

PERSONAL GEOGRAPHIES AND LIMINAL IDENTITIES IN THREE EARLY MODERN WOMEN'S LIFE WRITINGS ABOUT WAR

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510 Throughout literary history, war has been a recurrent theme in life writing. This article discusses life writing as an important aspect of comparative literature or world literature, and focuses on three early modern women's geographical experiences and liminal identities as found in their life writings: Marguerite of Valois (1553-1615), a Catholic and Queen consort of Navarre who served as a supporter of Protestants during the French wars of religion, Queen Henrietta Maria of England (1609-69), and Lady Brilliana Harley (1598-1643), the wife of a Parliamentarian representative of England. These three noblewomen used their writings as means of constructing their identities in the public sphere.

While describing the forced transgressions of their gender boundaries, these women reveal their concern for suffering people, and their geographic mobility in uncharted territories in which they came to create for themselves a liminal identity. Marguerite of Valois saved the Huguenots and her husband during a time of religious struggles in Paris. Queen Henrietta Maria's letters manifest her indomitable attempts to secure ammunition and support for King Charles I of England. Lady Brilliana Harley bravely participated in defending her home/garrison, Brampton Bryan Castle in northwestern England, when it was under siege by Royalist troops. These women contributed to life writing, a genre that traditional literary studies have generally associated with men. Men's life writings mainly dealt with political ideologies, decision making, and military conflicts with both enemies and lifelong friends. Although women's life writings often reveal their priorities in preserving the safety of their families, the women who write these accounts may also transgress their liminal experiences, go through rites of passage, and encounter a realm that falls outside their identity when they explore and undertake arduous and dangerous journeys.

David Herman uses the term *place* to refer to spatial experiences (515). The "lived

place” in wartime suggests not only each individual’s social relations and perception of the world, but also his/her liminal identity before the (re)positioning of the self. *Liminal space* is a term frequently used in psychology and cultural geography, referring to “thresholds,” “boundaries,” or “frontiers.” Arnold Van Gennep defines liminality as a rite of passage (1), while Victor Turner, a British cultural geographer, develops the theory of liminality as a threshold or an ambiguous state: “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (*The Ritual Process* 95).

Liminal space suggests the possibility of stepping into a new status. In his classic interpretation of social space, Henri Lefebvre asserts that geographical spaces, landscapes, and property connote the results of social production, while the designation of spaces marks the features of socially constructed boundaries (26). In the early modern period in which men controlled hegemonic discourses, most women’s everyday experiences tended to be confined within a narrow sphere; however, their life writings not only reveal the possibility of repositioning themselves but also exemplify their “ethical position by taking up the challenge and confront, heroically, this chaos” (Szokolczai 143).

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For Van Gennep, the liminal stage is like the rites of passage that a child needs to undergo before he/she becomes an adult and finds a paradigm for him/herself (1-2). The liminal stage also suggests separation from the original self and unlimited possibilities in the procedure of self-construction (La Shure). The early modern women discussed in this article not only disclose their individual sense of environment, but also reveal their bonding and perceived identities. Indeed, war itself could be seen as a liminal period, with each of the women discussed here standing on the threshold. With the uncertainty, impenetrability, and instability of the wartime situations in which they found themselves, each one was brave enough to create and define her role as a woman in transition.

Marguerite of Valois played an important role in the struggle between the Catholics and Huguenots and in the relationship between France and Navarre. In the House of Navarre, two queens of the early modern period were called Marguerite: one married Henry II of Navarre and was a patron of humanists and reformers; the other, also known as “Margaret of France,” saved many Huguenots during the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, and during these wars of religion, she was taken hostage and imprisoned for more than twenty years. The latter, Marguerite of Valois, known as the “Hostage Queen” (Lightfoot 1), is the one who is discussed in this paper. The massacre in which she was involved served as the inspiration for Christopher Marlowe’s tragedy *The Massacre at Paris* (1593). Alexandre Dumas, on the other hand, depicted her as a corrupted woman, an accusation made against her by one of her brothers, though she denied this charge. Marguerite was born into the House of Valois in 1553; her father was King Henry II of France, who was known for the suppression of the Protestant Reformation, and her mother, Catherine de’ Medici, was often called the most powerful regent in western history. She manipulated courtly power and domi-

