

Feminism in French Novels in the Late Renaissance-From the Perspective of Madeleine de Scudéry's "The Story of Sapho"

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Received: 23/04/2022
Accepted: 24/06/2022
Published: 01/09/2022

Volume: 3 Issue: 5

How to cite this paper: Zhao, J. (2022). Feminism in French Novels in the Late Renaissance-From the Perspective of Madeleine de Scudéry's "The Story of Sapho". *Journal of Critical Studies in Language and Literature*, 3(5), 9-16
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46809/jcsll.v3i5.165>

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Abstract

At the end of the Renaissance, Madeleine de Scudéry, an early exponent of historical fiction, infused French feminism with the spiritual qualities of the Renaissance with her novel *The Story of Sapho*. In this context, this essay takes it as the main subject and analyses the feminist qualities of this novel by examining the influence of the work over a period of nearly four centuries and comparing it specifically with the ideas of Gournay, one of the pioneers of French feminism, Rousseau, a revolutionary tutor, and Mona Ozouf, a contemporary historian. The study reveals that, unlike the feminism of Gournay's novel, Scudéry uses Sapho to reveal the birth of a new era of women with feminine virtue, feminine friendship and feminine love, and in this way to leave behind the old feminism of power struggles and gender differences. In the 18th century, this novel influenced Rousseau's *Émile*, in which the heroes and heroines are highly similar, and he continues to some extent the universalist spirit of *The Story of Sapho*, Rousseau's examination of the relationship between men and women has a similar concern to that of Scudéry, the pursuit of a harmonious society for both sexes. Finally, this novel echoes the uniqueness of French feminism as described by contemporary historian Mona Ozouf. In the long line of French feminism, Scudéry's vision embodies the humanistic concerns of a feminism with a humanist core.

Keywords: Late Renaissance, French Feminism, Aristocratic Feminism, Madeleine de Scudéry

1. Introduction

The development of early modern French feminism was accompanied by the rise of women's literature, especially in novel. Madeleine de Scudéry (1607-1701), one of the representatives of historical novel, was also known as Mademoiselle Scudéry because she never married. As a famous French female writer in the 17th century, her works were diverse in genres, broad in themes, huge in number, and flourishing for a time. In 1641, she published his first historical novel *L'Illustre Bassa*. From 1648 to 1653, published ten volumes of his novel *Le Cyrus*, one of the longest novels in the world, with more than two million words, attracting a wide European audience. Ten volumes of the novel *La Clélie* were published between 1654 and 1661. Throughout his novels, the most famous is the ten-volume, and the last volume, *Histoire de Sapho*, discusses the topic of women, and Scudéry regards Sapho as the key to understanding its feminism, and it also provides a different perspective for in-depth exploration of feminism in French novel at the end of the Renaissance.

The discussion of feminism in this novel has focused on the following aspects: firstly, the rhetorical exploration of the feminine way of discourse embedded in the language of Sapho, the heroine of the novel (Donawerth 1998, p.181-199).

Secondly, from the perspective of identity, the transformation of female identity in the 17th century is analyzed by means of Sapho (Feat 2012, p.217-242). Third, the sociological perspective of Sapho reveals the social situation of women in personal

and public space, the specific historical context in which women were living in the 17th century (Green 2009, p.272-285). Fourthly, it explores the controversy that Sappho as a specific female figure provoked in France. As can be seen, this novel provides the researcher with an intellectual resource for understanding French feminism. Textual analysis is therefore necessarily linked to a feminist vision, grounded in rhetorical, linguistic and sociological perspectives, in order to interpret the feminist world of Scudéry's writing.

The above-mentioned studies show that this novel has received sufficient attention in English and American literature, and that Sappho, as the protagonist of a classic feminist novel, has become one of the most iconic textual symbols of traditional Western feminist thought. However, these studies have mostly dismantled this novel in terms of textual analysis, without analyzing its historical impact on feminism, how the work has influenced feminist thought in later generations, which is very important. In order to achieve this, this paper seeks to use *The Story of Sappho* as an analytical text to reveal the qualities of Scudéry's feminism, situating the novel in the context of feminist thought at the end of the Renaissance, firstly by tracing the realities of early feminism forward, and then by identifying the distinctive features of Scudéry's feminist thought in its confrontation with another feminist thinker, Gournay. It is in this way that the intellectual value and historical significance of Scudéry's feminist thought in the seventeenth century can be understood. Secondly, this novel continued to be influential in the writing of Rousseau, the revolutionary mentor of the 18th century. By reading and analyzing Rousseau's classic educational work *Émile*, it is possible to understand the feminist elements shared by Sappho and *Émile*, as well as the differences between them. The comparison with the characters in Rousseau's work allows for an exploration of feminism in the historical context of the eighteenth century, thus providing an echo of ideas from the eighteenth century for an in-depth analysis of *The Story of Sappho*. Finally, even in contemporary society, it continues to inspire contemporary feminist thinkers, particularly Mona Ozouf, a French feminist thinker who, in her historiography *The Discourse of Women*, examines the distinctive ideas of many women thinkers throughout history, but whose commonality lies in the fact that they all find a universalist resonance in gender difference. This feminist quality of unity in difference is clearly relevant to Scudéry's thought in this book. Thus, Scudéry's ideas have survived in twentieth-century society, revealing the roots of a French feminist tradition that spans nearly four centuries.

