

Epistolary Silence in Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747)

Marijn S. Kaplan

ABSTRACT

Reading Françoise de Graffigny's 1747 novel *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* as an atypical travel narrative, I argue that the author's use of epistolary silence, a lack of response to a letter or a hiatus between letters, constitutes an integral part of her feminist message, a message we can recuperate by interpreting that silence.

RÉSUMÉ

En lisant le roman de Françoise de Graffigny *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*, comme une narration atypique de voyage, je déclare que l'usage du silence épistolaire de l'auteure, un manque de réponse à la lettre ou la lacune entre les lettres constitue une partie intégrale de son message féministe, un message que nous récupérons en interprétant ce silence.

...women's silence, blankness or absence must be translated back into visibility or audibility by a reader who is reader and rewriter both.

Carla Kaplan, *Listening to Silences*, p. 178

Questions of location are most useful...when they are used to deconstruct any dominant hierarchy or hegemonic use of the term "gender."

Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel*, p. 187

Françoise de Graffigny's 1747 epistolary novel *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* has received abundant attention from feminist critics both on its own merit and as a response to Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*, published in 1721.¹ This article participates in the ongoing debate about this extraordinary novel by one of the few prominent women writers in France at that time, analyzing an aspect not treated separately before: the role played by epistolary silence in the novel's feminist message, epistolary silence being the lack of response to a letter or a hiatus between letters. My critical framework of reference is informed by the work of Tillie Olsen and Janet Gurkin Altman. The former's book on the non-natural silence in the works of women, *Silences*, was followed by a more general interest in the concept of female silence, as well as by an effort to interpret this silence and "give it a voice."² In her groundbreaking study, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, Altman says that "All epistolary narrative ultimately drops off into silence, yet in some works this silence is more motivated than in others" (1982, 149). Reading *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* as an atypical travel narrative (following de Certeau 1986, 69-70), I argue that Graffigny's use of epistolary silence is indeed motivated and moreover, that it constitutes an integral part of the author's feminist message, a message we can recuperate by interpreting that silence and giving it a voice.

Graffigny's novel centers around Zilia, a sixteenth-century Inca princess whom readers meet on the day of her supposed wedding to Aza, the Sun Prince. The Incas require their ruling couple to be close relatives - they do not know the incest taboo - and Zilia is indeed closely related to Aza, but the text is ambiguous as to whether she is his sister. She has spent her entire life preparing for her wedding, living and working in the Inca temple as a "vierge du soleil" (Virgin of the Sun). On the morning of her wedding, gold-seeking Spanish conquistadors plunder the temple. They capture Zilia, but during their return voyage their ship is overtaken by the French, who transport Zilia to France where she miraculously lands in the eighteenth century (thanks to literary liberties taken by Graffigny). Her captor, Déterville, teaches her some French words suiting his amorous purposes and takes her in, but Zilia does not abandon her hope of being reunited with Aza and continues to write to him. In her letters, she comments on French society and especially on women's place in it. Eventually, she learns that Aza is alive and well in Spain, but that he can no longer be engaged to her: he has become a Christian, can therefore no longer marry a close relative, and is in fact already engaged to a Spanish woman. Zilia's world appears to collapse, yet by the end of the novel, we find her alive and single at a country estate outside of Paris. Despite Déterville's continued wooing, Zilia refuses to marry him, instead offering to be his "loving friend"; her new vocation in life is writing and translating.

Lettres d'une Péruvienne is a monovocal novel in the female voice where the male voice is represented directly only in about ten lines in letter 27, when Zilia copies a note she received from Déterville, thus still mediating the male voice. Men appear merely as silent addressees of letters written by Zilia: Aza, Zilia's Inca fiancé, is the addressee of the first thirty-six letters and Déterville of the five last letters. Therefore, as can be

deduced from the novel's title stressing the narrator's gender and singularity,³ men do not write letters, but only receive them from one single source, Zilia.

