to both Guizot and his new allies, Lenormant had a unique ability to convey affection between men.

One reason that all these politicians communicated through Lenormant was that she was seen as having special access to Guizot’s interiority. When Lenormant showed Montalembert some of her letters from Guizot in March 1849, he wrote her that it was so helpful to read Guizot’s correspondence with Lenormant because it contained “the private outpourings of friendship.” In this instance, the fact that Lenormant was a private actor with a personal relationship to Guizot meant that their correspondence was especially revelatory about his true feelings. The privacy of their communications was a guarantee of the authenticity of Guizot’s statements. Because she was a female friend, someone who might be understood to be Guizot’s confidante, he would be entirely sincere with her. He could not and would not hide his true opinions. Thus the letters that Lenormant received from Guizot and his potential allies were both private and public, and it was their supposed privacy that made them so politically valuable. These male politicians knew that their letters were liable to be passed around, as they were writing for one another and not Lenormant. But through drawing on the codes of male/female correspondence and confidence, they could claim to be operating openly and honestly. Privacy was here not a retreat from the political but a way to facilitate it.

In the end Lenormant’s efforts did bear some fruit, and, although Guizot was not elected, he did run with the support of other conservatives. This was
also the first step toward a monarchical fusion, an effort that would preoccupy Guizot in his later years. What Lenormant effectively did was build a chain of trust that stretched from Guizot to her and then to his new allies. Catholics and legitimists could trust her because of their own social connections to her and because they knew that she and Guizot trusted each other. Because Guizot was communicating through a female friend, they were assured of his good intentions. And indeed, it was Lenormant’s gender that was crucial here. As a woman, she could facilitate contact between social and political groupings, and she could cultivate social ties between men. She could also speak to the different parties in ways that men could not in order to ensure that these politicians trusted one another.

**Female Power and Female Politics?**

If women were powerful conduits for trust and crucial political actors, this naturally leads to questions about women’s power and women’s politics. First, in their roles in alliance formation and emotional management, can we see some sort of female politics? In his work on salons in this period, Steven Kale describes how the salonnières of the early nineteenth century were interested in a politics of reconciliation, as they tried to overcome the divisions of the post-revolutionary era. Are women’s roles as mediators and forgers of alliances another version of this politics of reconciliation? In some cases the answer is a clear yes. Mme de Montcalm is the best example of this. Her diary from the early years of the Restoration records her deep distress at the factional divisions of the time. She disliked politics because it created enmity between individuals and poisoned social relations. Her work on behalf of her brother thus arose in part out of a desire to heal the ideological divisions that had made high society so unpleasant. However, this should not be seen as a distinctly female politics, for the reconciliation that she effected was something that both Richelieu and prominent ultra politicians desired. Indeed it was Hyde de Neuville who first approached Montcalm. Similarly, when Rémusat reached out to Dosne in 1840 and when Guizot tried to ally himself with centrists through Gasparin that same year, it was men who initiated these negotiations. Moreover, some of the women discussed in this chapter were uninterested in reconciliation. Both Mme de La Trémoïlle and Mme de Broglie were invested in strengthening their factions and not in reaching out to other political groupings. Thus the incidents detailed here do not
demonstrate so much a feminized vision of political and social reconciliation, but rather a series of functions that women were better able to undertake than men.