In summary, this paper focuses on Scudéry's book *The Story of Sappho* in the following way: firstly, by presenting Scudéry's feminist thought through a detailed textual analysis, and secondly, by placing it in the historical perspective of the 17th-19th centuries and exploring the influence and resonance of the work in different historical periods. The significance of this paper is to clarify the unique value of Scudéry's feminism, namely that it does not conform to the traditional path of Anglo-American feminism towards a binary structure of gender difference and gender opposition, but that it fully expresses the universalism of French feminism, namely the harmonious relationship between men and women, the happy collaboration. The paper is therefore strongly realist in its concern and is of great significance for understanding the uniqueness of French feminist thought.

2. Feminism in 16th Century Literary Writing

In the 16th century, the Renaissance began in France. After King Francois came to power, he declared himself the protector of humanism, science and art, and established the French Academy in 1530, thus promoting the historical process of the French Renaissance. *Essais* by Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), the father of the French Renaissance, created a new literary genre, and his essays reflected the spiritual picture of the French, which inspired the French society to explore the spirit of humanism. Under the guidance of the spiritual mentor Montaigne, the concept of the Renaissance penetrated the literary writing of French women, opening the French feminist trend of thought during the Renaissance. Currently, there were many female writers calling for the liberation of women and for women's rights in the French literary world, the most striking of which was Marie Le Jars de Gournay. As Montaigne's close friend and editor, Gournay's female thinking was influenced by Montaigne. She believed in equality between men and women. This belief coincides with Montaigne's relativism, that is, thinking from the perspective of the other. In Gournay's *Equality Between Men and Women*, she argues for gender equality from a biblical and ecclesiastical perspective, beginning with Genesis, where the Bible holds that both men and women are in the image of God Created, they all can think rationally, and they are all subjects with the same rights and obligations (Gournay 2008, p.56).

And in *Les femmes et Grief des Dames*, Gournay explores the roots of female misogyny, which keeps women enslaved. She argues that the current subordination of women to men is based on prejudice and that only a lack of educational opportunities can explain the differences in cultural achievement between men and women. Women's own historical achievements show that prejudice alone creates irrational denigration of women. Thus, giving women equal access to education would quickly overcome the burden they currently bear. The deprivation of education is the only reason for the gender gap in cultural achievement. If women are not as brilliant as men, it is because they lack a good education. Women should not allow this to undermine their belief that they can achieve anything. The path to gender equality in the future lies in improving women's access to education and eliminate stereotypes that discriminate against women, which make women reluctant to even try to achieve cultural achievements. Gournay understands the importance of education in promoting women's social status and saving misogyny, and for this she strives to play the role of an image of an educated and intellectual woman to encourage French women to be educated like her.

The emergence of Gournay-style feminism was not only influenced by the spirit of the Renaissance, adoptive father and mentor Montaigne, but also reflected the social situation of this period: monarchical rule, hierarchy and bourgeois way of life and the developing republic (freedom) Spiritual coexistence. Feminist theory was shaped by the new pressures society imposed

on women: on the one hand, noble women lost considerable economic, political and cultural power. On the other hand, according to the new gender structure of housewives, a new female class emerged, which immediately showed the decline of the power of noble women and the forced naturalization of the power of middle-class women. However, this situation has arisen thanks to the new educational power that some women have acquired. Thus, Gournay feminist theory is rooted in humanistic forms of literacy.

