

Authorial Modesty and Its Readers: *Mondanité* and Modernity in Seventeenth-Century France

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We may live in a post-Gutenberg New Media age, but it seems clear that the book, if we contemplate its prominence in, say, the talk show interview, has, at least for now, retained its value in our culture as a currency of intellectual depth, expertise, vision, and moral fiber. Innovative ideas, knowledge, and singular personal experiences still do not quite constitute an individual as important, authoritative, or otherwise worthy of attention until they are expressed in the medium of a book. And again for now, this book remains a printed, physical object that a host can prop up on a desk and exhibit for the camera. Nothing, of course, could be farther from the sensibilities of the seventeenth century. When René Descartes discovered Marin Mersenne's efforts on his behalf not simply to obtain official permission to circulate his *Discours de la méthode* in France but to have him and his work praised in the authorizing documentation that would be printed in every copy, Descartes took exception. "It seems that you want to turn me into a maker and seller of books, which is neither my disposition nor my profession," he wrote in a 1637 letter. Far from his unique understanding or insight, so public a celebration of his authorship, Descartes believed, highlighted his venality and self-regard and would thereby cause read-

ers to think less, not more, of him, undermining rather than buttressing his credibility.¹

Familiar as a cliché about early modern intellectual life yet inescapably alien to our proauthorial sensibilities, Old Regime diffidence about book writing has proved a difficult convention to analyze. Those gestures that we might call “antiauthorial”—referring to a diverse repertoire of protocols aimed at distancing an individual from his or her books, such as anonymity, self-denigrating prefaces, the refusal to profit—have certainly gotten short shrift in studies drawn more easily to the kinds of practices, such as claims to intellectual property rights or commercial payments, that, in elevating rather than obfuscating the writer-book connection, have more evident affinities with current views. Indeed, insofar as the “birth-of-the-author” paradigm, with its teleological biases, has oriented the investigation into authorship and publishing activities in the early modern age, authorial modesty has mostly been configured as a concession to an antiquated cultural field, with its outdated courtly norms; “antiauthorship” describes an identity that the forward-looking, *modern* intellectual figure will have to learn to abandon.

One key observation should, however, give us pause: our sense of the archaic nature of the Old Regime writer who sacrifices rights, payments, and independence to the behavioral expectations of seventeenth-century social elites stands in stark contrast to the perceptions of contemporary eyewitnesses, who saw such a choice as anything but outmoded. To the contrary, the etiquette of authorial modesty, considered as deference to the values of court nobility, was integral not only to the sensibilities of the neoclassical era in France but, more saliently, to a vision of intellectual progress and, indeed, of modernity that defined those sensibilities; a vision rooted not in the writer’s libera-

¹ Descartes to Mersenne, May 1637, in René Descartes, *Correspondance publiée*, ed. Gérard Milhaud and Charles Adam, 8 vols. (Paris: Alcan, 1936–63), 1:350. In the letter Descartes is responding to the *privilège* obtained by Mersenne from the French authorities, which not only allowed the *Discours* to be sold in France but praised Descartes’s contributions to science and knowledge in glowing terms and named him against his wishes. His concern that the *privilège* (which by law was to be printed in every copy of the text) projected a self-promoting image of him is expressed in a letter to the abbé de Cérisy, also from late May 1637: “It introduces me praising myself” (1:356). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

tion from patrons but in a contrary move: his or her assimilation into an elite society that, for its part, staked its own evolution and preeminence on its cultivation of belles lettres, as a key manifestation of its refinement.

Building on the historical incongruity and resisting an older dismissiveness, recent work by cultural and literary historians has sought to enhance our grasp of these seemingly retrograde gestures by exploring them on their own terms, quite apart from a “history-of-authorship” agenda that generally relegates authorial modesty to a purely negative role. “Exhuming” the cultural output of seventeenth-century “salon society”—a corpus ignored by “literary history and traditional scholarship”—Delphine Denis advocates disavowing “our most habitual categories of analysis: *text*, *work*, and *author*.” Faced with a massively eclectic archive of named, anonymous, pseudonymous, initialed, or misattributed “works,” including poems, letters, conversations, histories, portraits, panegyrics, novellas, and romances, gathered haphazardly into printed collections or recorded in correspondence or *mémoires* as the reminiscence of a fleeting manuscript circulation or an oral reading, such concepts have, Denis notes, “revealed themselves to be anything but ‘natural’ . . . , and impede rather than illuminate our understanding of *le discours galant*.”²

If Denis and other key critics who have led the way in reevaluating this literary tradition evince a more nuanced and favorable view of seventeenth-century conventions of authorial diffidence, they nevertheless tend, in placing such emphasis on their historical singularity, to endorse rather than challenge the older presumption that early modern antiauthorship had little to do with current-day ideas as shaped by the eighteenth century and Romanticism.³ There is some recognition

² Delphine Denis, *Le Parnasse galant: Institution d'une catégorie littéraire au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Champion, 2001), 235. The Jesuit critic and theorist of the aesthetics of *galanterie* aptly defines this body of “ouvrages d'esprit” as “all that is written with care” (Dominique Bouhours, *La Manière de bien penser dans les ouvrages d'esprit: Dialogues* [1687], new ed. [Paris, 1743], iv–v).

³ Alain Viala, *Naissance de l'écrivain: Sociologie de la littérature à l'âge classique* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), and Christian Jouhaud, *Les pouvoirs de la littérature: Histoire d'un paradoxe* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), explore the counterintuitive conditions in which writers became “autonomous” by integrating themselves more completely into noble society and into the networks of high political patronage. Viala addresses the tradition of

that claims to modernity were central to evolving seventeenth-century conceptions of writers. Alain Génétiot describes the *galant* poets of the 1630s to the 1650s as the “eulogists of a certain modernism and creators of a new worldly aesthetic” (121).⁴ Yet such observations do not reconcile the two visions of modernity; instead, they leave us with distinct, seemingly incompatible articulations. The assumption prevails that the modern author defined by legal rights, publishing contracts, and a critical, independent voice represents a decided break with the aristocratic culture of authorial embarrassment.

This essay addresses a disconnect that has proved difficult to bridge insofar as efforts to understand the configuration of early modern authorship have focused primarily on the interests, strategies, and self-expressions of writers. Ascertained in prefaces and in letters, these certainly reveal the degree to which the seventeenth-century writer nurtured a self-image quite unlike that of the nineteenth-century writer’s fantasies of autonomy and transcendence. Yet antiauthorial posturing does not find its meaning only in the strategies of writers. In fact, it is in the desires, expectations, sympathies, and interpretations of readers that so much of the logic of the transcription, printing, and circulation of authorial modesty resides.⁵ And in contrast to the noble self-stylings

galanterie more directly in *La France galante: Essai historique sur une catégorie culturelle, de ses origines jusqu’à la Révolution* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008). See also Myriam Maître, *Les précieuses: Naissance des femmes de lettres en France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1999); and Alain Génétiot, *Poétique du loisir mondain de Voiture à La Fontaine* (Paris: Champion, 1997). Taking a different approach in her study of “salon writing,” Joan DeJean, in *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), underscores how a process of canon formation isolated this tradition of writing associated with women and refused to grant its integral contribution to the emergence of the novel.

⁴ In the introduction to their edition of the *Chroniques du Samedi*, a bound manuscript discovered in the nineteenth century that, in the hands of Madeleine de Scudéry, Paul Pellisson, and a secretary, records poems and letters exchanged among members of Scudéry and Pellisson’s social circle in 1653–54, Alain Niderst, Delphine Denis, and Myriam Maître depict the group as advocates of a “modern literature.” See Madeleine de Scudéry and Paul Pellisson-Fontanier, *Chroniques du Samedi, suivies de pièces diverses (1653–1654)*, ed. Alain Niderst, Delphine Denis, and Myriam Maître (Paris: Champion, 2002), 37.

⁵ For instance, Joan DeJean contrasts present-day definitions of anonymity, based purely on the absence of the author’s name from the title page, with the more complex seventeenth-century reality, in which names were left off title pages

of seventeenth-century *gens de lettres*, the responses of their readers, shaped by a symbolic and commercial investment in the book as an effective vehicle for a certain pleasurable, individualized experience of self-improvement and moral affirmation, might offer a more direct link with the conventions and sensibilities of our times. I begin by highlighting the defining ambivalence of the modesty topos, which at one level, as Alain Viala argues, expresses the quandary of seventeenth-century writers who aspired to recognition yet had to attain it in accordance with an aristocratic code of conduct that frowned on self-promotion and professionalism. I argue, however, that this conflict reflects another tension inherent in the decisive influence of a self-consciously elite and highly literate culture of *mondanité*, that is, worldly sociability. *Mondanité* shaped individuals who sought personal validation by cultivating a social polish that evidenced their mastery of the behavioral codes of elegant society and thus marked their integration into it. Yet they found this polish and affirmation less as face-to-face interlocutors than as readers, turning to books (and other textual forms, especially letters) as much as, if not more than, to actual get-togethers. The culture of *mondain* reading offers in turn a deeper context for reevaluating the “birth of the author” in seventeenth-century France, less as the formation of a new professional identity for writers than as the articulation of a new “function” for books—to adapt Michel Foucault’s term⁶—one that enabled books circulating commercially to operate as privileged instruments for delivering to a socially ambitious public the distinction, pleasure, and affirmation of the experience of *mondain* participation.

