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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
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The Style and Form of Authority

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Political Science

by

Whitney Mannies

June 2017

Dissertation Committee:

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The Dissertation of Whitney Mannies is approved:

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Style and Form of Authority

by

Whitney Mannies

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Political Science
University of California, Riverside, June 2017
Dr. John Christian Laursen, Chairperson

To what extent can the style and form of language convey authority? Can an author construct herself as authoritative solely by appropriating the style and form of an authoritative discourse? I consider three cases from the eighteenth century—a century that saw dramatic debates and shifts in the practice of writing and publishing—in order to examine how the link between language and authority was challenged, appropriated, and altered. I have relied on close readings of the texts as well as historical research to answer such questions as: To what extent were authors able to construct authority? To what extent could writing style and form serve as a proxy for authority? How did readers perceive the connection between authority and writing style and form? In the case of John Toland, he cloaked the heterodox arguments of his *Nazarenes* (1718) and *Pantheisticon* (1751) in the guise of biblical criticism and liturgy, respectively, in hopes of appropriating ecclesiastical authority. His readers were largely unconvinced of his religious fervor and thus his linguistic masquerade gained him few followers. Toland's

example demonstrates the limitations of style and form as a proxy for authority. The contributors to the *Journal des Dames*, on the other hand, enjoyed some success in their attempt to fashion women as authoritative contributors to the French public sphere. Translating the paradigm of women's authority already established in the salons to the masculine public print sphere of periodicals, the contributors to and editors of the *Journal des Dames* were able to fashion themselves as legitimate, authoritative authors. Finally, I consider Denis Diderot's attempt to forge a new style and form of writing. I argue that his style and form were meant to provoke the reader into conscious, authoritative interpretation. His radically modern prose, however, was roundly rejected. Together, these examples demonstrate the limits and advantages of appropriating styles and forms of language so as to seem authoritative. They highlight the institutional and historical character of authority, and they illustrate how difficult authority is to acquire.

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Introduction: Style, Form, and Authority

In October 1761, a Madame de Beaumer, editor of the enterprising periodical, the *Journal des Dames*, recommended a new translation of Seneca to her mostly women readers.¹ This scholarly impulse apparently prompted a slew of complaints from men about her editorial style, for the next month we find her responding to her critics. “Eh! Messieurs les Critiques,” she wrote, “car c’est moi qui suis cette femme, vous m’impatentez, vous me donnez de l’humeur.”² Their complaints present her with a double-bind, “Vous vous plaignez que mon Journal est trop sérieux, d’autres l’accuseront de frivolité.”³ A woman *journaliste* in eighteenth century France faced a conundrum: if what she wrote was too flowery, she seemed frivolous and would likely be ignored. Yet if what she wrote was too studious, she seemed unacceptably masculine and could be mocked. Exasperated, Beaumer adopts a policy of defiance:

¹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), p. 44. Subsequently the *Journal des Dames* will be cited as JdD. A nearly complete set of the *Journal des Dames* is contained in the Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal (8-H-26209 (1-36)), and in the Bibliothèque Nationale-François Mitterrand (Rez-Z-3161 and Rez-Z-3162). Extant issues include: January 1759-April 1761 (ed. Thorel de Campigneulles); April 1761-September 1761 (ed. Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière); October 1761-April 1763 (ed. Mme Beaumer); May 1763-June 1768 (ed. Mme de Maisonneuve); January 1774-April 1775 (ed. Baronne de Princen, later Mme de Montanclos); May 1775-August 1775 (ed. Sébastien Mercier); June 1777-June 1778 (ed. M Dorat).

² *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), p. 104.

³ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), p. 104.