This novel contains various crucial periods of epistolary silence, including the scene that has received the most attention from feminist critics (not as a period of epistolary silence, however), the conclusion, where Zilia prefers a career as an author over marriage to Déterville. This scene, located beyond the narrative and no longer accessible to readers through letters, might be called a "feminotopia," a term coined by Mary Louise Pratt meaning "episodes that present idealized worlds of female autonomy, empowerment, and pleasure" (1992, 166-67). Graffigny allows Zilia the feminist move of recuperating her own voice, for it is during the feminotopia that Zilia authors her text. In addition to writing, this requires translating: Zilia writes the first 17 letters, all addressed to Aza, using *quipus* rather than French. Graffigny describes *quipus* as follows in her "Introduction historique" (historical introduction): "Les *quapas* ou les *quipos* leur tenaient lieu de notre art d'écrire. Des cordons de coton ou de boyau, auxquels d'autres cordons de différentes couleurs étaient attachés, leur rappelaient, par des noeuds placés de distance en distance, les choses dont ils voulaient se ressouvenir. Ils leur servaient d'annales, de codes, de rituels, de cérémonies, etc." ("Their *quapas*, or *quipus*, replaced for them our art of writing. Cords of cotton or gut to which other cords of different colors were attached reminded them by means of knots placed at different distances of those things they wished to remember. These *quipus* served them as annals and codes, were used at their rituals and ceremonies, and so on.")⁴ During her feminotopia Zilia thus recuperates her own voice, translating it from *quipus* into French.

I am therefore in agreement with Nancy Miller that the feminotopia can be interpreted as a coming-to-writing (as evoked by Hélène Cixous) for Zilia (Miller 1988, 126). In her article "The Temple, the Château, and the Female Space: Nancy Miller's Overreading of Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*," Erin Isikoff claims that Miller has overread the feminist importance of the female space by isolating it from its patriarchal context. Hence, Isikoff interprets the final feminotopia very differently: "Instead of coming to writing, Zilia's decision represents the end of writing, a silencing, a closure of narrative" (1995, 25). She accuses Miller of the "projection of such values [approval of Zilia's decision not to marry but to write] onto an eighteenth-century heroine whose text does not claim them" (1995, 25). The text does claim such values, however: possibly in response to the negative reception of the feminotopia by her contemporaries,⁵ Graffigny added three letters in the 1752 edition (see note on text), containing further explanations and support specifically for Zilia's decision not to marry. And the author tells readers explicitly in her "Avertissement" ("Foreword"), an integral part of the

original text, that Zilia herself has translated the *quipus* into French during her feminotopia: "Nous devons cette traduction au loisir de Zilia dans sa retraite" ("we owe this translation to Zilia's leisure in her retreat"). Graffigny's brilliant use of the novel's final epistolary silence rests in the fact that her text allows her heroine to recuperate her own voice from the (silent) *quipus* through the traditionally male intellectual activities of writing and translating. Moreover, she incorporates the evidence of Zilia's successful coming-to-writing into her text, it being the very book the reader is holding.

Zilia as an "author" of *quipus* to Aza poses an important problem addressed by several critics,⁶ concerning the verisimilitude of the *quipus* as a device to communicate Zilia's first seventeen letters. Judging from the nature of *quipus*, they are used mainly for such things as "annals and codes," meaning systematized "texts" involving numbers and a high degree of structure. How then could Zilia use them to express not only her innermost feelings for Aza, but more importantly to convey objects and experiences that are - literally - entirely foreign to her and have never been expressed in *quipus* before? Thomas M. Kavanagh has concluded that the *quipus* constitute an idiolect and "speak as they do only for Zilia at the moment she knots them. She is the single possible reader able to use their mnemonic structure as a prod to speech. Woven within a context of loss and exile, they resurrect through memory a past self with which she no longer fully coincides at the moment of their eventual translation" (1994, 141-42). Therefore, Zilia's credibility as the translator of her own voice is not at stake, since she is the only person who can translate her *quipus*. In creating her idiolect, Zilia sets a precedent for her later defiance of gender-imposed roles, for in Garcilaso de la Vega's book on the Incas (*Royal Commentaries on the Incas*, first published in 1609), which served as Graffigny's basic source on Inca culture, he explains that the readers of the *quipus*, the *quipocamayos*, passed their tradition along from father to son: "...speeches were preserved by the *quipucamayus* by memory in a summarized form of a few words: they were committed to memory and taught by tradition to their successors and descendants from father to son" (Garcilaso de la Vega 1966, 331-32). Graffigny has Zilia challenge patriarchy by appropriating its "writing" system and then uses this to further her feminist message, by allowing Zilia to come to writing in French through its translation.