nated the fortune of France as well as the marriages of her sons and daughters. Two of her brothers succeeded to the French throne, and Mary Stuart, her cousin, became her sister-in-law in 1558. As a princess of France and a great beauty, Marguerite was a valuable commodity for her Florentine mother's political concerns. Don Carlos, King of Portugal, and King Philip II of Spain were on the list of Catherine's possible candidates for marriage with Marguerite; eventually, she entered into an arranged marriage with Henry of Navarre, against her wishes and her love for Henry de Guise, later Duke of Guise (1550-88). In one of her letters (Valois, "Letter IV" 17), she provided a description of the wedding ceremony. Marguerite's marriage to Henry was supposed to create harmony and compromise between Catholics and Protestants (Huguenots). However, the first war of religion had already been sparked in 1562 at a Protestant congregation at Vassy. The animosities between the rival parties and suspicions among the agitated Catholics eventually overshadowed the marriage, resulting in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre on August 24, 1572, six days after the nuptial ceremony.

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Marguerite had never offended her mother, and her rite of passage into religious conflicts took place with her arranged marriage to the Huguenot Henry of Navarre. The suppression of the Huguenots had been ongoing for some time before that, but during the reign of her brothers, Catholic hostility towards the French reformers was especially agitated. According to Marguerite's letters, war was declared against the Huguenots, and King Charles of France told King Henry of Navarre that his sister "had been given to a Catholic and not to a Huguenot" (Valois, "Letter XIII" 49); if he expected his marriage to endure, "he must declare himself a Catholic" (Valois, "Letter XIII" 49). On the day of the massacre, one of Henry's followers rushed into her chamber as he was pursued by four archers. Margaret hid him and cared for his wounds. However, more men, such as M. de Mioflano, first gentleman to her husband Henry of Navarre, and Armagnac, Henry's first *valet de chambre*, begged her to save their lives. Seeing that Huguenots as well as her husband were in danger, Margaret threw herself on her knees before King Charles IX and the Queen Mother, and pleaded for their lives ("Letter V" 22). Seeing her mother and brother take action against her husband, she eventually protested that the marriage had been arranged by them and they should not have hindered her from "partaking of his fortunes" (Valois, "Letter VII" 27). After the riot in Paris, the religious violence spread to other cities; in Lyons, Rouen, Orleans, Bordeaux, and elsewhere, Calvinist minorities were slaughtered. Although some historians tend to regard her as a victim, Marguerite demonstrated herself as a beneficent protector in an age of inhumanity, in a space in which religious conflict made her feel estranged (Haggard 13).

Political and religious tensions created a contested and vulnerable space for the reformers of the sixteenth century. As a hostage queen, Marguerite's concern was to decrease the damage caused by the war. It was understandable that the Huguenots were eager for revenge, and they planned to help Henry of Navarre leave France. For Marguerite, the most significant strategy for safety was to avoid military encounters,

and she proposed to move the royal family and her husband to a safe place before the arrival of the Huguenot troops. According to one of her letters, “[We] set off the night for Paris [...] putting King Charles in a litter and the Queen my mother taking my brother and the King my husband with her in her own carriage” (“Letter VI” 24). Eventually, Marguerite and her husband were both imprisoned by her own brother, Henry III. Henry of Navarre was forced to convert to Catholicism in exchange for his own safety, but he managed to escape and rejoined the anti-Catholic forces, while Marguerite was kept by her brother for the next three years. Henry of Navarre grew up in the Basque kingdom within France and was a target of Catholic assassins. After his escape to freedom, Marguerite’s personal geography helped her develop an insight toward the collective suffering of people in war. Ironically, her “displacement” was that she could not join her husband in the realm of Navarre, but instead she was kept as a hostage and became a target of the agitated Catholics. Marguerite grew up in a centre of religious and political intrigue; during her lifetime, she was imprisoned for almost twenty years. Although she did not expect her husband to have their marriage annulled in 1599 when he became King Henry IV of France, she maintained a good relation with his royal family.

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In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard notes that the house in which we were born is physically and psychologically inscribed in us as memories and habits (14-15). Marguerite’s memoir was in epistolary form and was written during her imprisonment. She wrote about her happy childhood, political intrigue, and religious intolerance at the French royal court. The space that Marguerite described as a grown woman is the suffocating family bond that was entangled with religious identities during a time of religious reformation. Her letters recorded her brother’s vow “to carry on a war of extermination, until this wretched religion of the Huguenots [...] is no more” (Valois, “Letter VIII” 50). However, her confinement did not restrict her from protecting her husband and the other Huguenots.