To argue for the need for women's power, Gournay cites the ancient history of the ancestors, pointing out that the *lex Salica* was enacted to control the disputed right of inheritance, enforced in France because women had the same rights as men in earlier times. In the distant past, Spartan men consulted with women on all public and private matters. Early feminists mostly turned to female representatives of the old order and maintained conservative romanticism. To the extent that their political conservatism limited their class, they were isolated by class privilege and knew little about the lives of most other women and did not see them as a source of power. But Gournay differs from her predecessors in that the ideology and gender concepts behind her works are novel and advanced, and she believes that all women should regain their own power.

However, although Gournay was the first woman to explicitly use the term "equality of the sexes" in her defense (Green 2013, p.499-515). But, like a later generation of egalitarian feminists, she also frames her feminism as an escape from the female state to equality with men, and she does not question the cultural superiority of men. As such, its general orientation and situation is like that of 20th-century feminists, such as Simone de Beauvoir, who, critics of a younger generation, argue that she seeks to force women into masculine values and erase gender differences. Gournay's work did not attract readers' attention at the time, but his gender equality theory did trigger the discussion of women in 16th-century literary writing. Half a century later, Scudéry is the "heir and critic" of her thought.

3. Sapho and the Rise of Aristocratic Feminism

3.1. *Dialogue Instead of Confrontation - The Mystery of Female Virtue*

For Scudéry, Gournay's view that in order to achieve gender equality, the meaning of women's education is led to strive for equal rights with men is obviously rude, which implies that the purpose of women's pursuit of equality is only to obtain the current belonging to the way to achieve equality in masculine things is to demand women from a masculine perspective. This leads to the result that gender differences are erased. Compared with Gournay's masculine gender proposition, Scudéry focuses on the unique nature of women and the inherent virtues of women, especially humility, gentleness, and non-pedantry.

Despite his poverty, Scudéry was adopted by his uncle and was able to learn writing, spelling, painting, dancing, painting and needlework, agriculture, cooking, Spanish and Italian (Elshtain 1981, p.3). While in Marseilles, Scudéry wrote the long historical novel *Le Cyrus*, that established her reputation as a novelist so that she was able to start her own "Saturday Salon". She found that most women were influenced by Gournay's ideas and began to imitate and play Gournay-like women, who did their best in the salon to show their knowledge and skills. At first, such women in the salon could win people's welcome and respect, but it didn't take long for Scudéry to reflect on the Gournay-style women in the salon, and she found that lots of women were not talented. Instead, they use talent and knowledge as a tool to decorate their facades and make themselves extraordinary, which is essentially just the embodiment of pedantic spirit.

In the novel, Scudéry uses Sapho to denounce this phenomenon. She portrays the heroine Sapho as an example of a good woman, a woman who is truly learned rather than pedantic: "But, as someone who knows so many things, what is admirable about her is that she knows these things, no pedantry, no arrogance, no contempt for the unlearned. Her speech was so natural, so easy, so charming" (Scudéry 2003, p.15). Don't think that Sapho is pretending to be vulgar and ignorant in a conversation, on the contrary, she knows very well the art of conducting the conversation. She always finds new ways to please the people she respects, let them know her love and she will not be jealous, she prefers to praise people rather than be praised (Scudéry 2003, p.16).

Contrasted with the pedantic woman: "In Mytilene there was a woman named Damophile who had seen Sapho and began to imitate. She considered herself the Sapho of her neighbors" (Scudéry 2003, p.22). Damophile believed she had found the secret to gaining more reputation. She was always behind five or six teachers, often writes letters to people who do science, but dare not speak to uneducated people. You can always find fifteen or twenty books on her desk, and you will find she always has one. There are far more books in her study than she has ever read, and in Sapho you won't see as many books. Damophile always used some big words, she always spoke arrogantly in a solemn tone. By contrast, Sapho used ordinary language to express the most admirable things. Also, Damophile believed that study and family affairs were incompatible, she doesn't condescend to take part in family affairs, Sapho does it herself. Not only does Damophile speak like a book, but she also keeps talking about it, citing writers she has never heard of in everyday conversation, like at a prestigious university public speaking (Scudéry 2003, p.23).

Unlike Damophile, Sapho was terrified to be seen as knowledgeable, she said: "I just want to be like everyone else. I'm so wrapped up in my poetry, my learning and my wisdom that I think stupid, and ignorance is the supreme good" (Scudéry 2003, p.30). "I will often feel all the trouble that my reputation has caused me, and I want to get rid of Sapho myself. If you can read my heart, you will know that there is nothing like putting me When a learned lady treats me even more insulting. So, I beg you all, don't let this persecution happen, I'm going to declare to the world that I'm not what they say I am (Damophile)" (Scudéry 2003, p.34). Sapho does not want to be held in high esteem, nor to be completely avoided. She just wants to be treated the same as ordinary women, not as a schoolgirl.