Thus, in her act of translating, Zilia does what Carla Kaplan has called a "recuperative reading" (1994, 168) of her own *quipus* by translating a woman's silence - her own silence surrounding the *quipus* - back into "visibility or audibility," in her case both visibility and audibility through translation and publication. Zilia gives the silent *quipus* a voice, as a reader and a rewriter, a process in which Graffigny once again has her defy norms relating to the *quipus*: if her gender has been discussed before as problematic in her relationship to the *quipus*, her

number or rather her singularity is also unconventional. As Garcilaso de la Vega indicates, given the memory abilities required in the "recuperation" of *quipus*, there were always back-up *quipucamayus*: "[the] number [of *quipucamayus*] in each village was in proportion to its population, and however small, it had at least four and so upwards to twenty or thirty. They all kept the same records, and [...] the Incas preferred to have plenty [of accountants or scribes] in each village and for each sort of calculations, [...] saying that if there were a number of them, they would either all be at fault or none of them (1966, 331). The "transgression" on the part of Graffigny of having Zilia be the singular translator of her *quipus* seems to be related to the one she made concerning the use of *quipus* for Zilia's personal correspondence, rather than for accounting. For if the verification of numbers requires more than one source of recuperation, the recuperation of a narrative seems secure enough with just one source, especially given that this source is Zilia, who has lived the narrative herself. Nevertheless, it is yet another example of Graffigny empowering her heroine in defiance of patriarchal traditions and norms, refusing to question the authority of her single female voice.

Having focused thus far on Zilia's epistolary silence, one should not forget that the male voice in *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* remains consistently silent. Graffigny uses its epistolary silence also to further her feminist goals, playing on the common correlation in epistolary fiction between epistolary exchange and sexual exchange. The first *quipus* (letter 1) are not only addressed to Aza, but actually reach him and receive a response from him: "Que Pachammac prolonge ses années en récompense de son adresse à faire passer jusqu'à moi les plaisirs divins avec ta réponse!" ("May Pachammac [Inca god] extend the number of his years as a reward for his deftness in having passed to me the divine pleasures accompanying your reply!") Zilia does not, however, reproduce his reply for the external readers. The second *quipus* (letter 2) are handed by Zilia to her *chaqui* (messenger) but never receive a response from Aza, as Zilia is taken to Europe by boat soon afterwards. From then on, Aza lives in epistolary silence. Zilia never participates in sexual exchange, neither with Aza nor with Déterville - she truly remains a Virgin of the Sun - and the only time Aza responds to her, it is to her very first *quipus*, when Zilia is still relatively close to him and chances of a reunion and marriage/sexual exchange therefore appear highest. Once Zilia boards the boat, her link with Peru is severed and silence reigns both metaphorically, as the chance for sexual and epistolary exchange with Aza diminishes, and literally, as she can not communicate with the French.