“Encore une fois, Messieurs, je fermerai l’oreille à toutes vos censures discordantes...Je vous donnerai du gai...mais n’allez pas vous imaginer que le *Journal des Dames* ne traite que des sujets renfermés dans le cercle étroit de la toilette; nous sommes faites pour entendre la raison aussi bien que ces hommes à qui nous avons l’honneur de la faire perdre tous les jours.”⁴

She warns men that, “il faudra bien vous accoutumer à nous regarder comme des êtres qui pensent sous leurs coëffures et sous leurs pompons...”⁵

Beaumer’s exasperation dramatizes one problem at the heart of this dissertation: How can one write authoritatively in the public sphere when one is not considered a legitimate member of the public sphere in the first place? In Beaumer’s case, her illegitimacy was identity-based: she was a woman encroaching on a man’s world.

In this dissertation, however, I also consider the works of two men. To make his radical, heterodox, and arguably atheistic theology seem authoritative, John Toland (1670-1722) disguised his beyond-the-pale sentiments in *Nazarenus* (1718) and *Pantheisticon* (1720) as biblical criticism and liturgy, respectively. Second, I consider Denis Diderot (1713-1780), whose *Jacques the Fatalist* (1796) promoted a materialist skepticism by way of an avant-garde style and form. Both Toland and Diderot were generally viewed as legitimate contributors to the public sphere, even if their positions were controversial. Unlike Beaumer, their identities did not cause their contributions to the public sphere to be viewed skeptically. Instead, what threatened their authoritative speech in the public sphere was the radical content of some of their works. For Beaumer

⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), pp. 104-105.

⁵ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), p. 105.

and the other *editrices* of the *Journal des Dames* that I consider, the challenge was to write in such a way as to seem an authoritative contributor to the public sphere and overcome the delegitimizing stigma of her identity. For Toland and Diderot, the challenge was to write in such a way to cause beyond-the-pale ideas to seem legitimate and authoritative.

These questions are motivated by a conundrum presented by Jürgen Habermas's narrative of the emergence of the public sphere. In Habermas's view, the modern European public sphere emerged in the eighteenth century when a mostly educated, more commercially-minded segment of society began to interact through social milieus and information networks that operated apart from the influence of the Court, e.g. coffeehouses, newspapers, Masonic lodges, and pamphlets. The public sphere differed from the hierarchical and status-obsessed world of the court because, ostensibly, its participants were not limited in their participation by their social status. In theory, everyone was permitted, and ideas were debated on their merits. One problem arises, though, once one acknowledges that the public sphere, though ostensibly open to all regardless of social status, was a masculine sphere. Prejudice, the law, women's lack of education and opportunity, male-dominated social spheres, and ideology that equated women's speech with corruption, and plain prejudice all worked to exclude women from effective participation in the public sphere. More generally, not every mode of speaking and writing were equally authoritative in the public sphere.

This study examines to what extent writing style and form mediated the ways in which knowledge was legitimate and authoritative in the public sphere. The authors in

this study are all conscious that writing style and form affect how their work will be perceived, and they alter their writing style and form so as to enhance the influence and authority of their works in the public sphere. They pursue different strategies, and their works meet with very different receptions. The fates of these works highlights the role of writing style and form in mediating a work's acceptance in the public sphere. Ostensibly open and evaluating ideas according to merit, the public sphere turns out to have a surprisingly narrow vision of what counts as acceptable styles and forms of expression.

Language is social

This dissertation proceeds from the simple premise that language is a social phenomenon, meaning that linguistic exchanges are marked by social dynamics, including inequality and authority. To inform this social theory of language, I draw on Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu argues against linguists like Ferdinand de Saussure and Noam Chomsky view linguistic encounters as egalitarian, as if every individual with a command of the rules and vocabulary of a language were equally positioned to use that language successfully. Those who buy into this “illusion of linguistic communism,” fail to see that if language is valued, it is not because of its technical accuracy, but rather because institutions have lent such language legitimacy and authority.⁶ Bourdieu posits that institutions such as schools, churches, or the law, structure the rules of language--by informing grammar, diction, and syntax, but also by creating contexts in which language

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 5.

is socially effective. “The competence adequate to produce sentences that are likely to be understood,” Bourdieu explains, “may be quite inadequate to produce sentences that are likely to be *listened to*...social acceptability is not reducible to mere grammaticality.”⁷

