

A Regency Possessed:

Passion, Disorder, and Anne of Austria in the Mazarinades, 1648-52

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Discipline: History

ABSTRACT: During the Fronde of 1648-52, the absolute monarchy of France came under attack both by weapons and by words. A relaxation in censorship laws during the four-year period of unrest led to the production of thousands of pamphlets, known as Mazarinades, which discussed the nature of the French monarchy and power. Although most were focused on the Prime Minister, Cardinal Mazarin, a subset also considered the role of the Queen Dowager and Regent, Anne of Austria. Factions both for and against the monarchy expressed a fear of her public role in government: as a female ruler, they worried that Anne would be too passionate and gullible to be able to govern fairly. Pamphleteers presented her as a disordering figure, one who turned the natural social hierarchies of the early modern era upside down. To some, she was a puppet for Mazarin, who they believed seduced her; to others, by acting as regent she neglected her quintessentially feminine maternal roles. All agreed that Anne was unsuitable as regent. Using a variety of literary techniques, Mazarinade authors ultimately demanded that she resign, pleading with Anne to return to the private, domestic world of women.

KEYWORDS: Anne Queen Consort of Louis XIII, Mazarinades, Regents (Sovereigns), 17th Century French Literature

Introduction

Everyone, it seemed, had an opinion on the regency of Anne of Austria. Indeed, mid-seventeenth-century France was a veritable “open season” on the reputation of the Spanish-born queen (Kleinman 1985, 225). She had become sole regent for her son Louis in 1643 when she had dissolved the Regency Council her husband had established; her reign had already overseen the end of the Thirty Year’s War (Merrick 1994, 667). Despite this, her leadership and her reputation came under fire. This was especially true during the civil wars of the Fronde. Not only did the Frondeurs directly challenge her authority, but they claimed that they did so in the name of the King, Louis XIV (Bakos 2000, 336). Furthermore, her opponents opened the floodgates for new discourse, questioning Anne’s very ability to rule as a female regent. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Mazarinade pamphlets published throughout the unrest. Because of the relaxation of censorship laws, over the course of four years thousands of pamphlets engaged in a discourse about the nature of absolute monarchy in the French government (Merrick 1994, 668; Bakos 2000, 337). Most of these, as the name suggests, focused on the role of Anne’s Prime Minister, the Italian Cardinal Jules Mazarin. But others discussed Anne. They critiqued her government, offered paternal advice, and attempted to pull back the curtain of her bedchamber. In doing so, pamphleteers voiced questions and fears regarding the role of women in the French government. This paper illustrates that the Mazarinade pamphlets of the Fronde in France see Anne of Austria’s regency as the origin of the unrest throughout the country. Through a variety of literary devices and rhetoric, pamphleteers both for and against her government reinforce the weakness of female reason in order to impose their fears of female leadership.

A Topsy-Turvy Regency

As a woman governing independently of male supervision, Anne posed a threat to the traditional French ruling order. As a result, her regency and her relationship with her first minister not only was considered unnatural but an inversion of the natural social order. Given that women were forbidden from ruling under Salic Law, pamphleteers feared the ramifications of such a flagrant violation of nature (Merrick 1994, 687). To them, Anne’s government was a world turned upside down. It was a place where an inferior could usurp

the position of their master and a woman could take the place of a man (Merrick 1994, 676; 686). Authors depicted this upset in established ruling hierarchies by describing instances where Anne shirks her maternal duties as regent. In one particularly vulgar pamphlet, Anne herself admits this inversion. Enchanted as Anne is by her prime minister, the author implies, she is “content to sacrifice every duty” in order to satisfy her relationship with him, even those of her own sons’ well-being (Kleinman 1985, 225). She is content in her debauchery. In a particularly damning statement, another pamphlet even suggests that it was not Anne but Mazarin who “a enlevé scandaleusement... la sacrée personne du Roy” (scandalously raised... the sacred person of the King) and his brother. Although as mother and Regent she is tasked with looking after both the political and physical body of her regnant son, Anne is incapable of fulfilling either (Mitchell 2019, 12-14). Though she may speak “in the name of the king”, Anne equally betrays the duty of the body politic to rule in a “just and paternalistic” manner. As a result, yet another perversion must take place: a man must raise her children. Pamphleteers feared that Anne loved her minister more than her own son, allowing her manufactured passion to overrule her sense of reason (Kleinman 1985, 225).