Déterville's voice is heard directly only once, in letter 27, in a note Zilia copies for Aza: "Ces trésors sont à vous, belle Zilia, puisque je les ai trouvés sur le vaisseau qui vous portait. Quelques discussions arrivées entre les gens de l'équipage m'ont empêché jusqu'ici d'en disposer

librement ..." ("These treasures are yours, fair Zilia, since I found them aboard the vessel that was carrying you. Some disagreement that arose among the crew prevented me from disposing of them freely until now..."). It is no coincidence that Déterville's voice is heard at this exact moment. In letter 25, Déterville has located Aza in Spain and with the letter preceding Déterville's note, letter 26, Zilia has sent all her remaining *quipus* and letters to Aza, as she has an address for him now: "Il [Déterville] m'a promis de te [Aza] faire rendre mes noeuds et mes lettres" ("He [Déterville] has promised me to have my knots and letters delivered to you [Aza]"). Déterville obviously knows that Aza may be in Spain but that he is no longer available to Zilia and this is why he attempts his biggest effort at exchange yet: he tries to obtain Zilia's consent to marriage with him (sexual exchange) in return for her stolen Incan treasures, thus bringing her closer to home yet keeping her far from Aza. He proposes this to her indirectly by means of the note quoted above, but it does not have the desired effect: Zilia responds to Déterville, completing an epistolary exchange, yet refuses sexual exchange. Ironically, Déterville's effort at sexual exchange with Zilia by means of epistolary exchange backfires when the treasures he offers to restore to her allow her to remain single and refuse marriage with him. Graffigny's choice of monovocality, of silencing the male voice, offers Zilia control over the latter and over sexual exchange. Zilia's selection of translation over sexual exchange with Déterville could be interpreted as her preferring an exchange with her Self, in which she creates a different type of progeny, a copy of her own voice, of her Self.

The end of the *quipus*, the end of Zilia existing "in and through silence" (Roulston 1997, 314), also marks an important narratological *caesura*. According to Michel de Certeau, a travel account is structured in three stages: the outbound journey, a depiction of "savage" society, and the return voyage (1986, 69-70). *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* offers an atypical travel account: the traveler does not undertake the trip of her free will; her gender is exceptional; the trip goes from the "colony" back to the imperialist fatherland, thus making France the foreign contact zone, and there is no (obvious) return voyage. In transposing de Certeau's three parts of the travel account onto Graffigny's book, one sees that the end of Zilia's *quipus*, followed by a six-month period of epistolary silence, coincides roughly with the end of her outbound journey; the period during which she writes in French corresponds to a depiction of "savage" society; the return voyage as such does not take place literally, but I would like to suggest that it occurs nevertheless, through Graffigny's use of epistolary silence. Since the return voyage is located after the depiction of "savage" society, it ought to happen during the feminotopia. At that time, Zilia is undoing her *quipus*,⁷ "reading" them and translating them into French. As the outbound journey consists in her knotting the *quipus*, it is only appropriate that the return

voyage consists in her undoing the *quipus* in order to "read" them. Metaphorically, she "returns home" at that point: in order to translate them, she has to "read" the *quipus* and in "reading" them, she finds herself back in Cuzco, on the morning of her supposed wedding to Aza, knotting *quipus*.

The issue of location plays a central role in travel narratives, and based on the quotation from Caren Kaplan cited above (see epigraph) it is particularly pertinent in *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*, for location is used here as a tool to deconstruct hegemonic use of the term "gender." In Peru, Zilia's life as a *vierge du soleil* fits completely within the norms dictated by her gender, with the exception of her *quipus* appropriation. When she is in France, however, her life and specifically her feminotopia defy gender-specific behavior. The primary underlying "justification" for Zilia's life in France is the fact that she is Other, from a different location. As a narrator, Zilia reproduces herself (her Self) as Other to make her tale authentically Peruvian. And it is this alterity, produced by her change of location, which forms the basis of her feminist consciousness, her coming-to-writing and her feminotopia. In that sense, epistolary silence in the *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* functions as a sign of alterity in two places: during the feminotopia, when Zilia's alterity "justifies" her choices concerning marriage and career, and during the transition from using *quipus* to writing in French, when the *quipus* end in absolute silence, because Zilia does not know how to communicate in any "Other" way.