The outbreak of the St. Bartholomew Day’s Massacre and the intrigue between the Catholics and the Huguenots are told in Marguerite’s letters, written from her perspective as a newly-wed bride. This massacre happened several days after the marriage ceremony, and it seems that her mother’s worries about the evil intentions of the Huguenots had imposed on her brother the responsibility for preventing possible assassinations as well as the crisis of a divided France (Valois, “Letter IV”). Marguerite became a hostage; she experienced separation, waiting, and disillusion, but her limited mobility and royal status equipped her to negotiate for the lives of the Huguenots. Her husband eventually acceded to the throne of France in 1589. Her letters reveal not only her experiences amidst political and religious turmoil and intrigue, but also her resolution to maintain a balance between her positions as queen, as hostage, and as sister to the king. Henry IV annulled his marriage in 1599 and married Marie de’ Medici in 1600, and their daughter Henrietta Maria became queen consort of England with her marriage to Charles I. Like Marguerite, Queen Henrietta Maria also encountered civil wars. On June 4, 1642, she wrote to King

Charles from Amsterdam that “I hope in three or four days to send you six pieces of cannon, with hundred barrels of powers and two hundred pairs of pistols and carabines” (77). While other women were defending their families at home in their own ways, Henrietta Maria’s purpose in Amsterdam was to secure ammunition for her husband. This kind of discourse extends women’s life writing from the private and domestic sphere to the public and political realm.

Historians such as Richard Lawrence Ollard refer to the English Civil War (1642-51) as a war without an enemy (1). When Charles I raised an army to deal with the rebellion in Ireland, a conflict erupted in England in which friends and relatives became opponents, and women sought to defend their families. The clash between the Royalists and the Parliamentarians in England resulted in the decapitation of King Charles I in 1649. In the following two decades, the Commonwealth soldiers, under the command of Oliver Cromwell, staged military campaigns against Ireland and Scotland. Most of the accounts of the English Civil War, as with other notable

514 life writings in the early modern era, were by men. Besides the letters of Charles I of England, Royalist accounts of the war include *Memoirs of Prince Rupert and the Cavaliers*, Henry Townshend’s *Civil War Diary, 1640-1643*, and *The Journal of William Dowsing (1633-44)*, while Parliamentarian accounts include *The Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow* and *The Civil War Letter-Books of Sir Samuel Luke, 1644-1645*. Women’s life writings of the English Civil War, as with other wars, are comparatively neglected. During this period, while most women engaged with the catastrophes on the home front, defending their homes, taking care of their families, or nursing wounded soldiers, some noblewomen found it necessary to step outside the confining gendered private sphere to venture into uncharted territories in order to help in the war effort.

Henrietta Maria of France is a representative early modern woman who traversed geographical and identitarian boundaries in a time of war. When she married the obstinate and unpopular King Charles I of England in 1625, she entered a realm that was suffering one of the most tumultuous periods in its history. Many historians tend to see her, a Catholic and a foreigner, as one of the major causes of the English Civil War, but others regard her as a scapegoat in the political conflict. Henrietta Maria was a patron of the arts, particularly garden design and courtly masques. In August 1642, she migrated to Holland and Flanders, and stayed there for almost a year, to settle the terms of her daughter’s marriage to Prince William II of Orange, the son of Prince Frederick Henry. Princess Mary was then nine years old, but Henrietta understood that the political parties at home were on the verge of war due to the growing hostility between Charles and the Parliament, especially after Charles challenged the power of his opponents by arresting several members who intended to impeach the queen. Henrietta wrote to Charles, whose responses to her were mainly in ciphers, but in her liminal space, she endeavoured to support her family. In February 1643, four months after the war broke out between Charles I and Parliament, the queen returned to England from the Netherlands with one thousand professional soldiers