The *Mondain* Modernization of Letters and Authorial Modesty

“It is better to adapt oneself to one’s times,” wrote the abbé d’Aubignac, criticizing Pierre Corneille for choosing in his 1659 tragedy *Oedipe* a subject jarring to the evolving tastes of midcentury audiences. What

yet the works were not strictly anonymous, since readers knew the identities of their creators in other ways (“Lafayette’s Ellipses: The Privileges of Anonymity,” *PMLA* 99, no. 5 [1984]: 885).

⁶ Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?,” in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. and trans. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 113–38.

were these new times? *Oedipe* failed because it depicted royal characters acting in ways “too inhuman and barbaric to be believable.” D’Aubignac refers to Laius and Jocasta’s decision to “expose a son to ferocious beasts,” a move that “contradicts all sentiments of nature and reason.” Corneille needed to find a subject “more in conformity with the lives of our Princes.”⁷

The “lives of our princes” articulated a cultural and literary modernity rooted in aristocratic refinement and polish, defined against the violent and crude habits of an older order. To be “modern” for a writer meant to adapt one’s production to this new ethos. The texts of the era bear witness to the rise of a “New Parnassus,” conceived as a noble appropriation of letters. “Too rigorous study that degenerated into pedantry and boorishness has been corrected in our day by *galanterie*,” writes Charles Sorel, describing the Muses abandoning “their rustic caves for golden palaces, where they often resided, received as guests of the high nobility of our time.” In such surroundings, philosophers, orators, and poets acquired “politeness,” while “barbarism and coarseness were left to the inhabitants of the old Parnassus.”⁸ Far, then, from opposing a legally and economically liberated author to the leisured society poet of the Old Regime, the battle for intellectual modernity in seventeenth-century France pitted the latter figure, as a manifestation of the deepening association of writers with an increasingly lettered social elite, against the unsocialized pedant of an older humanistic culture. Forsaking the grave, jargony mannerisms of this earlier age, dominated by “wild, morose, or taciturn men” (Sorel, *Nouveau Parnasse*, 8), the writers of the new generation staked their claim to modernity on their dedication to noble *divertissement* and pleasure. Indeed, *l’art de plaire* was a key classical-era articulation of this modernity, expressing a process of opening letters up to the enjoyment of “society” as defined in the 1694 edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, which emphasized the enjoyment and exclusivity of intimate, closed gatherings.⁹ The orientation of writing toward this society was, in turn, reciprocated by the

⁷ François-Hédelin, abbé d’Aubignac, *Dissertations contre Corneille* (1663), ed. Nicholas Hammond and Michael Hawcroft (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1995), 82–83.

⁸ Charles Sorel, *Le nouveau Parnasse ou les muses galantes*, in *Oeuvres diverses ou discours meslez* (Paris, 1663), 26–29.

⁹ The first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (Paris, 1694), 482, defines *société* as “interaction [*fréquentation*], commerce, that men naturally enjoy having

transformative assimilation of writers into its midst. Martin Pinchesne describes the personal ascension of his uncle Vincent Voiture, who, for having sought “to please those at the court,” was received as a guest by the “highest nobility . . . , and even by princes themselves.”¹⁰

At the same time, the modernization of language resided not only in its “refinement” for courtly pleasures but in its elevation as a privileged mechanism of the civilizing process and a primary medium for the expression of one’s *mondain* superiority. Sorel notes the ascendancy of language relative to more traditional forms of elite self-styling: “One must learn politeness and polish [*politesse*] in language, as much as in composure, or the way of dressing and everything that appears on the exterior.”¹¹ *L’art de plaire* evoked, in this sense, a deep fusion of the linguistic with the social, of which the aristocratic socialization of language was only one facet. The other was what Denis calls the “littérisation” of seventeenth-century elites, that is, a reinvention of noble identity as one whose preeminence was affirmed, first and foremost, in its intellectual dexterity and wit and especially in the linguistic forms by which such spiritualized qualities became patent: conversations, verse, word games, and writings of various types (*Parnasse galant*, 47). “Up to now,” wrote Bussy, reflecting on his 1665 admission to the Académie Française, “most noble fools [*sots de qualité*] would have us believe . . . that to have intellect [*esprit*] was to derogate one’s nobility; but the fashion of ignorance at court will soon pass, and the esteem that the king has for talented people will help polish the nobility of his kingdom.”¹²

with each other. . . . It can also be taken to mean a company of people who regularly gather for pleasurable get-togethers [*parties de plaisirs*].” The examples of usage tender an image of society as a mechanism of exclusion and inclusion rather than, in a more modern sense, as an all-encompassing system; they also emphasize concrete interactions: “Pleasant society. He’s a man of good company, we should admit him into our society. He is tiresome, we must banish him from our society.” Another central trope of literary modernity consisted in variants on the theme of purity and purification. See, among innumerable instances, Claude Favre de Vaugelas’s influential primer on up-to-date, modern, courtly usage, *Remarques sur la langue française, utiles à ceux qui veulent bien parler et bien écrire* (Paris, 1647). Vaugelas’s preface defines “good usage” as “purity of language and style” (n.p.).

¹⁰ Martin Pinchesne, “Éloge de Voiture,” in *Oeuvres de Voiture: Lettres et poésies* (1855), ed. M. A. Ubcini, 2 vols. (Geneva: Slatkine, 1967), 1:3, 6.

¹¹ Charles Sorel, *La Bibliothèque française*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1667), 8.

¹² *Les Mémoires de Messire de Roger de Rabutin, Comte de Bussy, Lieutenant General des Armées du Roy, et Mestre de Camp General de la Cavalerie légère*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1696),

To the extent that they embodied this fusion, and the inseparability of the two reciprocal evolutions—the socialization of language and the intellectualization of high society—writers were perceived as modern, manifesting in their activities an *esprit* as attuned to the delights of *le monde* as their personal demeanor was ennobled by their sublime command of the language of belles lettres.¹³ In the preface to his, Madeleine de Scudéry's, and Gilles Ménage's 1654 posthumous edition of Jean-François Sarasin's *Oeuvres*, Paul Pellisson singles out Sarasin's ability to synthesize "genius in letters and genius in society"

2:395. A cousin and correspondent of Madame de Sévigné, Bussy wrote his *Memoires* in exile, banished from Louis XIV's court after the debacle of the *Histoire amoureuse des Gaules*, a collection of accounts of the intrigues of prominent noblewomen, meant only for the entertainment of his friends, Bussy insisted. They were, however, soon copied and circulated for the enjoyment of a larger court public. The self-justifying *Memoires* appeared posthumously in 1693. Viala links the "cultural category" of *galanterie* with the emergence of a new kind of elite public, which, after the failure of the Fronde, displaced an older elite of traditional nobles and officeholders, who had lost their power bases and clout. Seizing on the opportunities available through service to the reconstituting state, this new public comprised "parvenus" and "ralliés," loyal to the king and socially and economically heterogeneous, for whom the *galant* archive's elevation of intellectual capabilities, "talent" and "merit," as principles of distinction resonated with their interest in validating their eliteness through personal qualities rather than through genealogies, military service, or family wealth (*France galante*, 180–84, 293). For a discussion of the appropriation of letters and writing by a nobility redefining itself see Jonathan Dewald, *Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture: France, 1570–1715* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 193; and Mark Motley, *Becoming a French Aristocrat: The Education of the Court Nobility, 1580–1715* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 68–122. On the inextricability of the two processes—the "aestheticization" of social practices and values and the socialization of intellectual practices—as essential to the development of seventeenth-century literary culture see Peter W. Shoemaker, *Powerful Connections: The Poetics of Patronage in the Age of Louis XIII* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), esp. chap. 6.