Between Zilia knotting *quipus* and Zilia writing in French, there is indeed an extended period of epistolary silence, as described in letter 18: "Le Soleil a fait la moitié de son cours depuis la dernière fois que j'ai *joui* [my emphasis] du bonheur artificiel que je me faisais en croyant m'entretenir avec toi" ("The sun has made half its journey...since the last time I enjoyed the artificial pleasure I created for myself by believing I was conversing with you"). Six months have gone by, during which Zilia has learned enough French to be able to write in French to Aza. Aza himself does not know French, but Déterville later convinces Zilia that he will be able to find an interpreter (letter 26). The verb "*jouer*" is used in connection with Zilia's writing to Aza, referring to the various pleasures she was to enjoy with Aza after their wedding, but she acknowledges even more clearly that this (sexual?) pleasure has come purely from the "writing": even though the happiness is artificial and she merely believes herself to be talking to Aza, she has still enjoyed it, for "*jouer*" is not modified by any word indicating its artificiality, unlike "bonheur" and "entretenir." The anti-patriarchal trend of Zilia's writing, instigated by her appropriation of a male writing system, thus continues and is strengthened by this epistolary silence because of her use of French now: in order to receive (sexual?) pleasure from writing, a woman does not need a sexual or an epistolary exchange with a man. Aza gradually declines in importance with respect to the purpose of her writing, as Zilia gains in importance. She

faces an important choice during this period of epistolary silence: how should she fill the blank page? She can either discontinue writing to Aza, as there are no more *quipus*, or continue writing to him in French, which he cannot read. The choice Zilia makes demonstrates that her writing is more important than his reading, for by writing to Aza in French, she effectively silences him permanently: French is as foreign to him as the *quipus* are to Zilia's captors. This move constitutes an othering of Aza, as Zilia ends the silence that was a sign of her own alterity by finding her voice and coming to writing in French. The six-month period of epistolary silence thus forms yet another space of female rebellion against patriarchy: it is not as explicitly rebellious as the final feminotopia denouncing marriage altogether, but favors the woman as writer by silencing and othering her male addressee.

Two simultaneous trends exist in Zilia's writing, one reinforced by the other: it increases both in its importance for her personally and in its resistance to patriarchy. The next important phase in those trends - chronologically speaking - is a period of epistolary silence located between letters 36 and 37. In real-life correspondences such as the one between Mme de Sévigné and her daughter Mme de Grignan, a period of epistolary silence often implies that the writing parties are together, and that therefore the immediate need to write no longer exists. This type of epistolary silence is present between letters 36 and 37, because Aza finally arrives in Paris from Spain. This in itself would already eliminate the need for more writing from Zilia to Aza, but during their reunion the "blockage"¹⁸ created by the incest taboo becomes obvious, causing the epistolary silence between Zilia and Aza to become permanent: Aza is never addressed again after letter 36. Given the absence of polyphony in the novel, Zilia thus requires another addressee at this point in order for her epistolarity to work, and this is why, at this very moment, Déterville appears as the new addressee of Zilia's letters (37 through 41).

The transition between the two addressees is clearly marked: for the first time in her epistolary narrative, Zilia mentions its addressee ("au chevalier Déterville") and his location ("à Malte"); all letters addressed to Aza are implicitly understood to be so and his location is unknown, which in fact - in line with the trend towards the letters' increasing importance for Zilia - does not matter much. Zilia's form of address changes from the informal (Aza; tu) to the formal (Monsieur; vous). Her love for Aza with which letter 36 ends ("les plus tendres expressions de mon coeur seront la récompense de ton empressement...") "my heart's tenderest expressions will be the reward for your eagerness") is replaced by expressions of cruelty and pain caused to Zilia by Déterville in the beginning of letter 37: "Avez-vous pu, Monsieur, prévoir sans remords le chagrin mortel que vous deviez joindre au bonheur que vous me prépariez?" ("Monsieur, were you able to foresee without remorse the mortal pain you were to attach to the happiness

you were preparing for me?")

