

I spent my 3-week residency at Can Serrat working on my book *Seven Women, Seven Salons*. Although my book is nonfiction, I draw on the techniques of fiction — character, setting, dramatic tension, point of view etc, to make the material engaging and interesting for the reader. The seven women in my book were each at the centre of an important movement in Europe. Isabella d'Este, whose guests included Leonardo da Vinci, Mantegna, Bellini, and Titian, was a key figure of the Renaissance. Catherine de Vivonne opened up Paris's first literary salon and helped establish the Académie française. Marie Geoffrin hosted the greatest salon of the Enlightenment and oversaw the production of Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. Henriette Herz was the first Jewish woman to host a salon in Berlin. George Sand hosted the Romantic era's greatest artists and writers including Dumas, Delacroix, Flaubert, and her lover Chopin. Gertrude Stein's salon kicked off the modernist movement in art. Across the Channel, Virginia's Woolf's gatherings provided a similar lightning rod for modernist literature.

I spent my time at Can Serrat working on the Catherine de Vivonne chapter. I spent a week reading, a day plotting, and the rest of the time writing. I ended up with a 17,000-word chapter that I was quite happy with. I also found time for wandering, daydreaming, playing music (there was an old spanish guitar in the house) and lying in the gentle Catalonian sunshine.

I also hosted a conversation for Can Serrat's Raco series, based on my first book which explores the love lives of seven philosophers (yes I love the number seven). This conversation, with wonderful contributions from Can Serrat staff and residents, was recorded as a podcast, and I understand will be on Can Serrat's website soon.

More about my work can be found at WarrenKWard.com

I have attached below a soundfile and printed excerpt of some writing I did at Can Serrat.



On 31 Jan, 1609, Catherine de Vivonne spent one of her last nights in the depraved court of Henri IV. Henri had a terrible reputation for preying on young women, and on that night his brutish appetites were on full display. At the much-celebrated Ballet de la Reines, performed in St-Germain-en-Laye, Henri decided what the young women in his court would wear and what they would perform for him.

The 20-year-old Catherine and two of her friends were dressed as nymphs, pulling along the imprisoned Cupid in a chariot. Ahead of Catherine were 16-year-old Angelique Paulet, half-naked, riding a dolphin — and the 14-year-old Charlotte Marguerite de Montmercy. Henri planned to bed both of them and everyone in the court knew it.

Although the lyrics of the ballet were penned by France's most celebrated poet of that time, François Malherbe, the grand spectacle would later be most remembered for its scandal, as that day even the depraved Henri stooped to new lows. (Henri was notorious for his unquenchable lust, not just for court women but for commoners too. When he tired of his usual round of courtesans and brothels, he had a habit of disguising himself as a commoner and picking women up on the streets. After they undressed, he would surprise them by announcing they were about to sleep with the King.)

On the night of the ballet, as Tallemant recounts in his *Historiettes*, Henri 'went to bed with the beautiful singer [Angelique Paulet] that she might sing beneath him; and everyone agreed his wish was satisfied.'

A popular ditty hit the streets soon afterwards. It mistakenly identified the seducer as Henri's son, probably because it allowed for an irresistible pun on the fact that the King's son was known as the Dauphin:

'Who was best in the ballet?
It was the little Paulet
It was the little Paulet
Riding on a Dauphin.' [Craver]

The King then turned his attentions towards Catherine's 14-year-old friend Charlotte, but this seduction wouldn't be so easy on account of her extremely high rank. Henri knew he couldn't snatch her with impunity as he had the lower-borne Angelique, so he came up with a devious plan. He betrothed her to one of his more docile

attendants, with the plan that on the wedding night he would insist the groom hand her over to the King for his enjoyment. He was sure his lesser-ranked attendant would obey.

But Charlotte's new husband surprised everyone by escaping with his young bride to Brussels where they were safe from the King's rapacious clutches.

It was at this juncture that Catherine de Vivonne took the unprecedented step of resigning from the court. Rather than waiting to see if she was next in line for the King's unwelcome attentions, she set up an alternative court a few blocks from the Louvre. Her new residence the Hôtel de Rambouillet was not only a place where women could feel safe and valued; it would become the site of Paris's first literary salon.