and many weapons and ammunition. Besides managing ammunition, the main purpose of her staying in Holland was to sell her jewelry (Stuart 331, 351) in order to raise funds for the Royalist army. As a devout Catholic and an unpopular queen of England, Henrietta wrote from Holland and France to her husband, before his death, more than a dozen times about the jewels she brought with her. Although more correspondence between Henrietta and Charles I was to be unearthed, the most circulated edition of her over two hundred letters to her husband, friends, sons, and relatives, written between 1641 and 1643, was published by Mary Anne Everett Green in 1856. The letters to Charles I, her husband, especially display Henrietta's anxieties and her development of her liminal identity when she transformed from a queen to a fighter and a comforter of her family. In a few letters presumably written in 1642, dated September 9 and 19, she told her husband that she "gave up" her crown jewels, to raise money (Stuart 114) and to negotiate for "great supplies from Holland" (Stuart 175). She informed Charles that a present of "ten thousand pistols" would be provided (Stuart 252-53), and she had borrowed money from banks and merchants, while her loyal courtiers recruited a thousand mercenaries in the Netherlands (Clarke 18, Strickland 290-93, Stuart 146). In her rite of passage or liminal stage, she sometimes revealed that she yearned for home, but then she confirmed that she would return to England with ammunition guarded with mercenaries. The duration of waiting for a seasonal wind that would have allowed her to sail home also made her feel nervous. In a letter dated August 30, 1643, she asked Charles to let her know where to land (Stuart 106), without knowing that this very letter would be intercepted (Stuart 107; see note by Green on the same page). Escorted by the Dutch, the vessels that carried Henrietta Maria and her mercenaries were chased relentlessly by "Parliament ships" that were waiting to eliminate them near the Burlington Bay area (Stuart 164).

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Henrietta developed her liminal identity during her long migration from England. She was quite capable of expressing herself, or enjoying herself in courtly entertainments, but during the war, she mediated herself between upholding and disturbing social norms, integrating herself into the collective identity of the soldiers. During her migration and exile, Henrietta wrote letters that served as maps of her experiences and her efforts to help restore her husband's kingdom. Due to the aforementioned intercepted letter, Henrietta and the soldiers were forced to take shelter in a ditch when they were bombarded by cannons on their arrival at the bay. A "dangerous ball grazed the edge of the ditch" (Stuart 167) and covered them with earth and stones; she made a joke to Charles that she needed "to act the captain" (Stuart 167), and she kept her promise by marching with her mercenaries to join the Royalist forces led by Prince Rupert, Charles's nephew, who was also called *Generalissimo* because of his valiance. In a letter to her husband meant to comfort him, she jokingly referred to herself as "*Generalissima*" (Stanton 72; Stuart 63-65), a reference to Prince Rupert's nickname. Her self-naming connotes her audacity in constructing an expanded space as a queen and member of the Royalists instead of passively retiring into her royal status as a queen only. As Henrietta said in a letter dated March 30, 1643, "I

wish a peace more than any” (Stuart 177), and urged Charles to accept Parliament’s conditions in order to end the war. In 1644, three months after she gave birth to her youngest daughter, she left for France to negotiate and to solicit financial help from her relatives; three years later, her Lady, Anne Douglas Dalkeith, helped smuggle the three-year-old princess to France. Meanwhile, her second son, the future James II, was rescued by Colonel Joseph Bampffield when the political turmoil became severe. The royal couple did not have a chance to meet after Henrietta’s departure for France in 1644. Although King Charles I escaped from house arrest in 1646 to the Scottish Presbyterian army, he was turned over to the Parliament in 1647. Rejecting an agreement proposed by the Parliamentary representatives, Charles was executed in December 1649, and Henrietta became an exiled queen before she returned to England as a queen mother to Charles II (1630-85), and later, James II (1633-1701), until the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

516 Henrietta’s personal geography can be traced through the letters she wrote and sent between 1641 and 1649. These letters illustrate various forms of cultural exchange, multilayered political relationships, pressure from public spaces, and anxiety for her children who were still in England. Henrietta abandoned her interests in theatre, art, and music in favour of providing support for her husband and family, as she adopted the identity of a generalissima rather than a queen, and provided financial and moral support secured via her interpersonal relations in the public space. Henrietta’s identity as a Bourbon princess may have structured her experience in exile (Britland 121), but for the sake of her family, Henrietta became an intrepid traveler, a negotiator, and a *femme forte*.

Henrietta Maria’s life and texts epitomize the roles and experiences of space of early modern women during the English Civil War, in which they encountered peril and suffering, and adapted to contemporary cultural structures and rapidly changing political landscapes. They managed to situate themselves tentatively in liminal spaces that were not purely feminine. By negotiating their physical spaces and selves, these women, as epitomized by Queen Henrietta Maria, redrew their gender boundaries in their liminal spaces.