However, to avoid being like Damophile, it takes an infusion of tenderness, humility, grace, and charm. Sapho was such a woman herself, as evidenced by the words of his male companion Phaon: "I think that Sapho was so gentle, so kind, so charming, that her poems were loved by people all over the world" (Scudéry 2003, p.39). "The woman I'm describing knows how to use her mind, she knows how to hide her intelligence subtly and not show it vulgarly...A woman who can understand languages, she can admit to having read Homer, the excellent works of Hesiod and the famous Aristaeus, rather than being a nerd, she can even express her opinion in a humble way" (Scudéry 2003.p.45). Sapho also admitted: "I hope that women are neither too erudite, not too ignorant, but better use the advantages that nature gives them. As I have said, I want them to adorn their hearts as well as their exteriors" (Scudéry 2003, p.46). What Sapho in writing is against the Gournay-style women, who have talent and knowledge only to highlight their own superiority, which may cause intellectual discrimination against men, is not conducive to gender equality, and at the same time risks erasing women's virtues. To this end, Scudéry encourages women to accept gender differences, cherish female virtues, and talk to men as much as possible, not against them.

3.2. *The Bridge Leading to Equality in Love - The Charm of Female Friendship*

As mentioned above, Scudéry translates gender opposition into a conversational mode of good form. On this basis, she believes that in order to promote equality between men and women, not only the prerequisites of this equal dialogue are needed, but also the idea of "celibacy to achieve equality between men and women" must be eliminated. In fact, Gournay lived his whole life alone in order to practice his philosophy, and always held a hostile attitude towards men. In her view, equality between men and women does not mean severing love. Gournay's so-called worry is because she regards love and marriage as the shackles that make women into slavery, which will ruin women's pursuit of equality. However, Scudéry did not fully accept this idea, believing that it was an escape from the problem of Gournay feminism. Women may not marry, but this does not mean the disappearance of love. So, how did Scudéry avoid the dilemma that love marriages might lead to women being subordinate to their husbands? She believes that the low status of women in marriage is caused by historical tradition on the one hand, and the unstable foundation of love on the other.

In the story, Sapho's world is centered on women. Sapho is always looking for love "as strong as friendship", and she believes that the best state of a relationship between men and women needs to be built on a strong emotional foundation. Sapho's friendship is platonic. They often sit together, chatting from day to night, introducing new friends to each other and exchanging ideas. They have a close relationship and focus on spiritual exchanges. Sapho realized that women's friendships are emotionally strong and can even be the bonds that hold together relationships. Compared with male-female relationships, female friendships are naturally stable, and same-sex friendships are more stable than opposite-sex friendships. To this end, Sapho tried to introduce female friendship into the relationship between the two sexes, using the tender, intimate and inseparable characteristics of female friendship to make the relationship between men and women have the positive characteristics of female friendship.

Scudéry has created a wise and decisive Sapho. Sapho's way of dealing with men is not purely sexual attraction but looks at the men who adore her from the perspective of friendship. Then ask her admirers to stay close to her like her female friends, gentle, loyal, and dedicated, rather than acting like a socially disciplined family boss. Loyalty isn't just a trait that women should have, men should be loyal to their relationships too. In the novel, Sapho learns that there is a utopia in the distance, establishing an autonomous country called New Sarmatae, surrounded by a vast wilderness (Scudéry 2003, p.8). The country's young queen came to power, creating an enclave where art and literature flourished, and laws dictated the behavior of lovers, requiring them to remain faithful to their lovers. The Queen interviews all candidates for Utopia to see if they are like-minded and loyal to each other. When Phaon swore to accompany Sapho to this place, Sapho made him promise that he would remain loyal to her and be inseparable. He expressed to Sapho that their fates were inseparable (Scudéry 2003, p.8). At the beginning of the story, Scudéry describes Sapho and her friend as "inseparable", which shows that Sapho applies the closeness of friendship to love (Scudéry 2003, p.17). Solomes, freed from the shackles of marriage, they lived in "the sweetest peace", and the queen forbade any foreigners from entering her kingdom for ten years, so that no one could disturb the peace of the lovers. For them, a passionate love akin to female friendship replaced marriage and ensured their peace in undisturbed exile (Scudéry 2003, p.9).