¹³ Alain Viala writes, "The semantic shift of belles lettres, from meaning 'sciences' (in [Antoine] Furetière, and thus among traditionalists) to meaning 'productions having at least in part an aesthetic character,' seems to correspond well to a new consideration given to literary activity" ("La naissance des institutions de la vie littéraire (1643–1665): Essai de sociopoétique" [PhD diss., University de Lille–III, 1982], 93–94). See also Marc Fumaroli's introduction to *L'âge de l'éloquence: Rhétorique et res literaria de la Renaissance au seuil de l'époque classique* (Paris: Michel, 1994), 24–25; and Philippe Caron's extended etymological study, *Des "belles lettres" à la "littérature": Une archéologie des signes du savoir profane en langue française (1680–1760)* (Paris: Société pour l'Information Grammaticale, 1992).

and ultimately to collapse all distinction between the two.¹⁴ To those leafing through the eulogy, as they thumbed their way toward what the volume clearly constituted as the work of a “modern” poet, this was the cutting edge, a view shared, moreover, by a wide cross section of producers and consumers of writing in this period, including not just those associated with salon life but those who, in opposition, sought to define a more monumental image of the author, legitimized by official positions at the royal court. Nicolas Boileau also conceives the ability to satisfy evolved, contemporary literary tastes to be inseparable from the cultivation of an agreeable persona that would couch the writing in the framework of polite interactions. “It is not enough to be pleasing and charming in a book,” he counsels aspiring poets. “One must also know how to converse and to live.”¹⁵

If the aristocratized image of intellectual modernity remains difficult to reconcile with more current, post-Romantic conceptions of authorship, this is no doubt partly because the elevation of language at the heart of the “New Parnassus” was mediated by a pointed rejection of “authorship.” Thus Pellisson underscores Sarasin’s qualities by contrasting the poet with lesser writers, who “seem to be living only in their works; for being authors, they almost cease to be men” (72). In reference to the seventeenth-century ideal of modernity, the “author” came to signify not the writer’s individual brilliance but a stark separation of the linguistic from the social. The concept of the author projected a vision of the connection between writers and their texts viewed in abstraction. Antoine Furetière defined “author, with regard to literature,” as such: “It is said of all those who have brought to light some kind of book. Today, it is said of those who have had one printed.”¹⁶ The matter-of-

¹⁴ Paul Pellisson, “Discours sur les oeuvres de Monsieur Sarasin” (1654), in *L'esthétique galante: “Discours sur les oeuvres de Monsieur Sarasin” et autres textes*, ed. Alain Viala (Toulouse: Société de Littératures Classiques, 1989), 72. See Alain Niderst, “Madeleine de Scudéry, Ménage et Pellisson éditeurs de Sarasin,” *Travaux de littérature* 14 (2001): 233–42.

¹⁵ Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, “L’Art poétique,” in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Françoise Escal (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 183.

¹⁶ Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel contenant tous les mots françois, tant vieux que modernes*. . . . (Rotterdam, 1690). Adrien Baillet, referring to René Descartes’s first work on music (1618), which he chose to circulate only in manuscript, similarly notes that “if it is to the prerogative [*bénéfice*] of printing to bestow the quality of author on a writer, it is not to the *Traité de la musique* that M. Descartes owes this quality” (*La Vie de Monsieur Des-Cartes*, 2 vols. [Paris, 1691], 1:47).

factness of this dictum belies, however, a fraught dynamic. For such a clear-cut association of an individual with the act of publication was fervently resisted in prefaces and addresses in which one who “brought to light some kind of book” sought to reframe the gesture as something quite different: not as an act of authorship at all but as a grateful tribute to a patron, a type of service to the greater good, or a loyal favor to a group of friends, who, moreover, took it upon themselves to distribute the work. “It was never my intention to have works printed that, until now, I had only shown to my close friends. . . . My friends prevailed over the low opinion that I had of these works,” declares the playwright Gautier de Coste La Calprenède in a typical address from the 1637 edition of his tragedy *La Mort de Mitridate*.¹⁷

Without a context to legitimize it, there was something decidedly unseemly about the “singular relationship” articulated by the concept of the author (Foucault, 115), a fact reflected in Furetière’s examples of usage, which skew markedly toward the negative: “Latin *authors* have stolen much from Greek *authors*. This man has finally made himself [*s’est enfin érigé*] into an *author*. . . . There are many more bad *authors* than good ones.”¹⁸ To be an “author” meant to be *nothing* but an author, which is to say a writer who pointedly lacked the personal *qualité* that would establish an identity as *homme* or *femme du monde*. It implied that one’s motives were not the inclinations—leisure, friendship, favor—that might lead a respectable *mondain* to put pen to paper but dispositions that, by the taint of venality and a professional orientation, undermined the *honnête* image that the individual sought to uphold. Jean de Préchac’s 1680 novella *Le Voyage de Fontainebleau* opens with a narrator traveling by carriage, listening in on a conversation between an English lady and gentleman who discuss a story that they have recently read. The narrator, coincidentally, wrote the story, but he hides this detail from his cotravelers; yet, when they stop for dinner, they meet

¹⁷ Gautier de Coste La Calprenède, “Au lecteur,” in *La Mort de Mitridate: Tragédie* (Paris, 1637). Hélène Merlin underscores the imperative for authors to downplay their own interests and ambitions in the name of serving the greater good, *le bien public*, in *Public et littérature en France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1994), 118–99, 414n20.

¹⁸ The verb *s’ériger* in this context connotes a claim to authority that is illegitimate, inasmuch as it is based on the individual’s sense of his or her own worth rather than on a recognized form of outside validation.

another “man of the court,” who recognizes and unmasks him. The narrator laments that he was “discovered as Author”: “I replied to the courtier that he was doing me a greater wrong than he realized, since I was with people who saw me as an important nobleman and not as an excrement of Parnassus.”¹⁹

The rhetoric of modesty detached the writer from such dispositions, of course. But one hardly has to scratch the surface to find how eagerly writers, contrary to their self-effacing prefatory declarations, strove to publish their texts and to publicize them, along with their own identities as the texts’ creators. The very existence of their books offers some evidence of this (authorial modesty is, after all, the product of a publication process). But the writers themselves barely concealed their ambivalence: just before expressing his horror at being “discovered,” Préchac’s narrator owns up to the pleasure of listening to others talk about his work: “I was delighted when I heard this Englishman who wanted to speak kindly of his companion compare her to *L’Héroïne mousquetaire*” (*Voyage*, 6–7).²⁰

For many contemporaries, such inconsistency unveiled the writer’s hypocrisy. René Le Pays opens his 1671 *Amitiez, amours et amourettes* with an ironic preface mocking the all-too-familiar formulas: “I could easily say here, like most of those who publish their works, that I have been made an author by force: that my friends tore from my hands the letters and poems that I offer you, and that these never would have left my study without having been taken from me.” But “it is at my own initiative

¹⁹ Jean de Préchac, *Le Voyage de Fontainebleau* (Paris, 1680), 9. This narrator is a figure of Préchac himself, since the novella to which the gentleman refers is his own 1677 *L’Héroïne mousquetaire*.

²⁰ Madame de Lafayette famously staked out a similarly vexed position vis-à-vis *La Princesse de Clèves* in a letter to Joseph-Marie, chevalier de Lescheraine, *premier secrétaire des commandements* of Marie Jeanne, duchess of Savoy (with whom Lafayette had begun a correspondence), soon after the novella began to circulate in 1678. In the letter she denies authorship of it but notes that the work is sufficiently excellent—“a perfect imitation of the court”—that she would “take credit for the book if I were certain that the author would never come back to claim it” (Marie-Madeleine Pioche de La Vergne, comtesse de Lafayette, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Roger Duchêne [Paris: Bourin, 1990], 622). See DeJean, “Lafayette’s Ellipses,” and Anne Green, *Privileged Anonymity: The Writings of Madame de Lafayette* (Oxford: Legenda, 1996), for probing analyses of Lafayette’s complicated, seemingly conflictual relationship with her works and her identity as author.

that I offer you my works, and only by the desire that I have to establish myself as an author.”²¹ Viala and Myriam Maître draw more sympathetic, nuanced assessments, ascribing the ambivalence to the inadequacies of a slowly evolving cultural field that, by increasingly valuing and promoting belletristic activities, enabled writers to pursue their ambitions and livelihoods, yet only at the cost of adapting to a social code antithetical to their “natural” desires for recognition and economic reward. Thus Viala describes the rise of the seventeenth-century writer as a “confiscated consecration.”²² Maître underscores the balancing act that literary life became, with the writer treading a fine line between self-promotion and self-effacement. *Honnête* modesty, she argues, constituted a “publication tactic” necessary to this all-but-impossible task, allowing the writer to publish and circulate in an environment that craved belles lettres but was, at the same time, hostile to authorial ambition and professionalism, especially as expressed by women, on whom the cultural expectations of propriety and self-restraint weighed so much more heavily (*Précieuses*, 394–96). Like Viala, though, Maître takes for granted that authorship and *mondanité* were, in some basic way, alien to each other. Indeed, both Viala and Maître assume that, as a concept advancing an individualized and specialized vision of intellectual aspiration and practice, authorship violated the core tenets of seventeenth-century polite society, with its emphases on group dynamics and leisured amateurism. The opposition rests, however, on the misleading view that seventeenth-century authorship, as a social and professional identity, took form *in spite of* the ethical restrictions of *mondanité*, shaped by the private ambitions of writers—for success and economic return—who then had to struggle to reconcile these aspirations with elegant society’s rigid codes. Yet the midcentury writers of belles lettres, producing for a readership steeped in the cultural and social ideals of the court and salon, did not bring into these contexts ambitions that had been previously born and nurtured outside them. It was the configuration of *mondanité* itself that established basic conditions for a model of authorship to gain credence that, while overtly prescribing modesty as a supreme intellectual virtue, nonetheless called forth, validated, and compensated—symbolically

²¹ René Le Pays, “Au lecteur,” in *Amitiez, amours et amourettes* (Amsterdam, 1671).

²² Viala contends that writers “paid for growing autonomy by playing the game of dependence” (*Naissance de l'écrivain*, 295).

and economically—what the modesty seemingly veiled but ultimately projected: the power and singularity of the individual writer as a broadly recognized source of cultural and intellectual authority and of commercial worth; a vision of authorship, therefore, that aligns more directly with current-day ideals.