Legitimacy, authority, and credential-granting institutions

Legitimate speakers or writers are recognized by listeners or readers as having the right to speak and as being sufficiently credible to be listened to. In many situations, legitimacy may depend on official credentials: someone marrying a couple requires certification as a Justice of the Peace; a source for an article on climate change may need a degree in climatology; a theologian may need a seminary degree. Other times, legitimacy may depend on softer credentials. Someone who wants to speak for a certain group will likely need to have had prior experience as part of that group. An ethicist will likely need to live in a basically ethical manner. Legitimacy means that, however much people may disagree with a speaker or writing, there is nevertheless a recognition that they are qualified to speak or write in a given situation. If one is not recognized as a legitimate speaker, not even the most rational of arguments will be listened to.

“Authority,” like legitimacy, means that one’s utterances or writings are likely to be recognized, but authority carries the additional meaning that one’s utterance or text will be *accepted*. Authoritative speech or writing has the ability to alter reality simply by declaring the alteration. The law provides the most straightforward example of this: “I now pronounce you married” will go unheeded if I saw it to a happy couple. If, on the

⁷ Bourdieu, p. 55.

other hand, it is pronounced by a Justice of the Peace, in front of a witness, accompanied by a specific, signed document, the utterance has the authority to establish a binding legal relationship. When institutions are recognized as legitimate, the credentials those institutions confer—whether in the form of degrees and certificates or simply in the form of group acceptance—can also confer legitimacy and authority on a speaker or writer.

Idioms, practical competence, and proxy authority

While it may be necessary in some circumstances, individuals do not generally need to carry around proof of their institutional credibility—e.g. photos that prove their group membership or degrees that prove their credentialed status. Oftentimes it is enough simply to use the specific style and form of language, or idiom,⁸ common to that institution. Institutions teach, and socialize individuals into, certain idioms, and when individuals attain what Bourdieu labels a “practical competence,” their ability to use an idiom becomes, to an extent, a proxy for the credibility that an institution confers.⁹ A lawyer learns legalese in law school, a psychiatrist learns the language for diagnosing psychiatric diagnoses in medical school, a scientist learns to use language in an objective, systematic manner. When a speaker or writer has undergone the necessary education or

⁸ The term “idiom” is my own and not Bourdieu’s. The closest concept in Bourdieu is “dominant language,” but I think the concept of dominance is misleading since it implies that there is one overarching dominant language (see Bourdieu, p. 53). In my view, “idiom” better communicates the plural nature of “dominant languages” that, in my view, co-exist and sometimes compete, but without one idiom ever necessarily gaining total dominance.

⁹ Bourdieu, pp. 5-6.

socialization process to master the style of an idiom, she can deploy the idiom itself to signal her credibility.

I use “style” in this study as a broad term, encompassing all of the features of language that an author or speaker may choose—consciously or unconsciously—to make her language distinctive: diction, syntax, sentence structure, rhythm, tone, imagery, hyperbole, active or passive voice, point of view, etc.¹⁰ “Style” in this sense also includes “form,” by which I mean an author’s choice of form or genre of writing: novels, essays, aphorisms, epic poems, treatises, etc. For Bourdieu, “style” is whatever makes one’s own expressions stand apart and *above* those of others; it is the ability to symbolically generate authority through an expert use of language. An individual can signal proxy authority by competently deploying the style of an institution’s idiom.