At the end of the Renaissance, the relationship between men and women was not supported by a firm emotional bond, but was based on a family contract, binding the opposite sex into a marriage relationship. The instability of relationships between men and women boils down to a lack of what sustains the relationship, what Sapho calls the emotional bond. The main reasons are as follows: First, the customs and folk customs that have survived for centuries have not been easily broken. Second, society has not been reconstructed in family, marriage, and gender relations in the ideal model of the Renaissance. Third, social differences between the sexes have not narrowed, and gender antagonisms are still significant. But Scudéry chose to use Sapho to speak to the women of the same period and let them hear her thoughts: avoiding the relationship between men and women does not solve the problem, only formalizing it, and getting along with men in a way that builds same-sex friendships.

3.3. *From Private Space to Public Space - The Power of Female Love*

Scudéry's friendship-based concept of love not only injects new ideas into the development of the family/private sphere, but also extends women's love for men to the public sphere, giving birth to the development and application of women's love in public spaces. In other words, women not only play a role in private space, but also should appear in public space, leaving the female image in private space behind and conquering the public with charm and talent. In modern society, the role of women in public space seems to be a matter of course, but in Scudéry's era, public space is not a stage for women, so it is necessary to understand the relationship between her love and public space. People often think of love as a pure natural passion that has persisted for centuries. However, the origins of the concept of marital love, and especially its political function, as Rousseau clearly articulated it, stemmed at least in part from the work of Scudéry (Losco 1988, p.91-111). According to this modern

concept, love is important to society because it contributes to the emotional cement of the private space on which the public sphere of the state is built. Marriage is taken for granted as a tendency to love, driving the pace of family love to social love.

In the societies before Scudéry, the distinction between modern public/private space was not recognized. Society is conceived to consist of two spheres: a private (female) sphere governed by emotion, private interests, and love; and a public (male) sphere governed by reason, justice, and beyond private interests (Elshtain 1981, p.105). This social space is organized in a Stoic-inspired way that prevailed in the Middle Ages and early modern times, when reason dominated passion in all aspects of life, the family, and the court or public sphere. The family is a private realm of emotional bonds, legally governed by the logic of attraction and love, which is illegal in the public realm (Mews 2007, p.369-384). Therefore, it is precisely based on this division of social space that when the time of social transformation comes, it will collide with the social trend of thought produced by the Renaissance.

The Story of Sapho is a response and reorganization of this social structure: Sapho's world seems to be a society with distinct public and private spaces, everything operates according to the norms of the social structure, and rationality dominates the public space Chinese people actively shape honor and friendship, while sensibility is responsible for putting marriage in the hands of women in private space (Aronson 1979, p.26-39). But it is precisely in this world that Sapho breaks the existing norms and makes new breakthroughs. Romantic love began to be seen as the foundation of marriage in a way that opposed previous thinking. Honour is divided into male and female honors, and the idealized tender friendship is conceptualized as holding between opposite sexes and associating male and female with one's own gender. This new idea of love between the sexes draws from the idealized tradition of friendship. Scudéry tries to introduce the love in the private field into the public space. She believes that women should exert their charm in the public space and enter the public space with the spirit of humility, gentleness, tolerance, consideration, and talent. Therefore, she made great efforts to create Sapho, a beautiful, intelligent, social, gentle and polite female image with the ability of passion and love. And further proposes that these feminine virtues should serve as role models for men to pursue. In the novel, even though Sapho has Phaon as a male companion, she does not stop there, and enters the palace of marriage with him, becoming an ordinary family woman and abandoning her poet who has attracted much attention, passion for speaking. On the contrary, Sapho does not indulge in the world of pure love because of Phaon, although she imagines the utopia of the new place for them to live in, and still plays the highly anticipated female figure.

It is worth noting that Scudéry's way of creating public space is not through Sapho's one-way output of his own ideas and thoughts, but the introduction of private space into public space through dialogue, honor, prestige, friendship, and love. It is not to resist the power of public space represented by men, but to reverse the social situation of women and try to lead them into public space through their own charm, talent, beauty, wisdom, and humility. This process is not violent, but full of romance and tenderness. As she said: "Conversation is the bond of all humane societies, the greatest pleasure of the educated man, and the most common way of introducing the world. The ideal woman is one who speaks rationally. You only must speak gracefully language; you will be fully understood. Through speaking and writing, a woman can create herself" (Scudéry 2014, p.195). "While the conversation demands of its practitioners are primarily easygoing, choosing consensus over endless debate and debate, it fits into the context of women's participation in the salon culture" (Rebhom 1995, p.23-79). Here, we can see, the day in the language as a communication bridge, especially elegant embodiment of rational language can be seen as a women, and women virtue reveals the perfect way, but more importantly, the aim of language communication is not to present women different from men's essential thinking differences or virtue temperament, but useful for gender equality communication tool. Public space is not a vanity fair for power, but a positive space for honest dialogue.