Reading and *Mondanité*

In other words, the evident ambivalence of authorial modesty reflects less the writer's predicament than a series of contradictions inhering in *mondain* culture and implicit in a reality to which the prefaces, all the while denying the existence of such a thing, bore witness: a huge demand at its core for the printed word, specifically for the printed works of recognized writers. This demand can be situated at one obvious level, as an effect of the intellectualization of social elites. "Our *bel esprit* is not limited to men of letters," Dominique Bouhours notes in his 1671 dialogue *Les Entretiens d'Ariste et d'Eugène*; "it extends to noblemen of the sword, and to people of quality of whom it seemed that ignorance was the primary trait in previous reigns."²³ Such noble embrace of letters, and of those who excelled at them, forms the framework in which a certain seventeenth-century literary trajectory plays out, exemplified by Voiture's integration into "the highest nobility of the court" (Pinchesne, 1:3), where success is measured by the degree to which the educated, professional writer is assimilated and transformed from a commoner into a man or woman of the world (Génetiot, 137–42). But the *mondain* demand for writing ultimately points to a broader context, which a legend such as that of Voiture regaling the habitués of Rambouillet's salon tends to hide, but which is more effectively expressed by, say, Scudéry's offhand comment in *Clélie* that, although it was intended for just a few friends, two thousand people saw the "carte de Tendre."²⁴

²³ Dominique Bouhours, *Les Entretiens d'Ariste et d'Eugène*, ed. Bernard Beugnot and Gilles Declercq (Paris: Champion, 2003), 264. The text consists of a series of conversations bearing on key facets of court culture, including "The French Language" and "The *Je Ne Sais Quoi*." The quotation comes from the fourth conversation, "The *Bel Esprit*."

²⁴ Madeleine de Scudéry, *Clélie: Histoire romaine*, ed. Chantal Morlet-Chantalat, 5 vols. (Paris: Champion, 2001–5), 1:407–8. Two thousand is not an innocent figure here. If it does not refer specifically to the number of copies printed by Augustin

Namely, *la société mondaine* was, in its essence, a community of readers. I mean not merely a coterie of literate elites who read a lot and incorporated, for instance, live recitations into their social events but a public constituted *fundamentally* through the circulation and individual enjoyment of writings, partly via correspondence but especially through what the figure of two thousand ultimately designates: the printing and diffusion of books. In pursuing the experiences of social inclusion and the delights of refined interactivity that, they believed, validated them in their preeminence and their chic, *mondains*—those, to be precise, who identified with this social demeanor—turned far more to written artifacts, certainly, than the prevailing images of this culture, emphasizing social gatherings and live oral exchanges, tend to convey, and as readers, they were more numerous and geographically scattered. In fact, their spatial diffuseness and their basic rootedness in books and other textual forms defined their sociability, no less than their social gatherings shaped their tastes in literature and quite possibly more.

No doubt, if we ponder the quantity of writings they were liable to read and, in the case of popular prose romances such as *L'Astrée* or *Le Grand Cyrus*, the remarkable length of these works, it is hard to imagine that self-styled *mondains* did not spend more time with their books than with their social circle, in spite of their characteristically low view of bookishness. “The school of high society, and its air in which we should live, teaches better, in my view, than any book could,” Ariste tells Sganarelle in *L'École des maris*, voicing a forward-looking worldly perspective on marriage against Sganarelle’s old-fashioned, authoritarian ideas.²⁵ Yet the commonplace that one learned “austere duties” from a book but how to live from *le monde* was at odds with an elite cultural landscape saturated by books,²⁶ and especially by “self-improvement”

Courbé, it certainly evokes the print run of a work in relatively high demand. All signs indicate, after the success of *Le Grand Cyrus*, that Courbé would have anticipated a sizable interest in Scudéry’s next romance, which indeed ran through numerous editions. See Nathalie Grande, “Un parcours éditorial: Madeleine de Scudéry et ses libraires,” in *Les arrière-boutiques de la littérature: Auteurs et imprimeurs-libraires aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles*, ed. Edwige Keller-Rahbé (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2010), 73–78.

²⁵ Molière, *L'École des maris* (1.2): “Et l’école du monde, en l’air dont il faut vivre / Instruit mieux, à mon gré, que ne fait aucun livre” (*Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Maurice Rat, 2 vols. [Paris: Gallimard, 1956], 1:352).

²⁶ In *L'École des femmes* (3.2) Arnolphe famously has Agnès learn her “austere duties” from a book, *Les Maximes du mariage ou les devoirs de la femme mariée avec son*

manuals, including not just old-fashioned guides to piety and marital duty but also contemporary, up-to-date primers on civility, grace, and the proper use of language, as well as books like *L'Astrée*, which were undeniably read as modern manuals for *mondain* self-improvement.²⁷ More saliently, the intensely self-aware, pleasurable sense of one's participation in a brilliant community of extraordinary individuals—a sense so integral to *mondain* sociability, with its endless expressions of mutual admiration and reflections on its own perfections and sublimity—is an inevitably mediated experience. This experience follows not from direct immersion in the live back-and-forth of high-society gatherings but from appreciative, objectifying representations of them.²⁸

This is not to say that seventeenth-century *honnêtes gens* did not socialize. They obviously did. But we might consider more critically the traditional view of *galant* writing as subordinate to the social activities of the worldly milieu it celebrates. The written works are thought to record or transcribe the exchanges of the salon or court, functioning

exercice journalier (Molière, *Oeuvres complètes*, 1:476–80). This fictitious title targets pious manuals, in the mode of François de Sales's 1609 *Introduction à la vie dévote*, that proliferated in the seventeenth century.

²⁷ Sorel reflects on the impossibility of a compact yet comprehensive guide to all books, such as was feasible during the Renaissance, when, for instance, Antoine du Verdier published his *Bibliothèque contenant le catalogue de tous ceux qui ont écrit, ou traduit en françois, & autres dialects de ce royaume* (1585): "If one undertook such a design today, one could not limit oneself to one volume, but rather would exceed a hundred, given how much has been written in France over the past sixty or eighty years" (*Bibliothèque françoise*, 266). Charles Perrault similarly views his own time as one marked by an "abundance of books," compared to an immediately prior era, that is, fifty or sixty years before (*Parallèle des anciens et des modernes* [1688–92] [Geneva: Slatkine, 1971], 32–34). Gabriel Guéret evokes a "multitude of new books" in his dialogue on the state of letters, *La Promenade de Saint-Cloud* (1669) (Geneva: Slatkine, 1968), 78. On reading Honoré d'Urfé's *L'Astrée* as a manual for life in high society see Emmanuel Bury, *Littérature et politesse: L'invention de l'honnête homme (1580–1750)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996), 86. Roger Chartier discusses the circulation of books of *civilité* in *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 71–109.

²⁸ Analogously, in a study that examines the quarrel sparked by Corneille's *Le Cid* in 1636, Merlin points to the importance of private judgments made by readers in their *cabines*—"detaching themselves from the immediacy of pleasure and pulling themselves out of the simulacrum," in opposition to the crowd response in the theater—as essential to the definition of a *public*, constituted via each reader's isolated awareness of himself or herself as a critical member (175).

as a “secretarial office for conversation, first of all,” or, alternatively, they are regarded as a “support” intended to inspire and facilitate discussion.²⁹ In either case, the works have value inasmuch as they are pointedly linked to nontextual events: “real” exchanges in spatially concentrated, face-to-face encounters. The “transcript” might offer, as in Scudéry’s romances, a highly stylized, nontransparent depiction of the group and its interactions. Scholars have quite rightly endeavored to see in such texts not cut-and-dried chronicles of life in seventeenth-century high society but sophisticated literary works in their own right.³⁰ Nonetheless, the interactions that constitute the core themes of the works are still assumed to indicate, however literarily, “objective” referents outside them, and this connection to the “real world,” to its conversations and encounters ultimately grounds the coherence and meaning of the texts in the coherence and vibrancy of a real-life social scene.

A corollary notion is that writing, particularly in print, is, by its “natural” traits and tendencies, opposed to this real-life *mondanité*. Smacking of school, artisanry, and commerce, writing’s centrifugal properties tend to remove the cultivated voiced discourse from the tightly knit, orally constituted community, delivering it to a larger, more open and diffuse group of readers, in whose consumption it is then degraded. It is a pervasive motif that the *galant* story, once written down, escapes its targeted audience of intimate friends to become accessible to a heterogeneous, “unintended” public, changing in the process the very timbre of the language from good-natured, socially unifying fun to mean-spirited, chaos-generating, socially disruptive satire.³¹

²⁹ Marc Fumaroli, *La diplomatie de l'esprit: De Montaigne à La Fontaine* (Paris: Hermann, 1994), 300–301.

³⁰ This point is forcefully made in studies of the *Chroniques du Samedi*, which it is tempting to view as a source of purely documentary evidence on the activities of the Scudéry circle. Delphine Denis writes, “We must read the *Chroniques* as a work [*une oeuvre*]” (“Les *Chroniques du Samedi* de Madeleine de Scudéry: Du recueil à l’œuvre collective,” *Seventeenth-Century French Studies* 24 [2002]: 5). The general tendency is to counter a tradition associated with Victor Cousin, who sought through Scudéry’s romances to write a history of Parisian society as if the former offered a relatively transparent window on the latter (*La société française au XVIIe siècle d’après le Grand Cyrus de Mlle de Scudéry*, 2 vols. [Paris: Perrin, 1905]).