One example of the relationship between language and social power is articulated by Jean-Pierre Cavaillé in his study of libertinism and early-modern clandestine manuscripts. Cavaillé has argued that libertinism emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a *culture philosophique* that managed to overcome Christianity, not merely by providing alternative beliefs, but also alternative practices and forms of

¹⁰ I have deliberately avoided the term “rhetoric,” because that term connotes persuasive, public speech in the context of political debate. My interest here, however, is with the experience of a reader vis-à-vis the text, which, while political, is more concerned with the micro-level processes of self-formation than public debate. Also, I am not interested primarily in persuasion, but in the ontological and epistemological effects of style that structure the rationality in which persuasion becomes possible.

knowledge.¹¹ If libertine philosophy succeeded, it was because it created an alternative culture—a social basis that could operate as a “mode de vie et mode de connaissance affranchis de la sujétion aux religions instituées.”¹² In other words, libertine philosophy created a social basis that eventually acted effectively as a credibility-granting institution. This social basis also became associated with certain styles and forms of writing—in other words, its own idiom. In other words, having established an alternative basis for authority, libertine authority was partially conveyed by proxy through the style and form associated with the credibility-granting social basis. Perhaps the idiom of libertinism never managed to become quite as authoritative as the idiom of the Catholic Church, but, as the case of Diderot will illustrate in chapter 3, the task of building authority from the ground up is no easy task.

Credibility deficit

The concept of proxy authority raises several issues. One problem that potentially results from proxy authority is the problem of credibility deficit. If a listener or reader fails to grant a speaker or writer authority as a result of systematic prejudice, injustice results. As Miranda Fricker has argued, rationality is a central component of each individual’s humanity, so failing to duly acknowledge rationality in others constitutes an

¹¹Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, “Libertinage et dissimulation: Quelques éléments de réflexion,” ed. Didier Foucault, *Sources antiques de l’irreligion moderne: le relais italien*, (Toulouse: Université Toulouse-Le Mirail: 2001).

¹²Jean-Pierre Cavaillé (2001), 59.

“epistemic injustice.”¹³ Moreover, we may do ourselves epistemic harm by depriving ourselves of a valuable and interesting perspective. These personal harms may even give rise to greater social harms: insofar as knowledge is necessary for the good-functioning of society, neglecting to recognize knowledge when it appears can only make our collective life worse. John Stuart Mill averred that “the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race... If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error.”¹⁴ Failing to give perspectives the deference that they are due inflicts harm on the individual who is speaking or writing, and it also interferes with our capacity for discerning truth and the common good.

Dissembling

A second potential problem that arises from proxy authority is that of dissembling. If authority is represented by a certain style and form of language, is not language then vulnerable to manipulation? Trusting in the authority implied by an idiom may lead us to recognize authority when in fact there is none. One could emulate the idiom of an institution without ever actually being credentialed by the institution. If employing the style and form of an authoritative idiom is a way of importing authority

¹³ Miranda Fricker. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

¹⁴ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and other writings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 20.

into one's own arguments, this means that style and form entail an ethical consideration. In essence, one must consider whether the authority one claims to have is justified. Laying claim to unjustified authority is potentially manipulative, since it leads an audience or reader to misplace their trust, perhaps even believing something they should not believe.

When dissembling cloaks bad arguments in authority, it can manipulate the audience or reader so that they place more trust in the speaker or writer's authority than is merited. This is another kind of epistemic harm than the credibility deficit mentioned above, one that harms the rational capacity of the audience or readers. When, for example, an irrational argument is delivered in the objective, systematic idiom of science, a listener or reader could be manipulated into believing something they should not believe. Such dissembling could cause real harms, as when pop psychologists amateurishly diagnose people with mental illness. A few legal terms tossed into an angry letter could make a threat seem more legitimate and increase the fear the reader might feel. When this fear is the result of language that intentionally misrepresents authority, it is a real harm to the reader or listener.

Ultimately, dissembling is self-defeating, for once people cease to believe that the idiom indicates genuine authority, the idiom's ability to indicate authority is diminished for dissemblers and the legitimately credentialed alike. When a listener or reader expects a speaker or writer to dissemble, the ability of language to facilitate effective communication breaks down.

Emancipatory potential

This consideration of injustice leads us to a third, potentially positive, consequence of proxy authority: that an author might employ the style and form of an idiom so as to attain the authority unjustly denied her. In other words, unjustly marginalized people or ideas might be able to appropriate the style and form of an authoritative idiom. Style and form could, in this way, be directed towards emancipatory ends.