4. The Story of Sapho and French Feminism

4.1. The Story of Sapho and Renaissance Feminism

In Scudéry's narrative, the realization of love through friendship is not the goal, and there is a profound humanistic concern behind it. She not only promoted the further stabilization of the love between men and women, but also extended the emotional issues of the sexes to the humanistic level. She studied under the teachings of Montaigne, and her words are permeated with the female power of humanism. She empowers her characters to be spiritually androgynous, allowing them to perceive and analyze gender relationships to shape love and emotional utopias. In other words, although Sapho and Phaon have their physical roles in the setting, their minds are rich and self-sufficient, with a complete personality aspect. As Desander, one of Sapho's suitors, told Sapho: "You are the only woman in the world who has discovered the art of bringing together all the virtues and good qualities of both genders" (Scudéry 2003, p.66). As a writer, in her circle, Sapho won the honor of men, was supported and loved by men, and gained friendship that belonged to men.

"Madame, I don't believe there is anyone in all of Greece who can compare to Sapho. I won't spend time here talking about her childhood, because when she was 12 years old there was already talk of her being such a beautiful, wise, and a man of judgment, the whole world admires her. I can only say that there has never been anyone with such noble aspirations as her, or with the ability to learn anything she wants to know. Whether Sapho was born from birth how charming she has been since I wanted to portray the wisdom and beauty, she has now so you can get to know her better. Madame, I tell you that although I say Sapho is the most extraordinary and charming woman in all of Greece, you mustn't think of her as the kind of beauty who can't find fault with jealousy. But you should know that although her beauty is not that kind of beauty, it can attract people as much as the most famous beauty in the world" (Scudéry 2003, p.14). More importantly, she has some qualities that are hard to find together, a beautiful and unpretentious face, noble and free at the same time. Or, if you will, you can compare her to a

muse. Beloved, the learned young girl whose hands are worthy of the most beautiful flowers in Parnassos. But what makes Sapho truly admirable is her spiritual charisma, which goes far beyond her personality “She thinks so far, what she doesn't understand, nobody understands. She can learn anything she wants to know, even if you've never heard of it” (Scudéry 2003, p.15).

Phaon, on the other hand, is the male aspect of Sapho: “If his character is admirable, so is his wit and character: he is polite, amiable, neither too cheerful nor too melancholy— —He has everything it takes to please people. He is approachable, speaks well, and knows so many wonderful things that no one knows how to speak and act better than he does. Besides, his character and intelligence are so harmonious, you could say they were a natural match”(Scudéry 2003, p.32). Phaon, too, disliked the Damophile woman: “I wanted her to be beautiful, charming, and conversational, not knowledgeable, because I am very afraid of these rhetorical people, who always stand on the top of Mount Parnassus and speak to people only in the language of God” (Scudéry 2003, p.34). And of Sapho, Phaon is full of praise: “She has unexpected the beauty of the soul and the charming temperament, cannot help but please people, become charming and much loved” (Scudéry 2003, p.38). He has a highly similar soul to Sapho, transcends gender differences, and at the same time combines the common virtues of both genders, cherishes and appreciates each other, and finally loves each other, becoming a community through dialogue rather than confrontation.

On the one hand, Scudéry made Sapho and Phaon similar in spirit to each other, but he also made Sapho show his masculine spirit and charm. Her submission became her conquest. Therefore, Sapho is a masculine woman, and “conquest” is an important honor for Sapho, which can prevent women from becoming slaves to marriage. Scudéry is not satisfied with creating a perfect and eye-catching heroine Sapho, but will achieve spiritual attraction, complementarity and fusion in the spiritual dialogue and collision with the other Phaon. Scudéry did not accept the feminist argument of Gournay but reiterated the spiritual core of humanism to help people better understand the importance of gender differences to the realization of gender equality. Based on fully recognizing the gender characteristics of both sexes, realize the two-way equality of men and women. From her “aristocratic feminism”, we can see the spirit of humanism: transcending the barriers between the sexes, superimposing friendship and love, exerting the power of women in public spaces, and balancing the social situation of both sexes, these propositions all demonstrate Scudéry's humanistic feelings.