³¹ The story of Bussy-Rabutin and his *Histoire amoureuse des Gaules* is a famous case (see n. 12). Literary depictions of such eventualities—in Molière’s *Misanthrope*

Print went a step farther, conjuring the prospect of a limitless circulation. In the 1664 *Bibliothèque françoise* Sorel reports that Lafayette's *Princesse de Montpensier* was "rare" when it circulated in manuscript, but "everyone wanted [it] as soon as print multiplied copies of it" (180; my emphasis). Marie-Catherine de Villedieu articulates a similarly expansive view of the print public, affirming in the dedication of a 1669 novella to the duchesse de Nemours that she would not have bothered with a description of her protagonist, whose name in the text, Cléonice, is a pseudonym for an anonymous contemporary, "if this story were only going to be seen by you." After all, as a member of a tightly circumscribed network, Nemours was already familiar with the individual in question. "But," Villedieu goes on, "since print is the inevitable destiny of everything that comes from my pen," she must offer a portrait for "every uninformed reader."³²

In this view, only a highly stylized, controlled use of print, one that turned the medium against its own basic nature, could serve the ends of *mondain* culture: strict limits on print runs and circulation; a use of anonymity meant less to conceal the writer's identity utterly than to transform it as the privileged knowledge of insiders; a recourse to prefaces asserting a lack of interest in the wider public and to typographical effects—ellipses or initials in place of names—that prioritized a small group in the know over, as Villedieu wrote, "uninformed readers" unable to fill in the blanks.³³ Aside, though, from the problem of imput-

and Lafayette's *Princesse de Clèves*, for instance—consistently show the circulation of writing to undermine the politeness and harmony of *mondain* socializing.

³² Marie-Catherine de Villedieu, *Cléonice ou le roman galant: Nouvelle* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1976), 6–7; my emphasis. On Villedieu's savvy authorial strategies and her readers see Edwige Keller-Rahbé, "Mme de Villedieu, 'la Poule aux Oeufs d'Or' de Claude Barbin?," in Keller-Rahbé, *Arrière-boutiques*, 87–111; and Faith Beasley, "Apprentices and Collaborators: Villedieu's Worldly Readers," in *A Labor of Love: Critical Reflections on the Writings of Marie-Catherine Desjardins (Mme de Villedieu)*, ed. Roxanne Decker Lalande (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000), 177–202.

³³ We could add "keyed novels" (*romans à clé*) to this list, specifically the refusal to provide a key. On July 19, 1673, evidently responding to a request for a key, Scudéry wrote to M. P. Taisand: "I was most unhappy, Monsieur, not to be able to see you yesterday, but I am much unhappier to have to refuse the first thing that you ask of me. The reason for this refusal is that I have never produced a key, either for *Cyrus* or for *Clélie*, and I do not have one myself" (*Mademoiselle de Scudéry: Sa vie*

ing to print as “natural” certain traits—such as wide circulation and permanence—that were in fact, as Adrian Johns argues, the outcome of a long process of culturally constructing print as an institution for establishing credibility and truth, we might entertain the prospect that such “unnatural” uses of print did not so much reconcile publishing activities with *mondanité*’s social codes or “civilize” them according to the sensibilities of an aristocratic circle.³⁴ Instead, mobilizing the tools and conventions inherent in writing and print (paratexts, typographical characters, title pages, fonts, layout), these uses sought to foster an experience of detextualized and unmediated sociability that belied the experience’s rootedness in the written word, obfuscating the central paradox: a sociability built on the solitary, geographically nonspecific use of a commercialized object.

Indeed, the topoi advancing the precedence of *mondain* sociability over writing, along with the vision of *mondanité* as a culture of spontaneous, face-to-face, site-specific exchanges existing independently of their textual representations, should not be taken at face value, any more than Voiture’s emblematic claims that he composed his verse “on the spot,” as Gédéon Tallement des Réaux noted. “This may have occurred often enough, but often as well he brought already finished pieces from home.”³⁵ Such tropes—including those of salon improvisation, restricted circulation, and writing “as one speaks”³⁶—did not conjure up, after the fact, the pleasures of an earlier get-together but

et sa correspondance avec un choix de ses poésies [1873], ed. Edmé-Jacques-Benoît Rathery and Boutron [Geneva: Slatkine, 1971], 296). As mentioned in n. 31, Cousin constructed his study of seventeenth-century society on the basis of a key to *Le Grand Cyrus*, which he found in the Arsenal library. Mathilde Bombart and Marc Escola, eds., “Lectures à clés (XVIe–XIXe siècles),” special issue, *Littératures classiques*, no. 54 (2005), offers a recent collection of essays on keys. See also Lewis Seifert, “*Les Fées Modernes*: Women, Fairy Tales, and the Literary Field in Late Seventeenth-Century France,” in *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France*, ed. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Dena Goodman (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 129–45.

³⁴ Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

³⁵ Gédéon Tallement des Réaux, *Historiettes*, ed. Antoine Adam, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960–61), 1:498. Tallement des Réaux’s “de chez luy” (from home) evokes the writer’s study, a devalorized place with which a writing might be associated.

³⁶ Du Plaisir, *Sentiments sur les lettres et sur l’histoire avec des scrupules sur le style* (1683), ed. Philippe Hourcade (Geneva: Droz, 1975), 19. Echoing Vaugelas, Du Plaisir—about whom little is known—declared that “one cannot help but write better where one speaks better.” A *libraire*’s address to the reader from the 1699 edition of

cultivated in the very reading of the text a rich, validating experience of social inclusion, which had no reality apart from, antecedent to, or posterior to the perusal. Not, again, that there was no socializing among seventeenth-century cultural elites, other than as mediated by the written works of *galanterie*. But *mondanité* was not mere socializing. It was an ideal of sociability articulated in terms of stylish, pleasing exchanges and aristocratic leisure, whose underlying rationale was not interaction or leisure per se but self-affirmation via affirmation of the elite group with which the self was to be affiliated. Thus one was *mondain* not simply for participating in high-society gatherings but insofar as this participation was experienced as a reflection of one's personal excellence and projected in sociable qualities that made one's participation appear so natural. In this sense, while *mondanité* is normally assumed to entail individual subservience to an overriding goal of communal elevation—expressed in the characteristic gestures of politeness, modesty, generosity, and adaptability—in truth the particular logic of *mondanité* resided in the inverse: configured within an evolving cultural, social, and political framework shaped less by collective values than by relatively increased openings for personal ambition, reinvention, and mobility, *mondanité* appropriated social ideals for the ends of individual stylization, legitimization, and advancement.³⁷

Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle's 1685 *Lettres galantes de Monsieur le Chevalier d'Her**** gives assurances that the work has been authored by a "man of the world, who speaks agreeably, and who writes as he speaks" (*Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Alain Niderst, 9 vols. [Paris: Fayard, 1989–2001], 1:265). Denis cites Jean Segrais's recollection from his *Mémoires*, written decades after the fact, that only thirty copies of the *Divers portraits*, recording the recreations of Mademoiselle de Montpensier and her circle of friends, were printed in the 1659 edition that Montpensier asked Segrais and Pierre-Daniel Huet to undertake. Moreover, Segrais recalls, the forms were subsequently destroyed, "so it was impossible for the printer to run more copies" (*Oeuvres diverses de Mr de Segrais . . .*, 2 vols. [Amsterdam, 1723], 2:171–72). Yet as Frédéric Lachèvre points out, whatever the precise figures of the 1659 Caën edition might have been—and Segrais's memory is unreliable—the image of a tightly controlled, restricted printing jars with the fact that many of the portraits from this edition were, in the next four years, republished in a series of larger-scale commercial editions undertaken by Sercy and Barbin and specifically identified and marketed as collections of portraits dedicated to Montpensier (*Bibliographie des recueils collectifs de poésies, publiés de 1597 à 1700* [1903–5], 4 vols. [Geneva: Slatkine, 1967], 2:108–9). See Denis, *Parnasse galant*, 163–64.

³⁷ *Le monde*, Génétiot believes, is an idealization of elite sociability in terms of exclusivity, pleasure, and leisure: "Its calling is to live, according to the ideal of

Defined not directly by such attributes as sublimity, exclusivity, and up-to-dateness but rather by an intense awareness of these traits as conducive to individual affirmation, the experiences of *mondain* sociability were as likely, perhaps more likely, to be found in solitary reading, which presented to the self an image or internal feeling of one's "virtual" presence in the salon setting, than in actual presence in the group. "One cannot become intelligent [*habile*] or agreeable if one does not enjoy reading," wrote Saint-Évremond, tying two key qualities to textuality rather than to sociability.³⁸

Mondains would then, of course, bring this experience and the idealized self-image it nurtured into their real social exchanges. It is difficult to ascertain exactly how these exchanges might have unfolded. But it seems reasonable to wonder whether it was not the social interactions that were made meaningful by the texts, rather than the other way around. Readers of Scudéry's romances sought famously to recognize their own social world in the pages of her books,³⁹ yet the conversations and portraits offered not a transparent rendering but a mythologization of this world; as such, they molded rather than mirrored readers' perceptions of it and of their places in it. The pleasure of the text lay not in a reiteration or memory of an original social pleasure subsequently recollected and recognized by the reader as his or her "real" life. It lay in the molding itself; in the sublimation of a society, in writing, that was

honnêteté, a life both contemplative and sociable, realized in the friendly circle of a small, select society" (115). Such a view of eliteness, unlike one based on the exclusiveness of aristocratic birth, highlights the individual in his or her relations to others. Viala's definition of the associated construct of *galanterie* similarly underscores personal rather than genealogical traits: "*Galanterie* is a care of the self [*soin de soi*], as well as a care of others" (*France galante*, 115). See also Antoine Lilti, *Le monde des salons: Sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2005).