Passion and Possession

Some authors attempted to understand the topsy-turvy nature of Anne’s regency in terms of enchantment. In their eyes, the queen herself could not be the source of the court’s corruption; an unnatural situation could only be caused by unnatural means. By using the rhetoric of magic, they were able to instead shift the blame to her first minister, making him the scapegoat for the unrest. These anti-Mazarin discourses argue that “par ses enchantemens et ses sortilèges” (by his witchcraft and his enchantments) the queen’s first minister had caused her obsession for him. His prominence in her government was the result of supernatural activity (Carrier 1982). As a result of these spells, he dominated her, bent the government to his will, and, more seriously, threatened the sanctity of an already vulnerable body politic (Merrick 1994, 692). Similarly, other pamphlets characterized his hold over the government with other equally supernatural means. According to this view, Mazarin is a demon who possesses the queen and needs to be exorcised (692). The use of the supernatu-

¹ “Contract du mariage du parlement et la ville de Paris,” in *La Fronde, contestation démocratique et misère paysanne: 52 Mazarinades*, ed. By Hubert Carrier (Paris: EDHIS, 1982), 7. As most Mazarinades, including those discussed in this paper, are not available in English, all translations into English have been made by the author.

² Mitchell, *Queen, Mother, and Stateswoman*, 13. Mitchell also notes that the combination of maternal love and political exclusion in the queen mother made French queens dowager ideally suited to the role of regent, as they were deemed less likely to usurp the throne. By the time of Anne’s regency, this tradition was well established.

ral in this way, however, not only scapegoats Mazarin but removes Anne from both responsibilities for her actions as regent. Whether positive or negative, these pamphlets indicate that her actions leading up to and during the Fronde were simply not her fault. Rather, it is Mazarin who, as sorcerer and demon, acts as the surrogate victim for the French court. The queen's gullible nature absolves her from guilt.

Other authors blamed this perversion of the natural hierarchy on a woman's passions. To warn Anne against the dangerous and unnatural character of her rule, they invoked the personalities of historical female rulers. Although France had a tradition of female regency, pamphleteers sought to demonstrate how impossible it would be for the sceptre to be controlled by the distaff (Slaven 1997, 452). As Jonathan Merrick indicates, ongoing debates about a woman's nature at the time of the Fronde stressed that women were morally inferior to men. They ruled by their whims rather than by reason (Merrick 1994, 686). Certainly, in France, it was this assumed emotional character that precluded women from most means of rulership. Unlike Habsburg women in other regions, Salic law "barred women from all aspects of royal succession" and prohibited a tradition of female rule (Mitchell 2019, 13). The Mazarinades' use of "notorious powerful women", such as Agrippina and Brunhild, underlines the need for masculine governance (Klaus 2020, 379). By comparing the "gullible and incompetent" Anne to these women, pamphleteers situated her in a tradition where passion caused "eternal punishment" (Merrick 1994, 687; Klaus 2020, 379). In one pamphlet, Saint Geneviève tells Anne that she is just like these notorious women. Agrippina, for example, was blinded by her ambitious nature. Her regency for her son Nero led directly to his disastrous reign, and eventually to her own demise. Implicit in the allusion is a warning about one regency to another. If Anne continues to let her love prevail over her reason, she will face a similar fate (Merrick 1994, 687; Klaus 2020, 379). The same is true with Brunhild. Just as she ordered the murder in service of her rage against another queen, so too is Anne "responsible for millions of murders" on account of her role in instigating civil unrest in France (Merrick 1994, 687; Klaus 2020, 379). Through these allusions, Mazarinade authors warned Anne of the dangers of a government led by feminine emotionality. Pamphleteers pleaded with her, entreating her to trust in masculine

reason.

A Poisonous Body: Pro-Mazarin Rhetoric

Even pro-Mazarin discourses agreed with the portrait of Anne as a disordering regent. Whereas pro-Frondeur authors argued that that disorder was the result of her possession by her first minister, his supporters instead declared that enchantment was necessary to maintain good governance in France. Similar to later pamphlets attacking Marie Antoinette, Anne was cast as the corrupting figure who polluted the French court. Both were strangers and women, which made them dangerous. Early modern France was not a welcoming place. Indeed, when Anne had first arrived at court she had even had sanctions placed on her household precisely because of her Spanish origins (Rodier 2017, 448). Furthermore, both queens inhabited a liminal space between their roles in the private and public political spheres that Mazarin supporters placed at the centre of ongoing unrest (Hunt 2003, 122; Merrick 1994, 697-8). Throughout her reign, attacks on Marie Antoinette's morality emphasized her role as a "political tarantula" causing the degeneration of the French royalty (Hunt 2003, 129). Her body was both "polluted with crimes" and corruptive; she was so obsessed with debauchery that it prevented her from fulfilling her feminine role as a mother (122;126). The same can be said for Anne. Her disordering influence is described as penetrating every aspect of the French court. "Excepté trois douzaines de fidel" (except three dozen faithful men), all of its members must be expelled by a heroic Mazarin because of their complicity in the Regent's misguided debauchery (Carrier 1982, 4). Like Marie Antoinette, her body cannot be separated from the state (Merrick 1994, 694). As we have already seen, Mazarinades too called into question her ability to govern as regent, regardless of what side they took in the conflict. We have also seen that, like her relation 140 years later, her maternal instincts were called into question because of the balance she maintained as a female regent in a male-dominated government (698). Unlike Marie Antoinette, however, there is disagreement over the degree of Anne's culpability (Carrier 1982, 8). That being said, there is no question for the pro-Mazarin pamphleteers: Anne's guilt is total.