Lady Brilliana Harley was another seventeenth-century noblewoman for whom the English Civil War prompted experiences in liminal spaces. Brilliana wrote some four hundred letters, mostly to her husband, Sir Robert Harley (1579-1656), and their son Edward. Brilliana, who was Sir Robert’s third wife, respected his decision to become a Parliamentarian who opposed some of the national and foreign policies of Charles I (Eales, “Robert Harley” 399). Instead of experiencing physical mobility, Brilliana revealed her role as a mother, a wife, a Puritan opposing Catholic values, and a defender of her home, Brampton Bryan Castle. In 1853, Brilliana’s granddaughter, Lady Frances Vernon Harcourt, published a collection of her grandmother’s letters, dating between 1625 and 1633 and mainly addressed to her husband. These letters described their family life, especially her daily chores, concerns for relatives participating in the war, and worries about the impending siege on her home/gar-

ri son (Lewis xv).

The shaping of Lady Brilliana Harley's identity as a defender of home was a progressive and painstaking development that can be observed within her letters. After Sir Robert and Edward went to war, Brilliana was left at the castle with her three youngest children, fifty servants, and fifty soldiers. Brilliana sensed her limitations, and expressed her anxieties at this liminal stage in many of her letters. An early modern woman's duties included subjection, silence, and chastity, but Brilliana's situation gave rise to a learning process by which she integrated her identity as a mother with an identity as a defender and negotiator when she understood her husband's castle was to be besieged. As an active member in the Long Parliament, Robert Harley was strongly against the ecclesiastical innovations promoted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud (1573-1645), and conflict between the Royalists and Harley, a supporter of the parliamentarians, was unavoidable (Eales, "Sir Robert Harley" 157). Brampton Bryan Castle, located in the County of Herefordshire, eventually became another target of intermittent sieges in 1643 and 1644. Entrusting the castle to his wife in 1641, Sir Robert returned home for a short time, urging his wife to desert the place when necessary (Robinson 249), but Brilliana, torn between public and private spaces, eventually held herself on the threshold before she undertook her mission as a defender.

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Pressures from Parliamentary commanders and the king himself increased, and Brilliana's identity was subjected to political power from outside. In her liminal period, or status of in-betweenness, Brilliana progressed from being a woman who was easily disturbed by every movement in the neighbourhood to one who took a stand on her home front, defending her castle. In a letter to Edward dated June 4, 1642, Lady Harley described the acts of violence of "the barbarous crowd" who set up a maypole "in derision of roundheads" (Harley, *Letters* 167). In December 1642, she expressed her anxiety about the tension of the impending siege (Harley, *Letters* 185-86). Although Brilliana never failed to express her motherly love to Edward, who was in the Parliamentarian army, her recurring references to the war represent her inner turmoil. Although Brilliana's letter-writing functioned as a means of drawing her connections and her wartime knowledge together, her letters demonstrated her worry that her home would be "blown up" (Harley, *Letters* 188). In this liminal and undecidable space in which the territories of the political parties were constantly reconfigured, she continuously redefined that space for her territory, to some extent blurring the line between public and private spaces or roles.

Brilliana was forced to transgress her spatially-determined identity when she realized that she had to negotiate for peace and voice her status as a defender. She wrote to her husband, her son, to Royalist commanders such as Vavasour and Lindgen, and even to King Charles I, because she did not have enough hands around her, and her castle was not a military garrison at all. Brampton Castle was probably built in the thirteenth century, guarding a major route from Ludlow on the border of Wales. This fortification was important before the sixteenth century, but it was not equipped for

early modern wars. Lady Brilliana, who was then forty-five years old, started preparing for the impending military conflict before the king's commissioned forces reached her neighbourhood (Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads* 125). As she had anticipated, the Royalist Governor of Hereford soon visited her to pressure her to surrender. On July 25, seven hundred cavaliers and infantrymen, joined by five or six cannons, laid a siege to the castle (Bennett 101). Two weeks later, Vavasour sent her a letter advising her to lay down her arms (8); upon receiving King Charles I's letter, accusing her as a traitor, Brilliana immediately petitioned the king to withdraw the plundering soldiers from her castle (Harley, "Lady Harley to the King" 17). Brilliana's plea was in vain, and the castle suffered a six-week siege. She continued to defend her home until her death on October 29, 1643 from symptoms of a cold (*Letters* 399), during the interval of two long-term sieges. The second long-term siege lasted until the spring of 1644, and the home/garrison was then under the command of Dr. Wright, the Harleys' faithful family doctor. Being short of supplies, the castle was surrendered to their opponents in 1644, and Brilliana's three children were sent to prison (Rigg vi).