³⁸ Charles de Marguetel de Saint-Denis, seigneur de Saint-Évremond, *Oeuvres meslées*, 11 vols. (Paris, 1670–84), 6:42. Saint-Évremond uses a number of hard-to-translate key words evoking *honnête* qualities: *habile* means "talented," though not calculating or scheming; *agréable* is a common term and, like *politesse*, signals a stronger quality that we might assume today. In the second part of the passage he writes, "Without it [reading], the most beautiful natural demeanor [*le plus beau naturel*] is ordinarily dry and sterile." The French phrase reflects the famous *précieuse* predilection for using the adjectival form as a noun.

³⁹ "You wouldn't believe how greatly ladies are pleased to be in her novels or, to put it better, to see their portraits there," wrote Tallement des Réaux (2:68g).

then taken for one's own; and in the exalting sense that one belonged there. "I am delighted that you did not reveal the identities of the characters to me," wrote Lafayette in a 1653 letter to her uncle Gabriel Pena, the sieur de Saint-Pons, as she awaited the next volume of *Clélie*; "now I will have the pleasure of figuring them out" (565). Did such pleasure shape how *mondains*, in turn, interacted when they came into contact? In their correspondence Scudéry's readers adopted the mythical names with which she had baptized their novelistic alter egos. Did they use these names in live company? It is, of course, hard to know. But the participatory experience of reading that, as in the case of Lafayette, sustained one's sense of self as *mondain* did not ultimately need the validation of a subsequent or antecedent gathering. Lafayette's pleasure, experienced from the distance of her husband's estate in Auvergne, was not a pale substitute for the delight of *mondain* sociability, from which she was, for the moment, removed; it *was* this delight.⁴⁰

Reading for *Mondain* Writers

We have, for the moment, left behind the world of the author. In fact, the author was central to the book-centric culture of *mondain* readers, whose engagement with the writings of *mondanité*, in contrast with the impressions advanced by the tropes of authorial modesty, was shaped

⁴⁰ It is important to signal the role of private correspondence, which similarly offered an experience of intimate, closed sociability, but via the isolated, solitary activities of writing and reading. In the seventeenth century, personal, private, non-formal epistolary exchanges were seen as a relative novelty, which did not simply allow friends to overcome the distance between them but in fact changed the nature of their interactions. According to both Mademoiselle de Montpensier and Gilles Ménage, the practice was "invented" in the 1640s by the marquise de Sablé and the comtesse de Maure, hypochondriacs who preferred to send *billets* "from one room to the other" (Montpensier, *La Relation de l'isle imaginaire et l'histoire de la princesse de Paphlagonie* [n.p., 1659], 79–82; Ménage, *Observations sur la langue française* [Paris, 1672], 395). These texts are cited in Niderst, Denis, and Maître's introduction to the *Chroniques du Samedi*, 23; and in Antoine Adam's edition of Tallement des Réaux's *Historiettes*, 1:1152n1. Joan DeJean has written on the importance of the (short-lived) penny post in 1650s Paris to the intimate, novelistic letter exchanges, especially between Scudéry and Pellisson, that eventually made up the *Chroniques du Samedi*: "(Love) Letters: Madeleine de Scudéry and the Epistolary Impulse," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 22, no. 3 (2010): 399–414.

by their investments in the figure. In fact, these investments constitute a critical backdrop to the development of the *galant* repertoire of anti-authorship, which, in this light, played not only to the delicate sensibilities of a rarefied social group hostile to the vulgarity of commercial print and authorial self-promotion but also—and, I would venture to suggest, primarily—to a desire to know, and a desire for the pleasure of knowing, the identities of authors, among a considerably less rarefied (though still, to be sure, relatively elite) public of more spatially scattered readers who sought in books to establish and affirm their compatibility with high society. For knowing the author's identity was certainly a principal mechanism by which a text could generate in its reader the sense of fitting in. "Don't ask too insistently [*Ne t'informe point trop curieusement*], reader, after the author of this novella," wrote the publisher of Scudéry's 1661 novella *Céline* in a prefatory address. "I am not at liberty to tell you his or her name, but you will easily guess it so long as you are of *le monde* or are familiar with famous works of this nature."⁴¹

This prefatory note invites us to reconsider how antiauthorial gestures conceived of and appealed to their *mondain* public. Authorial diffidence might initially be thought to recognize and reaffirm a division, seemingly integral to the very logic of *mondanité*, that separated an intimate group of friends privy to the writer's identity and motivations from a broader set of readers who, lacking personal access to the group, lacked access to the information.⁴² Yet the facts of the printing and broad commercialization of these texts suggest that such a convention, even if ostensibly oriented toward a handful of insiders, was hardly intended exclusively or even primarily for their enjoyment (or for the correlative frustration of a larger group of outsiders who could not penetrate the secret). Instead, it performed a more complex operation, speaking less to those definitely in the know than, in the manner of the *Mercur galant*, to those who *wanted to be* in the know and who thought, moreover, that they could be in the know. Defined less by actual social inclusion than by a desire for inclusion, and thus shaped far more by

⁴¹ Madeleine de Scudéry, "Le libraire au lecteur," in *Céline: Nouvelle première* (Paris, 1661).

⁴² Myriam Maître, "Les escortes mondaines de la publication," in *De la publication: Entre Renaissance et Lumières*, ed. Christian Jouhaud and Alain Viala (Paris: Fayard, 2002), 262.

hopes, even expectations, of mobility than by the rigidity of the social order, this public was a decidedly hazier, more heterogeneous, and less circumscribed one.⁴³

The distinction is significant, reconfiguring the insider-outsider oppositions articulated in the prefaces on the basis not of objective, preestablished identities but of social aspiration. And if we assume, in turn, that “every reader” has not a similar status but, quite likely, a similar desire for status, then the gestures do not divide a book’s *galant* readership as we might think. In truth, the group of “uninformed readers” evoked by Villedieu is an empty set, since no reader of her novella would willfully have situated himself or herself in it, even if he or she belonged there. Indeed, no one who engaged the writings of *mondanité* did so out of a resigned sense of being hopelessly cut off from the stylized world that it celebrated; the literary discourse was inaccessible when approached with such an expectation, which is surely why we do not especially esteem it today. Instead, the very move to buy and read the *mondain* text expressed, from the beginning, a longing for assimilation and, crucially, a belief that this goal was in some measure, through the purchase and perusal of the right texts, attainable.⁴⁴

⁴³ DeJean notes that, despite the anonymity of authors, their identities “were widely known, at least within that relatively small circle of well-connected and generally well-born Parisian intellectuals who then formed the essence of the public for literary works” (*Tender Geographies*, 98). In the first issue of the *Mercurie galant* Jean Donneau de Visé, the magazine’s founder, introduces it to readers as a source of news about *le monde*, appealing not to their prior integration into this social sphere but to their curiosity about it, often pursued from afar. In fact, Donneau de Visé targeted a provincial readership: “The curious for news, and provincials and foreigners, who have no knowledge of people of great birth or great merit whom they have heard others speak about, will discover in this and the following issues why they are commendable and what has made them esteemed” (*Le Mercurie galant, contenant plusieurs histoires véritables, et tout ce qui s’est passé depuis janvier 1672, jusques au départ du roy* [Geneva: Slatkine, 1982], 1:8). Though the actual subscriber base is unknown, Viala suggests that about a thousand copies were printed, and these, of course, would be passed from person to person, so that each issue reached many more readers (*France galante*, 278). See Monique Vincent, *Le Mercurie galant: Présentation de la première revue féminine d’information et de culture, 1672–1710* (Paris: Champion, 2005), 57.

⁴⁴ “Assimilation” is the term Viala uses (*France galante*, 137). As one reader wrote to the editor of the *Mercurie galant* in April 1678: “Your works, sir, are creating such a buzz in *le monde* that one would have to not be part of it to not read them.” Presumably, for this reader, the converse was equally true (*Mercurie galant*, April 1678, 226).

In this respect, even as it advanced a view of its readers as divided into two exclusive camps, authorial modesty, in addressing itself to fantasies of social integration rather than to actual integration, conceived of its public as a more unified bloc, comprising not insiders and outsiders but a broader group of readers who, despite their diffuseness and relative heterogeneity, shared an interest in the self-affirmation that came with the pleasure of participating in the cultural rituals of *mondanité*, radiating, like the characters in the novellas they lapped up, its style, panache, and preeminence.