If we do not see a particular female politics at work here, we can still ask why women undertook these roles. What did they think they were doing and how much political change were they able to effect? In some cases, these acts of female political involvement arose out of strong ideological conviction, such as Mme de Broglie’s attempt to keep Barante in France. Mme Lenormant’s letters to Guizot also indicate that she was heavily invested in facilitating an alliance between Guizot and other conservatives because she hated the Revolution of 1848 and wanted to reestablish the monarchy. Uniting Catholics, legitimists and Orleanists was one way to halt the Revolution. Similarly, Mme de Montcalm provides a clear example of a woman whose actions arose from her political commitments. She was an intermediary between ultras and Richelieu because she wanted to help her brother and because it suited her politics. In her journal she spoke of herself as a royalist who was suspicious of both the far-right and the far-left. While she helped her brother work with ultras, she was opposed to their excesses. By calming the political passions of moderate ultras, she hoped to unite all monarchists and establish the regime on a more solid footing. Likewise, Allart’s actions as a political facilitator during the Restoration probably arose out of her commitment to liberalism. In her autobiography, she claimed that she wanted to orchestrate a meeting between Chateaubriand and Béranger because of the distinctly nonpolitical desire to bring together two literary men who admired each other. But this was also a political move, for it showed the wide spectrum of opposition to the governing ministry, and in this respect the encounter between the two men bolstered the liberal cause. Hence, some of the women studied here were heavily engaged in politics and saw themselves as having clear political goals that they were in a unique position to achieve.

Not all political involvement, however, arose from deep conviction, and some of these women saw themselves as having relatively limited or no political aims. Mme Récamier is an obvious example. She mediated between Chateaubriand and Mathieu de Montmorency for personal reasons, despite the fact that she was considerably more moderate than were either of them. In some cases, women made no effort to change the views of the men around them. For instance, in 1821, when Montcalm reached out to Chateaubriand so that he might gain a cabinet position, she wanted to alter how he expressed his views, and not the views themselves. The letters between Guizot and
Lenormant in 1848 and 1849 show that there was considerable disagreement between him and other conservatives over both aims and tactics. Montalembert, for instance, was unhappy with Guizot’s position on Catholics and did not even think that he should run for a seat in the Constituent Assembly. Lenormant communicated these differences, but she did not try to convince Guizot that he should change his politics, nor did she state that she would try to change the views of Guizot’s newfound allies on his behalf. In both cases these women wanted to build working relationships between politicians despite their disagreements.

There are a few instances, however, when women did try to change the politics of the men around them, and these cases are instructive about the possibilities and limits of women’s political power. Allart seems to have wanted to expose Chateaubriand to her position in 1829 and 1830; in her autobiography she writes of reading articles from Thiers’s liberal journal Le National to him. Given her own liberalism, she probably did this to expose Chateaubriand to her views. But of all the women studied here, it was Mme de Montcalm who was most invested in—and most successful at—shaping politics around personal relations, and she did manage to change Hyde de Neuville’s position. This is apparent in his memoirs when he describes his political activity after his return from the United States. In his mind Montcalm had convinced him to adopt a more centrist position. For example, in an 1820 letter to her, he spoke of being “an ultra and a moderate at the same time”—that is to say, he thought of himself as having allegiances to both the far-right and the center-right. And in the same letter he indicated why he was drawn to political moderation and Richelieu’s position. He wrote, “As for your brother, I am bound to him because of him, because of you.” By his own account his allegiance to Richelieu arose at least in part out of an allegiance to Montcalm. And indeed, Hyde backed up his words with action. This letter was written when Richelieu was trying to include ultras in a new cabinet. He and Montcalm asked Hyde to approach Villèle about joining the new government. When Hyde went to Villèle, he stated that he was not asking on Richelieu’s behalf, “but on behalf of someone dear to him [i.e., Montcalm].” Of course, this allowed him to reassure Villèle that he had not entirely quit the ultra camp and was not doing any favors for Richelieu. It also reflected the fact that in his mind, he was acting for Montcalm and not her brother. Thus Montcalm’s estimation of Hyde’s character did prove to be correct. Once she had cultivated goodwill for her brother and more importantly for herself, he was a useful ally, one who worked between ultras and moderates for her sake. To be sure,
this political moderation was not too far a stretch for Hyde, for he had always held centrist views. What Montcalm did was bring his moderation to the fore while calming his impassioned hostility toward compromise. In other words, she succeeded in using the emotions to reorganize the political landscape.