4.2. *The Birth of The Story of Sapho and Émile: ou De l'éducation*

The Story of Sapho not only influenced contemporary readers, but also later readers. Among them, the most noteworthy is Rousseau's inheritance of Scudéry's feminist thought. As a loyal reader of her novels, Rousseau has been reading her novels tirelessly since he was a child. *The Story of Sapho* aroused Rousseau's deep thinking on the relationship between husband and wife, and Rousseau created the characters of Émile and Sophie with reference to the relationship between Sapho and Phaon. In “*Émile*”, Rousseau's setting of Émile and his female companion Sophie has a certain degree of similarity with Scudéry's setting of Sapho and Phaon (Green 2009, p. 272-285). “As *Émile* is a man, Sophie should be a woman, that is to say, she should have all the characteristics of a woman in order to take on the tasks she is obliged to undertake, both physically and mentally” (Rousseau 2011, p.442). Although Rousseau noted that Gender similarities and differences can make it difficult to compare men and women, but he understands the significance of similarities. “The only thing we know for sure is this: what men and women have in common is that they are both human, and what they differ is their sexuality. From both points of view, we find that they have both There are so many similarities and so many opposites that we can say that it is indeed one of the miracles that nature has made two people so alike and so different” (Rousseau 2011, p.446). Like Scudéry, he sees the importance of male and female characteristics in building a good relationship and affirms the positive significance of developing a perfect personality and a healthy relationship.

Sensibility and emotion are also indispensable to Rousseau (Green 1996, p.87-109). Compared with contemporary male writers who tend to put reason over passion, Rousseau emphasizes the importance of love and emotion. Rousseau agrees with Scudéry that the honor of man lies in the subjugation of love by inspiring love through virtue, so that women rule over the hearts of men. Émile has indeed become a man with a rich emotional world. However, what Rousseau inherited was the rational and prudent principle of Scudéry on love relationships, that is, both men and women should not fall into a state of slavery. Fearing that Émile would be enslaved in love with Sophie, his mentor (Rousseau) insisted that the young man learn to control his passions by leaving Sophie. So, Rousseau tried to use Émile to speak for his fellow men, reminding them that men can't get lost in the state of love and abandon public affairs. They must maintain rationality and control their passions in order not to fall into the clutches of love and marriage. For Émile, reason was important: When he reach the age of desire, he cultivates reason with senses.

Still, Rousseau does not fully accept Scudéry's ideas, but shows something special: When they finally get married, Sophie must accept that Émile is her master, and at the same time, by manipulating Émile she is sure that she will rule him through love. While Rousseau affirmed the charm of female love in Scudéry's words, he denied the status of women. On the one hand, he accepts the value of female virtues and recognizes the positive significance of femininity but tries to avoid irrational love flooding the public space and affecting the function and social orientation of men in the public space. Rousseau described his republic as consisting of men who swore to the death to defend the state, which in turn defended them. His collective sovereignty appears to be made up of men, with women clearly not party to the social contract. They are portrayed as being controlled by women through their sexuality and ability to manipulate their passions. Their natural subordination restricted women to the private sphere of the family, their duty to care for men and children, away from politics and the arts, and to inspire men to fulfill their civic duties (Green 1995, p.65-81).

According to Rousseau, Scudéry encouraged a revival for women in the arts and sciences, which Rousseau believed would make men the slaves of women and their passions. For men to regain their freedom, they must assert their sovereignty, while women continue to reside in the tender realm of the heart. His private sphere corresponds to the world of Scudéry's egalitarianism, gentleness and inclination, but it is not a model of behavior for all individuals, but a model of private sphere ruled by women, in which men can participate, but they must also transcend. The reason Rousseau sees women as a threat to the role of male public space is that he sees the "strong" (men) as masters, when in fact it depends on the "weak" (women), not out of any foolish heroism Customs, not from the magnanimity of the protector, but from the ruthless laws of nature. For nature endows a woman with the ability to inspire man's passions more than man's ability to satisfy those passions, thereby making him dependent on her goodwill and forcing him in turn to try to please her so that she agrees with him to become stronger.

If Scudéry's feminist thought led women from private space to public space, then Rousseau, who was influenced by it, tried to pull men back from private space to public space, in order to maintain the balance between the two genders in public space and private space. The principle of coexistence is ultimately to build a gender-equal and free society. But Rousseau obviously devalued women's social status and did not give women power and roles in public space. Although both are aiming to better build a public space, there is no female role in Rousseau's plan. The meaning of women's existence is to serve men better, so that male citizens can better enter public life. In the republic play an important role. For Sapho and Phaon, friendship-based love can make itself more complete than a social identity more limited by gender, but Émile and Sophie clearly do not have the balance of public space that their predecessors had.