The publisher of *Célinte*, Augustin Courbé, offers in his preface a hint, referring to an episode in *Clélie*, that would be easily recognizable to any reader who knows the corpus of *mondain* literature and especially one of its most visible texts. No need to have been assiduously present at Scudéry's Saturday salons to figure this one out. Courbé's notice conforms to a larger pattern; the *honnête* respect for authorial anonymity—expressed in prefaces composed by the author, a friend, or the publisher—was less a form of compliance with an aristocratic taboo on divulging or crassly promoting authorial identity than a type of ploy, which presented the author's name as privileged information to all except a favored few while in fact making the identity, if not fully transparent, at least eminently and deliciously guessable to all readers with a connoisseur's knowledge of *mondain* literature. The book thereby offered them a point of access into the speculation and hence the possibility of feeling part of the community, granting them—in a virtual if not an actual sense—a toehold in the social networks of high society. Henri de La Chapelle-Bessé's discourse that opens Barbin's first edition of La Rochefoucauld's *Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales* plays the game, employing ellipses to obfuscate the authorial name and cultivating a stylized evasiveness that might keep the unapprised reader at a distance: "I could not tell you in truth if the *Réflexions morales* are by M. ***, even though they are written in a manner that seems close to his."⁴⁵ But as Jacques Truchet and François Moreau point out, La Chapelle-Bessé's reference to the *Mémoires* that La Rochefoucauld had written in exile after the Fronde, and that had been circulating with much fan-

⁴⁵ Henri de La Chapelle-Bessé, "Discours sur les réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales," in La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes*, ed. Jacques Truchet (Paris: Garnier, 1967), 269.

fare and scandal in unauthorized printed versions since 1662, made it almost impossible for even a semiaware reader of the 1665 *Maximes* to go wrong.⁴⁶ The key was not to keep the information about the author's identity from disseminating beyond the small coterie of friends and supporters already in possession of it but to indulge "every reader" (Sorel) — the totalizing terms referring, again, to a larger, if still obviously limited, public — in the fantasy that he or she might know the social mores of the *grand monde* of Paris, with its key protagonists and its sense of literary and (consequently) personal style, well enough to identify the unnamed writers who celebrate this culture's excellence.

The role of the *libraire*, or bookseller, in fostering this anticipation among readers, moreover, calls attention to the embeddedness of *mondain* culture not only in writing and print but, more specifically, in a book trade whose evolution in the second half of the seventeenth century was tied to growth in the market for belles lettres. Denis discusses the part played by publishers in the development of the *galant* archive, which she sees as providing cover for a group of studiously anonymous *honnêtes gens* whose writings, gathered in *recueils*, bear witness to the excellence of *mondain* life (*Parnasse galant*, 134–36). This, though, surely understates the degree to which the publisher's investment in this culture, which afforded lucrative business opportunities, shaped it. We tend to construe the publisher's economic interest as at best irrelevant and at worst antithetical to the cultural configuration of *mondanité*.⁴⁷ Yet the connections between the polished culture of high society and the commercial book trade in contemporary accounts are striking not only for their frequency but also for the fact that they posit relatively slight tensions or divergences of interest. Certainly, writers

⁴⁶ "One could not have designated La Rochefoucauld more clearly," writes Truchet in a note to La Chapelle-Bessé's *Discours* (La Rochefoucauld, 269). See also François Moreau, *La plume et le plomb: Espace de l'imprimé et du manuscrit au siècle des Lumières* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2006), 592–95. Christian Zonza points to the pattern of cluing savvy readers in to the identity of anonymous authors by referring, in the books themselves—on the title page or in prefatory addresses—to other works by the same writer, as with Madame d'Aulnoy's *Histoire nouvelle de la cour d'Espagne* or Préchac's *L'illustre parisienne* ("Nouvelles historiques et leurs libraires," in Keller-Rahbé, *Arrière-boutiques*, 243). This privileged not so much social insiders as up-to-date readers.

⁴⁷ Denis refers to the "effets pervers" of the publisher's interest (*Parnasse galant*, 136).

deemed commercially motivated were condemned, but the opprobrium attached to authorial venality did not extend to publishers, who were assumed to be in it for the money. If such motives wedded them to lowly artisanal status, it did not for the most part devalue the products they peddled. So long as the *honnête* writer “gave” his madrigal to his publisher, the fact that the latter then “sold” it for economic benefit did not diminish the *mondain* quality of the verse. Boileau’s poet is “happy,” not compromised, when his book is “surrounded by buyers in Barbin’s shop.”⁴⁸

Thus observers openly contextualize *mondain* writing in light not only of court and salon life but also of the vitality of an expanding commercial publishing trade specializing in belles lettres and *nouveautés*. In his novella *La Valise ouverte* Préchac, again contemplating his own authorial identity, encounters his name in the *Mercurie galant*: “I got used to this quality and finally believed that I was [an author], and since I noticed that most of those who buy books want the newest ones, I write one every week. It is then sold based on its newness, and the edition often sells out before it is discovered that the book is worthless.”⁴⁹ Tallement des Réaux notes, minus the self-denigrating mannerisms of Préchac, that Scudéry’s romances “sell very well; she made a lot from them” (2:691). In contrast with later (and perhaps earlier) sensibilities, the books that best celebrated high cultural ideals, so long as they did not reflect mercenary authorial motives (which modesty took care of), had commercial value and did so precisely as evidence and affirmation of their capacity to communicate those ideals. Their commercialization did not undermine their *honnêteté* but reflected it. Sorel’s *Bibliothèque française*, meant to “edify *les Esprits*” by cataloging works indispensable to the endeavor, frankly invokes the commercial trade in which the books are to be found, highlighting the parallel utility of his text for *libraires*: “All those who do a traffic in this immortal merchandise will profit [from this work], not only by the sale of a book that suggests other books but also because it might encourage many good books to be bought” (dedication). It is, I believe, integral to the *mondain* orienta-

⁴⁸ Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, “L’Art poétique,” in *Oeuvres complètes*, 158–59.

⁴⁹ Quoted in the introduction to Jean de Préchac, *Contes moins contes que les autres, précédés par l’Illustré parisienne*, ed. Françoise Gevrey (Paris: Société des Textes Français Modernes, 1993), x.

tion of Sorel's guide that, unlike earlier, humanist manuals on book collecting that addressed aristocratic patrons building libraries, his advice, dedicated to "la France," targets individual buyers.⁵⁰

Sorel's guide rests on the assumption that a *mondain* was not just a conversationalist but also a book buyer. To be sure, the pursuit of *honnête* self-improvement led one as inevitably to the *librairie* as to the salon, where, according to many accounts, *mondains* seemed, in the aggregate, to form the most important segment of the public of book buyers in the mid-seventeenth century.⁵¹ The *libraire*, for his part, endeavored not only to satiate but also to nurture this interest and demand, and as a reader, the elegant man or woman of the world therefore became a prime target of the bookseller's marketing efforts. In Corneille's 1632 comedy *La Galerie du Palais*, a *libraire* pounces on Dorimant, the *honnête* character at the center of the plot, as soon as he passes by his stall: "Monsieur, would it please you to see a few of the latest books [*quelques livres du temps*]?" When Dorimant answers yes, the *libraire* proposes "some in fashion."⁵² No less than *galant* conversation, the exchange with

⁵⁰ Sorel defines the innovation of his *Bibliothèque française* in terms of its focus on books that are "useful." We might understand this utility as a reflection not only of the helpfulness of the books for *mondain* self-improvement but also of the books' easy access in the commercial market. Sorel's guide should be distinguished from, say, Gabriel Naudé's 1627 *Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque*, which is the work of a librarian writing for his patron.

⁵¹ Grande describes Barbin's boutique as a "chosen rendez-vous" (82). Echoing, more critically, Préchac's assessment that "those who buy books want the newest ones," Pierre de Villiers emphasizes the "prodigious multitude of *ouvrages d'esprit*" in his *Entretiens sur les contes de fées et sur quelques autres ouvrages du temps: Pour servir de préservatif contre le mauvais goût* (Paris, 1699), 2. Henri-Jean Martin describes the influx of "new classes" into the reading public after the Fronde, including, "in first place, *gens du monde*" ("L'édition parisienne au XVIIe siècle: Quelques aspects économiques," *Annales: Histoire, sciences sociales* 7, no. 3 [1952]: 310).

⁵² Pierre Corneille, *La Galerie du Palais ou l'amie rivale* (1.4–5), in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Georges Couton, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 1:308–10. Situated near the law courts of the Palais de Justice, the Galerie du Palais was a commercial space that catered to a customer base drawn from the educated professionals who clustered in the law courts and made up much of the readership of *mondanité*. The local bookshops were known for specializing in *nouveautés*, in contrast with the traditional *libraires* of the Latin Quarter. Furetière gives us the most famous literary depiction of this milieu with the "Histoire de Charroselles, de Collantine et de Belasire," in part 2 of his 1666 *Roman bourgeois*. Toussaint du Bray, in the early part of the century, and Claude Barbin, who between the 1650s and 1698 published many of the century's most famous "literary" works, were two prominent Palais booksellers who embodied

the merchant affirms an uplifting image of the customer, whose refined, up-to-date tastes mark him, in his book-buying habits, as a member of the fashionable society that his reading material celebrates.