We can see this pro-Mazarin perspective on Anne in the pamphlet "Dialogue de Iodelet et de L'Orviatan"

³ Hunt also illustrates how Marie Antoinette was compared to the abstract state, which in republican discourse was cast as the ideal mother. The same concern is also present in the Mazarinades; pamphleteers argue that that Anne is too attached to the king, whose true mother is the state. See Merrick, "The Cardinal and the Queen," 688-9.

(Dialogue between Iodelet and Orvatan). The character of L'Orvatan, an Italian like Mazarin, demonstrates to the audience the urgent need for a male figure to supervise the regent's activities (Carrier 1982, 8). Under Anne, it is chaos: the nobles are in servitude, the princes "gouvernez par les coquins et des indifferens" (are governed by the impish and indifferent), and the Clergy cannot effectively serve their flock (4). With such disorder, Mazarin's domination of the government becomes a need in order to preserve "la tranquillité publique" (the public order) of France (4). With Anne "incapable dans l'autorité" (incapable of governing), the pro-Mazarin view argues that he had to "dissipé les tenebres..., pris le time de l'Estat," and "conduit la Regence de la Reyne" (eliminate the shadows..., take the reins of the State... and steer the Queen's Regency). Simply put, she could not effectively do so herself (4). Thus Anne's Prime Minister does not usurp her position. Rather, it is his good conduct that sets her on a better course of action. Without Mazarin's guidance to eliminate supporters of the Frondeurs, L'Orvatan argues, "tout est corrompu" (everything is corrupt) within the court (7). Other accounts of the regency see Mazarin as an ordering figure. In his memoirs, for example, Cardinal de Retz records a 1648 episode in which a hot-tempered Anne responded to a request to release political prisoners with violent words and an equally violent plan of action. Mazarin, however, "calmed her down", and persuaded the queen to a more reasonable approach (Kleinman 1985, 208).

Disenchantment

Inevitably, however, many pamphleteers urged an end to the enchantment and the regent to come to her senses. To do so, Anne needed to recognize her problematic role as regent and focus on her responsibilities as a mother. Just as pamphleteers saw her as "possessed ... and obsessed" to the detriment of her "conjugal, maternal and regal responsibilities", so too did they see the release of the enchantment as an opportunity for Anne to accept (Merrick 1994, 689). Indeed, this is the outcome that many a Mazarinade encourages. Although Mazarin had ensnared her, Anne ought to break free, recognize her shortcomings, and recede into private life. L'Orvatan and Iodelet urge her to step back from her role as regent and even to "prenez le Cilice" (take up the veil) and cloister herself in a convent (Carrier 1982, 5). In a similar treatment, Saint Genevieve encourages Anne "take seriously her responsibility" as a caretaker for her son's kingdom and to listen to the French people as is fitting for a mother (Klaus 2020, 380). In this narrative, Anne had already awoken from her enchantment by the time the saint had arrived. Indeed, she realized that she had been



under the influence of a love potion. With the help of Saint Genevieve's intervention, the regent comes to recognize that she will be able to restore the natural hierarchies that she had violated. This restoration could only be done by releasing Mazarin from his service and by stepping away from public life. Only then can Anne make amends for her crime (Klaus 2020, 379-80). Similar to Iodelet's plea for her to enter a convent, in this narrative too Anne steps away from her role as regent. Although it is not clear whether she cloisters herself as he and L'Orvavian advise, this version of Anne also announces that finally disenchanted, she will retire. Distancing herself from the discord she caused, she will "reflect upon the evils she has brought" to her son's kingdom (Klaus 2020, 380).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Mazarinades of the mid-seventeenth century reveal anxiety around female leadership in France. Although the kingdom had a tradition of female regency, during the unrest of the Fronde these concerns took on a new political meaning. Indeed, it was widely felt that Anne of Austria's role as regent without a regency council unnaturally inverted the pre-existing beliefs in female inferiority to men. Pamphleteers concurred with these beliefs. In their eyes, Anne was too passionate to rule well, like many historical women before her. Subsequently, they saw her as a disordering figure in the French government. Some Mazarinades tried to deflect the responsibility from Anne's person by using a language of enchantment. The discord was not Anne's fault but that of Mazarin, the Prime Minister who possessed her. These depictions, however, shared the belief in her passionate nature. Such sentiments even crossed faction lines, with opponents of the Frondeurs also viewing the queen as a hot-tempered and disordering figure in need of male supervision. In the end, the pamphleteers urged for a restoration of a familiar balance where Anne was no longer a public figure. That is, they encouraged a retreat from public life. Authors pressed for a return of the status quo, where a man was in control of the government, where a queen lived away from the public eye, and where a king could fulfill his own body politic.

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