The epistolary silence between letters 36 and 37 lasts two days, as described by Zilia in letter 37 ("Comblée *il y a deux jours* [my emphasis] des douceurs de l'amitié, j'en éprouve aujourd'hui les peines les plus amères"; "Brimming over *two days ago* with the sweetness of friendship, today I am experiencing on its account the bitterest of hardships"). These two days are significant in that they make up the only instance in the novel where Zilia changes addressees. They comprise both the beginning of a new period of epistolary silence (Aza will never be addressed again) and the ending of another (Déterville, who had been present, has therefore not been addressed in letters, but his departure to Malta changes this). More importantly though, this two-day period of epistolary silence indicates a transition in the nature of Zilia's relationship with her addressee, from *amour* (love) to *amitié* (friendship). It is essential because it exemplifies yet another step in the trend in Zilia's writing towards resisting patriarchy; in abandoning Aza as addressee, she also abandons the idea of marriage and exchanges it for friendship with Déterville. This in turn sets the stage for her *feminotopia*.

Of the five letters written by Zilia to Déterville, the first three locate the latter in Malta (letters 37-39). Letter 40 does not specify his location, but from letter 41 we understand retroactively that Déterville has still been in Malta at that point. Importantly, it brings closure to Aza as an issue: "Je sais qu'Aza est arrivé en Espagne, que son crime est consommé" ("I know that Aza has reached Spain and that his crime has been consummated"). Seemingly in response to Aza's marriage having been consummated and Zilia thus officially being "available," letter 41 - the last letter in the book - completes Déterville's own travel cycle, placing him both away from Malta and back in Paris: "Je [Zilia] reçois presque en même temps, Monsieur, la nouvelle de votre départ de Malte et de votre arrivée à Paris" ("I [Zilia] have received at practically the same time, Monsieur, news of your departure from Malta and of your arrival in Paris"). The travels of Zilia's addressees are thus complementary to each other: when Aza comes from Spain to Paris, Déterville leaves Paris for Malta; when Aza has left Paris and completed his return voyage to Spain, Déterville makes his return voyage back to Paris. Epistolarity completes itself at this point as well: Aza is no longer an addressee because of his marriage, and neither is Déterville, because he has returned to Paris where Zilia is, thus eliminating the need for epistolarity. Now the time has come for Zilia's own return voyage by means of translation during her *feminotopia*.

As analyzed above, Graffigny implies that Zilia receives (sexual) pleasure from writing to Aza, but this is no longer evident in her letters to Déterville, given that *amour* has been replaced by *amitié* during an important period of epistolary silence and that there are no future marital privileges to refer to as there were with Aza

(political and religious power and sexual exchange). Rather, the verb "jouir" is used by Zilia no less than four times in the last letter to refer to her future relationship with Déterville: "vous *jouirez* [my emphasis] au même degré de ma confiance et de ma sincérité" ("You will enjoy my trust and sincerity to the same degree"); "Vous ornerez mon esprit de ce qui peut le rendre amusant, vous *jouirez* de votre ouvrage" ("You will adorn my mind with that which can make it amusing and will take pleasure from your work"); "Le plaisir d'être...pourrait seul rendre heureux, si l'on s'en souvenait, si l'on en *jouissait*..." ("The pleasure of being...could bring happiness all by itself if one remembered it, if one enjoyed it..."); "venez apprendre à connaître les plaisirs innocents et durables, venez en *jouir* avec moi..." ("come learn to know pleasures innocent and lasting, come enjoy them with me..."). In each case, the verb refers to the future, to a period of epistolary silence beyond the narrative, to Zilia's *feminotopia*. Given that the four quotations above are listed in chronological order, one can distinguish a trend: in the first two instances, Déterville - the subject - will enjoy Zilia's trust and sincerity. He is even allowed to work on her mind in order to make it "amusing." The third example is a general statement that might or might not include both speaker and addressee, but the fourth example clearly includes both speaker and addressee. Zilia progresses from excluding herself from the verb "jouir" as a subject, to making a general statement that might include her, to clearly including both herself and Déterville as subjects at the end. At the end of her narrative, then, she will share the joy in her life with Déterville. The nature of that joy has changed: implicitly sexual and derived from political and religious power when shared with Aza, it becomes explicitly non-sexual ("innocent" and therefore perhaps - "lasting") and shared with Déterville now.