Alternatively, one could use style and form to break down forms of authority that the author finds unjust or objectionable. Foucault, for example, made a conscious effort to use style in this emancipatory way. Some readers find Foucault a bit difficult to follow, but this difficulty is one way in which Foucault's text disrupts the ways in which language structures authority by attaching it to a unitary origin: the "author." In his 1969 essay, "What is the Author?" Foucault critiques the kind of text whose style effaces any indication of an historical person at its origin, implicitly laying claim to a sacred status or, alternatively, a purely aesthetic character.¹⁵ Where any trace of an author is obfuscated, the text becomes an anonymous, transcendent authority. In this way, a style that suppresses the person of the author brings to the text an unearned, reified authority. The omnipotent authority of the text puts an end to the reader's interpretive action.

Foucault is most concerned, however, not with the suppression of the author-figure but with its *presence*. In Foucault's view, the figure of the author is a way to

¹⁵ Reprinted in Paul Rabinow, ed. *The Foucault Reader*, New York: Vintage Books, 2010.

contain meaning by corralling the potential proliferation of meanings by tying them to an historically limited identity. When a reader perceives writing style to be the distinctive trace of an author-figure, the author-figure then becomes a “a point where contradictions are resolved,” as if the author-figure had to be a unitary, coherent, monolithic subjectivity.¹⁶ Style is wielded in order to indicate an identity, an essence, or origin that would limit the pluralities of meaning. “The author,” he writes, “is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning.”¹⁷

Foucault’s style, by contrast, is designed to disabuse the reader of the notion of a unitary subject, freeing her to employ her own interpretive authority. Foucault writes in a passive voice. He avoids pronouns. Without an “I” or “We” or “One” upon which to hang a thought, Foucault denies his sentences the clarity of a unitary subject, and communicates a diffuse field of subjectivity both for himself and the reader. In the introduction to *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault himself makes the link between his writing style and the effacing of subjectivity:

“What, do you imagine that I would take so much trouble and so much pleasure in writing, do you think that I would keep so persistently to my task, if I were not preparing—with a rather shaky hand—a labyrinth into which I can venture, in which I can move my discourse, opening up underground passages, forcing it to go far from itself, finding overhangs that reduce and deform its itinerary, in which I can lose myself and appear at last to eyes that I will never have to meet again. I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face. Do not ask who I am and so not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our

¹⁶ Foucault 2010, p. 111.

¹⁷ Foucault 2010, p. 118

police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write.”¹⁸

Foucault “writes in order to have no face,” so as to decenter our norms of authorial authority, and also to decenter our sense of our own self as a center of enduring, unitary authority. The disorientation, cognitive dissonance, and loss of self effected by his labyrinthine style is a way for Foucault to emancipate the reader from notions of final, monolithic sources of authority—the author and the reader’s own self—so as to open the way to more and more varied interpretation. In Foucault’s view, then, when style causes either the author-figure or the reader’s own self to be mistaken for a final authority, readers reify the author or themselves as the ultimate interpreter, and just as with sacred texts, the existence of a final authority that can determine meaning truncates the potential proliferation of meanings in the text. Alexander Nehamas (1998) observes that Foucault’s broader goal is not so much the destruction of the author (or the reader), but the overthrowing of a desiccating historicism that would deny the proliferation of discourses by tying them to a monolithic authorial point.¹⁹ Foucault objects not to style or authors

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, New York: Vintage Books, 2010, p. 17.

¹⁹ Nehamas notes that Foucault’s examination of *parrhesia*—the courageous act of speaking truth to someone in a position of power over oneself—is a capacity for ethical self-creation. In *parrhesia*, the style and form of our speech is the mode in which we fashion ourselves as ethical subjects with political power. Forging our own subjectivity is a mode of self-emancipation. Style is clearly one mode through which Foucault accomplishes his unmasking and reaches emancipatory ends. Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

per se, but to the ways in which “style” and “authors” can be constraining forces, constructed to suppress interpretation.