4.3. *The Coincidence of The Story of Sapho and Les Mots Des Femmes*

In recent years, French scholar Mona Ozouf's book *Les Mots des femmes* has aroused heated discussions among domestic scholars. Ozouf's analysis of feminism has not been divorced from the context of French history. Putting it in the framework of French national and social changes, it tries to reveal the French characteristics of feminism, that is, the principle pursued by French feminists is gender harmony and gender equality, rather than a female model of confrontation and conflict, division and resistance. In his view, the current feminist movement in British and American society contradicts and separates from the French feminist tradition, and French feminists do not discriminate against women as a social minority. Since the 18th century, the spirit of French feminism has been fully reflected in French women. They all recognize gender differences, but they all recognize the spirit of universalism, that is, the sense of community requires them to jump out of the cage of gender differences, which has been declared since the French Revolution. The idea of "all men are created equal" starts from thinking.

Every woman has her own way of dealing with the relationship between the sexes and the status of women. Among them, there are those who believe that men and women are in harmony and almost experience it (Madame du Deffand), and there are others who believe that men and women are two very different ethnic groups, sometimes blindly concluded vague contracts between the two, but always fleeting. In essence, French women did not follow the path of the Anglo-American suffrage movement, but deeply based on recognizing self-gender differences, seek gender identity, and pursue the equality and freedom required by the complete individual. Therefore, gender propositions and gender movements are a way for French women to improve themselves and pursue independence.

In the book, Ozouf dedicates himself to exploring the place and role of women in French society, listening to and making the "women's discourse" heard, the words women themselves choose to describe femininity. The women in this book show that they generally recognize the positive significance of women in private space, that is, women should play an important role in the field of family life and play a female role, and love and marriage are important fields for realizing women's equality. All but one of them had painfully experienced marriages where women were exchanged and believed that marriages would be the greatest misfortune in life if they didn't match each other.

The Story of Sapho continues the spirit of gender equality and mutual assistance to the women in Ozouf's writings. They show the desire and possibility of realizing perfect individuals in the relationship between men and women, and women can become men's virtuous men in the family. Internal helpers, but they also frequently appear in public spaces. Women did not accept the various presuppositions arranged by Rousseau and Montesquieu to be loved, admired, placed at the bottom of society, praised by men, and only contribute to family and children, because that is the perspective of men's concerns. Women did not follow the female path set by the Enlightenment philosophers but crossed the railing of revolution and participated in the revolution in person. They demanded to take oaths in the federation, to walk in the funeral procession with cypress leaves on their heads, to participate in nature's festivals with roses on their heads, to wear badges and remove jewelry for the motherland, to donate money to organize civic banquets, to set up lint workshops Club. Madame Roland embodies in her all the expressiveness of women in public spaces: he is openly hostile to Proudhon, accomplishing feats of partisan femininity, while maintaining the image of a 'half man': She displayed masculinity on the guillotine. There are many women in the public space. They are practicing Sapho's expectations, a space where men and women can equally exert their abilities.

Therefore, women should have their voices heard in both private and public spaces. It is by virtue of this principle that French feminism is distinguished from Anglo-American feminism out of a French way. Scudéry breaks the oppositional feminist thought and examines it with a critical attitude. *The Story of Sapho* is in a way a fictional prototype of the women in Ozouf's book, a heartfelt connection with them, illustrating the charms and qualities of the French feminist spirit and echoing the ideas of contemporary women's historian Ozouf, perpetuating the unique spirit of French feminism and the values of the times.

5. Conclusion

At the end of the Renaissance, Scudéry 's ideas shocked the feminism of the literary writing tradition from the 16th century, and with his 'aristocratic feminism' revealed the ways in which gender equality could be achieved: through dialogue rather than confrontation, making the most of feminine virtues; through female friendship, moving towards a bridge of equality in love; and through the power of female love. The power of female love to help women move from the private to the public space. *The Story of Sappho* also embodies Scudéry 's humanist spirit, which influenced Rousseau's *Émile* and echoed the views of contemporary historian Mona Ozouf, making the uniqueness of French feminism known. In this sense, Scudéry is a gentle inspiration for women at the end of the Renaissance and has earned her a place in the long line of French feminism, as a pioneer in offering men an olive branch for reconciliation between the sexes and encouraging the shaping of emotional bonds through femininity.

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