Although Déterville clearly writes letters to Zilia (letter 41: "après avoir pris sur vous de dissimuler vos sentiments dans toutes vos lettres..."; "after having taken it upon yourself to conceal your sentiments in all your letters..."), he remains epistolarily silent to the external reader, just like Aza. This framework of the epistolarily silent male ties in with the increasing importance of Zilia's letters to her: by not including any male epistolarity, Graffigny poses Zilia as autonomous and independent, benefiting from her letters for what they are, not because they are part of a male context in which she is inscribed and to which she responds, literally and figuratively. Due to the absence of the male voice, the female voice can be heard better. When Zilia reproduces Déterville's voice in her last letter, it is to show him the inconsistencies between his earlier letters - those in which he has disguised his true feelings - and his current epistolary behavior: asking to see her, pledging his devotion to her and wanting to marry her ("Vous me demandez la permission de me voir, vous m'assurez d'une soumission aveugle à mes volontés, et vous vous efforcez de me convaincre des sentiments qui y sont

le plus opposés, qui m'offensent; enfin que je n'approuverai jamais;" "You ask permission to see me, you assure me of your blind submission to my wishes, and yet you endeavor to convince me of the sincerity of sentiments that could not be more opposed to those wishes and that offend me, wishes of which I will never approve in any event"). This inconsistent behavior she then uses for her own purposes, namely to highlight her own consistent behavior: "il faut donc vous dire quelles sont mes résolutions plus inébranlables que les vôtres" ("I must tell you of the resolutions I have adopted, resolutions more steadfast than yours"). Even when the male voice is "reported," its purpose is to serve Zilia's goals.

Graffigny uses epistolary silence to highlight Zilia's voice: there are various periods of epistolary silence related to Zilia's stages of coming-to-writing. Different issues are related to these different periods, but the overall trend is towards a "silencing" and othering of the male addressee(s), creating an increasing importance of the letters for Zilia herself. Thus, (the absence of) epistolary exchange between the sexes can be linked to (the absence

of) sexual exchange. As this trend of male silencing is underway, Zilia is described as deriving (sexual?) pleasure from the act of writing itself, rather than epistolary exchange, locating her outside of patriarchy and increasing her resistance to it. From a feminist point of view, the strength of Zilia's feminotopia lies in the fact that Graffigny has Zilia "recuperate" her own silence, the silence surrounding the *quipus*, by means of her return voyage, the translation of the *quipus* back into both visibility and audibility. During this voyage, Zilia's racial and sexual otherness is used productively to undermine gender stereotypes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Pamela Cheek for her feedback on an earlier version of this paper and the three anonymous *Atlantis* reviewers for their careful reading.

ENDNOTES

1. There were obvious reasons for the pairing of these two novels, even before Nancy K. Miller formalized this type of "Repairing the Tradition" (*French Dressing*): both are early- to mid-eighteenth-century epistolary novels containing, among other things, travel narratives produced by fictitious and exotic Others, two males in the case of Montesquieu and one female in the case of Graffigny, who come to Enlightenment France from eighteenth-century Persia and sixteenth-century Peru, respectively. In both instances, the travelers describe France in frequently negative terms, based on comparisons with their own cultures. Thus, in an interesting reversal from previous travel writing, France becomes the "contact zone" (Pratt 1992, 6). Importantly, too, the two texts in question *pair themselves up*.