His clued-in tastes are reflected, moreover, in the facility with which he recognizes the books' authors. Indeed, the interaction between *honnête homme* and *libraire* affords the author's name a significant place. Looking at the recommended items, Dorimant notices their creators' identities instantly. "Take this author away," he exclaims. "His very name bothers me." Denis points to Bouhours's 1693 *Recueil de vers choisis*—in which the critic states, "Since readers are eager to see where works that are worth the trouble of reading come from, . . . we have included the names of authors that we have been able to discover"—as a sign of change, evidence that *galant* culture was giving way in the late seventeenth century to a new system that refused to abide by its norms of politeness, including respect for the anonymity of "*honnêtes gens* who write verse" (*Parnasse galant*, 175). But Bouhours's editorial strategy of divulging names when he knows them does not seem so novel. Charles de Sercy's 1653 *Poesies Choisies*, which tenders a long list of authors' names in its extended title (Corneille, Scudéry, Isaac de Benserade, François le Métel de Boisrobert, etc.), submits to its readers a mix of named, initialed, and anonymous poems that half opens the door to the poetic activities of worldly society.⁵³ Sorel's *Bibliothèque françoise* likewise only half-respects *galant* anonymity. While the "person of high condition and excellent intelligence" who wrote *La Princesse de Montpensier* remains nameless, Sorel takes a different tack with *Célinte*, "which we

the new trade. See Roméo Arbour, *Un éditeur d'oeuvres littéraires au XVIIe siècle: Tous-saint du Bray (1604–1636)* (Paris: Champion, 1992); and Gervais Reed, *Claude Barbin, libraire de Paris sous le règne de Louis XIV* (Geneva: Droz, 1974).

⁵³ *Poesies Choisies de Messieurs Corneille, Benserade, et al.* (Paris, 1653). The third part of Sercy's *Recueil de pieces en prose les plus agréables de ce temps. Composées par divers auteurs* (Paris, 1660) divulges fewer names but similarly presents itself as a glimpse into a private community of exceptional elites, thus inviting wide access yet instilling a sense of privilege among readers. "The pieces that I am giving you," Sercy writes in a preface to the reader, "should attract your curiosity, all the more because they were not written to be seen by everyone. Thus you will discover the natural grace that comes without effort and that few people are favored with. These types of souls [*Esprits*], writing only for the enjoyment of a single person or a small number of friends, manage to find beautiful things without troubling themselves to look for them. . . . This is what one can clearly see in these pieces that I am giving you."

believe comes from the pen of one of the most excellent women who has ever written and who is *Mademoiselle de Scudéry*" (180). If Bouhours's late-century text marks a break with the cultural conventions of *mondanité*, it is not by indulging readers' desire to know the identities of the authors in whose writings they take pleasure.

The well-known 1638 Abraham Bosse engraving of the Galerie du Palais shows a *libraire's* boutique with a board overhead advertising names and titles. These veer toward the classics, among them Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch, and toward the great writers of the Renaissance: Boccaccio, Rabelais, Machiavelli. By contrast, Corneille's Dorimant, on learning who wrote the book recommended to him, appears to react to a contemporary with whom he is personally familiar: "He is an impertinent, or I do not know a thing about it."⁵⁴ François Charpentier's dialogue, "Le Libraire du Palais," records a similar exchange.⁵⁵ "Monsieur, would you not like something of ours? Some new book?" asks a *libraire* to a discerning customer named Fredeville who enters his stall seeking "books of entertainment [*divertissement*], of worldly society, and of noblemen [*livres de Cavalier*]" (87, 89). The bookseller plugs a long list of names consisting almost exclusively of recognizable, current-day *gens de lettres*: Desmarests, Scudéry (Madeleine), Boileau, Cotin, Colletet, Scarron, Boisrobert, Sarrasin, Voiture. He finally proposes a book without a name, an absence that Fredeville, who identifies the work as one he approvingly read the previous day, picks up on right away. When he asserts that "I don't know who wrote that book," the *libraire* informs him that the author is a "gentleman" (95). Coincidentally, the author himself, the "Marquis de Faufarguilly," enters the store at that very moment and orders three dozen copies of his own work (one dozen bound in sumptuous morocco leather, two in calfskin), proclaiming it the composition of a friend. Confronting the marquis with the information the bookseller has just shared with him, Fredeville asks why he would disown so good a work. "There is no pleasure in passing

⁵⁴ "Je n'y connais rien," in this context, is an expression of certainty of judgment (Corneille, *La Galerie du Palais*, 1.5).

⁵⁵ The dialogue was published in the posthumous *Carpenteriana ou remarques d'histoire, de morale, de critique, d'érudition, et de bons mots* (Paris, 1724), 87–111. Charpentier died in 1702. He had been commissioned as a propagandist for the colonial enterprises of Jean Colbert in the 1660s. In the 1670s and 1680s he wrote in defense of the French language over the use of Latin.

for a book writer [*faiseur des livres*],” replies the marquis, drawing on the usual tropes (99). Yet when Fredeville asks whether he would be annoyed if another claimed to be its author, the marquis confesses that he would: “After all, I am content [*bien aise*] that my name was deduced from the first leaf [*feuille*] of the book” (102).

This exchange stands as another ironic illustration of seventeenth-century authorial ambivalence, in line with Le Pays’s exposure of modesty as mere posturing. “I do not know what to tell you, but it is the air of *gens de qualité* to hide themselves in these occasions,” the marquis continues (100). But we might also focus here on the figure of the *honnête* reader and book buyer, who, attempting to ascertain the author’s identity, suddenly finds himself face to face with a nobleman. That is, the discovery of the author’s identity translates instantly, albeit in a satirical vein, as a direct encounter with an *homme de qualité*, whose writing then spurs conversation. Charpentier’s dialogue offers a literal depiction of the shift from book to elite, *mondain* interaction, with its recognizable formulas: exchanges of conventionally hyperbolic praise—“those who know you will be able to guess that you [are the author] from the profound erudition, wit [*beau tour d’esprit*], and ingenious mockery that reign everywhere” (103)—and an orientation toward nuanced questions of moral conduct: is the marquis’s parody of the Académie Française appropriate?⁵⁶ But we might also think of the dialogue as the projection of a fantasy of the self-styled *mondain*, who, engaging this culture fundamentally as a reader, imagined himself or herself to be, like Fredeville before the gentleman who magically appears in the bookshop, personally interacting with the refined figures who wrote the works he or she bought and read, not in a proto-Romantic communion of souls but as a well-assimilated, adept member of a community of like-minded, outstanding individuals. In all of its equivocations, the seventeenth-century author acquires power and meaning, as a cultural construct, in its ability to facilitate such a translation from book to self-image.

⁵⁶ How to mock appropriately—offering pleasure without malice—was an important topic in *mondain* conversation. Scudéry’s famous collection of conversations, adapted from her midcentury romances and republished as stand-alone moral investigations in 1680, included the conversation “De la raillerie” (*Conversations sur divers sujets*, 2 vols. [Lyon, 1680], 2:72–159).

We normally take the defining gestures of seventeenth-century authorial modesty to point directly to this vision of an elegant connoisseur integrated into a refined society of nobles. But antiauthorship points as well to the processes and mediations by which these fantasies were given credence and allowed to take effect. While the fantasies themselves, in their fixation on aristocratic mannerisms and affectations, tend to strike us as outmoded, the processes and mediations seem more familiar when measured against twenty-first-century norms: a conceptual and commercial configuration of the book as a privileged mechanism for secular self-improvement and self-affirmation, as well as an instrument for social mobility; an individualized reading experience, partly rooted in a shift toward cheaper, smaller, and more portable formats; and an evolving media environment driven by new marketing strategies that catered to and promoted these trends, orchestrated by a new kind of purveyor. Less attached to the art of printing than his forebears had been, he was more concerned as an entrepreneur to anticipate, shape, and gratify “modern tastes” in order to profit from the demand of a growing, socially heterogeneous public that was, at the same time, united in its desire to experience the satisfaction of being “with the times” and in its agreed-on belief that belles lettres—as a “culture” acquired through the buying and reading of particular kinds of books—were one of the most effective means for achieving this experience.⁵⁷

The *galant* archive, the corpus of works celebrating an elite culture of refined interactions and indulging its ethos of leisure and exclusivity, finds its coherence no less in the degree to which it was conjured, produced, and commercialized by these processes than in the extent to which it consistently reflected the ideals of a tight-knit elite. Viewed from this angle, the antiauthorial conventions that normally strike us as so typical of an earlier phase of literary history might be better associated with the “functions” that Foucault understood modern authorship to perform: enabling and giving meaning to the reader’s experience of the written text by rooting it in a desire for interpersonal connection, for social intimacy with an exceptional personality whom the book did not name but to whom it certainly did point.

⁵⁷ Reed, who sees Barbin as a proto-*éditeur* rather than as an old-style *libraire*, notes that he was an excellent arbiter of literary tastes (1, 62).

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