



Language and Literature in Marie le Jars de Gournay (1665–1645)

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In her writings on literature Marie Le Jars de Gournay defends the use of figurative speech. She insists that metaphor is necessary to express some of the more mystical and romantic dimensions of human experience. Even the most grotesque metaphors can properly express human sentiments in moments of extreme exaltation or despair. Similarly, she defends the use of neologism, repetition, sentence fragments, colloquialisms, and dialectical speech in literary compositions. This arsenal of varied types of speech is necessary to express the full spectrum of human emotions, memories, desires, and concepts. Efforts to purify and control speech by grammarians only impoverish human communication and suppress the valuable, unusual human experiences figurative speech expresses. Gournay is especially critical of the neoclassical French literary establishment, which is attempting to impose a clear, concise, and uniform vernacular language purged of metaphor, colloquialisms, and dialectical variations.

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