2. See, for instance, *Listening to Silences: New Essays in Feminist Criticism*, Elaine Hedges, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, eds. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

3. A pairing of this title with that of *Lettres persanes* will illustrate this point.

4. All translations of quotations from the novel come from *Letters from a Peruvian Woman*, the English companion volume to *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*, both published by the Modern Language Association in 1993. Its translator is David Kornacker.

5. Although the novel was quite popular throughout Europe for a long time after it was published (Altman 1991, 262), its ending inspired several contemporary authors to re-write it specifically. The most famous of these re-writings is *Lettres d'Aza, ou d'un Péruvien*, published in 1749 by Ignace Hugary de Lamarche-Courmont and frequently paired with the novel. It offers a male narrator's perspective - Aza's - created by a male author, and not surprisingly has a much more traditional ending: Aza and Zilia get married and return to Peru.

6. Thomas M. Kavanagh and François Rosset, among others.

7. They are given back to her by Aza when he visits her in Paris; Zilia had sent them to him in Spain.

8. The incest taboo functions in the novel as what Stephen Greenblatt calls "blockage:" "the key to the exclusion or blockage is a native practice that does not fall in the category of familiar European vices, a practice that is not part of the European repertory of moral disasters such as extreme cruelty or lust or blasphemy" (Greenblatt 1991, 131).

REFERENCES

Altman, Janet Gurkin. *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982.

- _____. "A Woman's Place in the Enlightenment Sun: The Case of F. de Graffigny," *Romance Quarterly* 38.3 (Aug. 1991): 261-72.
- Certeau, Michel de. "Montaigne's *Of Cannibals: The Savage 'I' 1981*," *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, Brian Massumi, tr. *Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 17. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, pp. 67-79.
- Cixous, Hélène. *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*, Deborah Jenson, ed. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Garcilaso de la Vega. *Royal Commentaries of the Incas and General History of Peru*. 1609, 1617. Harold V. Livermore, tr. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966.
- Graffigny, Françoise de. *Letters from a Peruvian Woman*. 1747. David Kornacker, tr. New York: Modern Language Association, 1993.
- _____. *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*. 1747. Joan DeJean, Nancy K. Miller, introd. New York: Modern Language Association, 1993.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Marvelous Possessions. The Wonder of the New World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Hedges, Elaine, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, eds. *Listening to Silences. New Essays in Feminist Criticism*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Isikoff, Erin. "The Temple, the Château, and the Female Space: Nancy Miller's Overreading of Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*," *Dalhousie French Studies* 33 (Winter, 1995): 15-26.
- Kaplan, Caren. "Postmodern Geographies: Feminist Politics of Location," *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement (Post-Contemporary Interventions)*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996, pp. 143-87.
- Kaplan, Carla. "Reading Feminist Readings: Recuperative Reading and the Silent Heroine of Feminist Criticism," *Listening to Silences. New Essays in Feminist Criticism*, Elaine Hedges, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, eds. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 168-94.
- Kavanagh, Thomas M. "Reading the Moment and the Moment of Reading in Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 55.2 (June 1994): 125-47.
- Miller, Nancy K. "The Knot, the Letter, and the Book: Graffigny's Peruvian Letters," *Subject to Change. Reading Feminist Writing*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, pp. 125-61.
- _____. *French Dressing. Women, Men and Ancien Régime Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Montesquieu, Charles de Secondat. *Lettres persanes* 1721. Laurent Versini, ed. Paris: Flammarion, 1995.
- Olsen, Tillie. *Silences*. New York: Delacorte Press / Seymour Lawrence, 1978.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London, New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Rosset, François. "Les noeuds du langage dans les *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 96.6 (Nov. Dec. 1996): 1106-27.
- Roulston, Christine. "Seeing the Other in Mme de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 9.3 (Apr. 1997): 309-26.
- Showalter, English, ed. *Françoise de Graffigny: Choix de Lettres*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2001.