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Lady Brilliana Harley's mental geography is manifested in her letters, reaching out to various places. Unlike Marguerite and Henrietta Maria, who traversed wartime landscapes, Brilliana wove her mental geography through letters and correspondence to seize every chance for her castle, managing to negotiate with the commanders of the sieges. Passing through her liminal situation, Brilliana alternated her roles as a comforter, negotiator, and warrior at her home garrison. In her letter to Edward on January 28, 1642, she revealed that her only hope was not to be delivered to the ir enemies (Harley, *Letters* 187). She stopped writing letters when the castle was under siege. According to Captain Priamus Davies, a witness of these two series of sieges, Brilliana was a woman with masculine bravery, resolution, and wisdom (90), but he was not aware that his lady had hidden away her anxiety and fear. According to Davies, Lady Harley sent a troop of about forty people to stage a siege against the Royalists' new headquarters, which was only twelve miles away (Davies 90). In her last letters, dated September 24 and October 9, 1643, she informed Edward that she wished he were home with her, but due to the war, he should remain with his father (Harley, *Letters* 208). Brilliana did not leave her home during the sieges, but her mental geographies imbedded in her letters were always connected with the home that she cherished most.

To conclude, women's life writings, as this article has argued, tend to reveal their tensions, anxieties, and sufferings in personal geographies such as migration, displacement, and refuge, but their liminal experiences represent their courage in redefining their roles and territoriality. Wartime, a liminal period of turmoil, calls for these women to engage with the outside world. With her skills and knowledge, Marguerite provided help for those in need, and acted upon her bravery and intelligence to defend the liberty of the Huguenots. She said, "[We] were not persons to be treated like those shut up in the Inquisition" (Valois, *Letters* 18). Marguerite's liminal space is a contested space constructed on the unequal power relations that invaded

her designated realm because her husband was a Huguenot. With her wisdom and with the title of Queen, she enjoyed staying at the court in her later years, maintaining the political stability of France after the assassination of Henry IV (Pidduck 10). Queen Henrietta Maria became an indomitable queen, providing her strongest support for her husband by fundraising and assembling mercenaries and ammunition. Lady Brilliana Harley integrated her roles of mother and noblewoman into a newly-developed identity as a negotiator and defender of her castle. Brilliana's epistolic narratives manifested the process of detaching herself from her anxieties by strengthening her will and legitimacy, protecting her domain and further denying that she was a traitor. As Turner maintains, liminality is an interim state, since "possibility exists [...] from one's own social position [...] formulating a potentially unlimited series of alternative social arrangements" (*Dramas* 13-14). Wartime life writings do not merely function as connections between the microhistory of individuals and the macrohistory of the nation(s). With the contextualized pictures of the author's environment and the mapping of personal geography, wartime life writings involve feelings and physical migration or exile, and further project dimensions and relationships between private and public spaces. In their life writings about their wartime experiences, the three female narrators discussed in this article disclose possible liminal spaces that symbolize their decision-making and transformation of identities, while also developing their inner strengths and capacities. As Richard C. Taylor contends, "Diaries and letters are manifestations of a newly emerging consciousness" (138). Although their private spaces were increasingly interrupted, these noblewomen in France and England learned to adapt, accept, and reify their individualized roles, by mapping their boundaries and geographies in their unstable public spaces.

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These life writings of early modern or Renaissance women across the English Channel (La Manche) are instances of early modern period when a relation between gender and genre emerge in life writings. This comparison can enrich comparative literature, especially that centred on Europe, but can also contribute to studies of life writing, or the autobiographical and biographical, in the world beyond, in what some have called, and do call, world literature. The roles and spaces of these women on and at the threshold should be of interest for those studying this kind of writing and the work of women in other cultures in Asia, the Americas, and elsewhere.

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