Literature is an excellent source in expressing oneself. One can critique society, like French writer Montesquieu in the 18th century, or describe historic events, like French poet Agrippa D’Aubigné in the sixteenth century. There are no limits for a creative author. During the Renaissance, writing became more important for culture and for people who were learning to read and write. Thus, authors had a new source and a bigger audience to share their ideas. In the poems *Les Tragiques* (The Tragedies), by Agrippa D’Aubigné, and the epistolary *Lettres Persanes* (The Persian Letters), by Montesquieu, these two authors discuss the injustices of their eras by utilizing precise metaphors.

During the seventeenth century, there was a schism between the two parts of Christianity: the Catholics and the Protestants (D’Aubigné 182). Agrippa D’Aubigné was one of the most important authors during these hostilities. He was a protestant, himself, and he had a different point of view than the Catholic authors of the era (D’Aubigné 182). During his life, there were religious wars, and these wars were the subject of his poems, particularly *Les Tragiques*. One part of his poem describes the genocide of the Protestants during the marriage in August 1573 of the King of Navarre, the future Henri IV, and Queen Marguerite de Valais, who was Catholic (D’Aubigné 182). Several Protestants went to Paris to celebrate the marriage, but, for the French Catholics, it was perceived as a good opportunity to kill them (D’Aubigné 182). This genocide is
called the “Saint-Barthélemy massacre.” In the middle of the night, the Catholics killed the visiting Protestants and threw their bodies into the Seine (D’Aubigné 182). It was a tragic event.

The imagery in the poem *Les Tragiques* is crucial to express D’Aubigné’s point of view. He “paints France as an afflicted mother” with two children (“Tragiques” 43). One of these children is big and strong, and the other is small and weak. Why? Because the mother (France) neglects her youngest son; he is her “unfortunate Esau” (“Tragiques” 49). She has enough nourishment for both of her sons but she does not give any to the smallest child. She also ignores her youngest when he is being abused by the eldest, who is like “her Jacob” (“Tragiques” 53).

Sibling rivalry (which is the theme in the Biblical Story of Jacob and Esau) is normal, but in this relationship, it is perilous. There is an abundance of imagery in this poem that engages almost all the senses of the body. For example, D’Aubigné describes the Seine as “red [with the blood] of our deaths” (“Tragiques” 9). This imagery is different than more romantic poems because it describes the horrors of war instead of the fire of love (“Tragiques” 1). In addition, the rhythm is like a galloping horse. This rhythm adds another layer of imagery because the galloping horse represents the sounds of war.

When he wrote this poem, D’Aubigné wanted to describe the miseries of France during the religious wars and reformation of Christianity. He finds his voice in poetry. He also writes about important themes like intolerance, injustice, and the persecution of others due to their choice of religion. There is no justice for the Protestants who are constantly afraid because they practice Christianity a little differently than the Catholics. Thanks to his poetry, D’Aubigné can critique the politicians and the Catholic’s actions without fearing the ratifications. This is the same for Montesquieu, who uses literature to critique the Parisian customs during the eighteenth century.
Montesquieu, who wrote *Lettres Persanes*, was a philosopher and writer, during the Enlightenment (Montesquieu 7). Because he could not openly criticize the aristocracy or royalty, he decided to write a satire. In his epistolary, he claims to solely be the translator of two foreigners, Usbek and Rica, who come from Persia to visit Paris (Montesquieu 48). He chose this method because he could give a different point of view to the public about their own culture. This work analyzes all aspects of Parisian culture but also criticizes them. For example, he describes politics, religion, fashion, entertainment, women, and other elements of everyday life.

At the beginning of the epistolary, Usbek and Rica are astonished; they are experiencing a true culture shock. The most profound descriptions are their observations of the Pope and the king. Rica calls the two “magicians,” and he says that the “king of France is the most powerful prince in all of Europe…who exerts his empire on the spirit of all his subjects; he makes them think what he wants them to think” (Montesquieu 90). In addition, he surrounds himself with people who are much younger or much older than he is (Montesquieu 106). Why would he do this if he truly wanted good advice to better run his kingdom? To put things simply, the king wanted to feel more powerful, and it was not important for him to effectively run his monarchy. This is the same for the Pope. Rica says that “the Pope is the head of the Christians, but he has just as much power [as the King]” (Montesquieu 100). Time and time again, he puts his own interests above those of the Church, and thus, religion becomes crippled by politics. Rica is surprised to learn that the Pope could even “burn a man as a convicted heretic” (Montesquieu 102). For Usbek and Rica, and also for Montesquieu, it is obvious that avarice is more important than integrity in Parisian society.

Agrippa D’Aubigné and Montesquieu are two very gifted authors. They could objectively express their feeling and points of view, but with an added taste of their own respective voices. It
is clear that they understand the power of literature. Instead of starting a war, they use their ideas like a weapon, but in a more peaceful and effective manner. D’Aubigné is disturbed by the injustices against the Protestants, and he wanted to bring the persecution to the attention of the public. All the same, Montesquieu did not like the corruption in society, and he decided to take a stand on the subject. In both cases, literature is a powerful medium. There will always be variances of opinions in society. However, the true measure of intelligence is recognized in the manner than one treats the situation.

Works Cited