During the July Monarchy, Mme de Gasparin also attempted to use her friendship with Guizot to move him to the center, but she had far less success in her endeavors. Unfortunately, we only have Guizot’s side of their correspondence; at her request, he burned all her letters. As a result, we cannot know her exact politics nor how she made her case to Guizot. Nevertheless, his letters make it clear that she was more moderate than he and that she wanted to move him away from his conservative stance. For example, in 1839, she argued that he should ally himself with Thiers and Odilon Barrot, which he briefly did. Barrot, in particular, was far to his left, and any long-standing alliance with him would have pulled Guizot toward a more moderate position. One year later, during the crisis of 1840, Gasparin again showed her political stripes, as she backed Thiers’s left-leaning cabinet, while Guizot opposed it. In May, she tried to convince him of the merits of her position. In his reply—he only flash of anger in their long correspondence—he strongly rebuked her and asserted that he was unquestionably right in his views. Two months later, however, he asked her to write him about her opinions on international and domestic matters, as he saw her as a barometer of public opinion. Since he was outside of France, she could help him understand the reactions to Thiers’s government. In other words, he wanted to hear her views only insofar as they were useful to him. Her role was to aid him and help him achieve his goals, not to convince him to achieve hers.

Gasparin and Montcalm had many of the same desires, for both wanted to move the men around them to the center. But in Montcalm’s case, her political activity gave her power, whereas Gasparin’s work as a communicator deprive her of any such influence. If female political interventions did not always allow women to have a voice in politics, they did not necessarily deny this to women either. Beyond such generalizations, how can we understand the difference between Montcalm’s success and Gasparin’s failure? It is not that Hyde de Neuville was more open to women’s political engagement than was Guizot. Both maintained that women should play no part in politics. Hyde also wanted to use La Trémoïlle in many of the same ways that Guizot sought to use Gasparin.

Part of the difference may have had to do with the nature of the bonds Hyde and Guizot had with Montcalm and Gasparin, respectively. Hyde’s
memoirs paint him as almost besotted with Montcalm after his return from the United States. For example, he writes that their bond was “the relation that was the sweetest to me”; such intense affection made him eager to please her.51 Guizot’s tie with Gasparin was loving but appears to be have been less intense. Additionally, in 1840, the woman to whom he was closest was not Gasparin but Lieven, who heavily disliked Thiers’s foreign policy.52 But undoubtedly the most important difference was that Hyde’s politics were more flexible than Guizot’s. The former’s ultra beliefs were tinged with moderation, whereas during the 1840s the latter’s conservatism was unbending. Hyde also wanted to reach out to moderates like Richelieu, but Guizot had no interest in agreeing with Gasparin’s positive assessment of Thiers’s government. Indeed, had he backed the cabinet, he would have placed himself out of contention for being a viable alternative to Thiers—and therefore out of the running for forming a government himself. In other words, women could influence men when they wanted to be influenced, but they could not necessarily make them change their minds when the men had no desire to do so. In the end, it was men who would make any final decisions in the political realm. Because women accessed the world of high politics through their male friends, it was men, and not women, who held ultimate authority over this arena.

Women did not enter the political terrain on equal footing with men; they could make suggestions and open up alternatives, but they were not necessarily able to change the minds of the men around them. Despite these limitations, it is clear that women were not passive actors in the political life of the time. Certainly, the various roles that these women played within the new parliamentary system were powerful and necessary. Because women were understood as private actors who were excluded from the public sphere, they were particularly suited to work between politicians and build trust within parliamentary life in a more robust way than were men. In an era when many were concerned about high levels of anomie and suspicion, one without political parties or even necessarily clear governing majorities, female friends were invaluable in creating the trust that allowed the parliamentary system to function. They thus made the political regimes of the Restoration and July Monarchy viable. Individuals of the time may have wanted to exclude women from politics and to separate the private from the public, but they found this was impossible in practice, for in the end the social and emotional functions of female friends were too useful in political life.