Foucault outlines a different approach to style and authority in later works, however. Foucault seems to realize the impossibility of subjectlessness, and he begins to elaborate the positive, emancipatory potential of subjectivity.²⁰ In his later view, style can be a method of self-formation and political agency and an implicit invitation for the reader to style herself—not as an imitation of the text, but in the course of her own individual creative process.²¹ The style of the author-figure can be an example to the reader, demonstrating how interpretive authority might be creatively, idiosyncratically employed.

In other words, instead of employing style and form in writing so as to signal an authoritative idiom or to appropriate the authority of a certain idiom, we can employ style for the purpose of challenging the authority that those idioms represent. Style and form in writing do more than attach themselves to authority; they can also be self-consciously detached from authority. Because such styles of writing aim to disconnect writing or speaking from a style or form that represents authority, such texts will likely be odd, confusing, challenging, or disorienting.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *Government of the Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982-1983*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010.

²¹ In her Foucauldian approach to rhetoric, Barbara Biesecker suggests that language may serve as a site for that “technique of self” that is the substantive practice of freedom: writing style can make visible the possibilities for emancipation by decentering the subjectivity of the reader and author, thereby opening the space for a new form of subjectivity. Barbara Biesecker, “Michel Foucault and the Question of Rhetoric,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 25 (1992), pp. 351-364.

Overview of the dissertation

In this study, I look at how authors have altered, appropriated, or challenged the relationship between language and authority. The three cases in this study each demonstrate a different relationship between the style of writing and authority. In the case of Toland, his efforts to cloak his radical thought in the authority of biblical criticism and liturgy mostly failed. His example demonstrates the limits of using style and form as a proxy for authority. The appropriation of an idiom can only take one so far: clearly irreligious material cannot take on the sheen of ecclesiastical authority simply by application of ecclesiastical styles and forms of writing.

In the case of the *Journal des Dames*, the *editrices* and women contributors to this periodical were conscious of the fact that women's speech was unwelcome in the masculine public sphere. But I argue that by employing styles and forms of writing associated with women's authority in the salons, and by combining those authoritative, feminine styles with the values of the public sphere, women were able to navigate a path to legitimacy and authority in the public sphere. What success they had was limited. The example of the *Journal des Dames* demonstrates the difficulty of fashioning oneself as authoritative in spheres where even one's presence is viewed as illegitimate.

Finally, Diderot's example shows how his avant-garde novel *Jacques the Fatalist* attempted to challenge established styles and forms of writing. His experimental, fractious style of writing placed interpretive authority in the conscious reflection of the reader. The book, by presenting the reader with an aggressively meaningless and ostensibly determined universe, does not attempt to attach itself to any institution or

idiom of authority. Instead, like Foucault challenging the loci of interpretive authority through his own difficult and unfamiliar style, Diderot's novel style rejects the predictable, artificial devices employed by most fiction. Instead, Diderot seeks to construct authority anew on the basis of the reader's conscious reflection on the disjointed, meaningless nature of material reality. Diderot's experiment was mostly rejected by critics and the public alike, but in the twentieth century it has received broad recognition as an early, influential example of modern literature.

Those who would appropriate the style and form of authority face an uphill battle. Why, then, do it at all? For the women of the *Journal des Dames*, it was not a choice made from preference but from necessity. The very people who did not or could not belong to credibility-granting institutions were precisely those people who needed authority most. Toland, an otherwise legitimate contributor to the British public sphere, nevertheless had no choice but to cloak his most fringe sentiments in a conservative style and form. One cannot argue one's way into the public sphere if one is excluded from the public sphere. Likewise, one cannot debate radical ideas if those ideas are excluded from the public sphere by prejudice and law. And while masquerading as authoritative is never as preferable as being authoritative, for those people or ideas that are not perceived as legitimate, adopting the style and form of an authoritative idiom offers one method for testing the waters of legitimacy and, potentially, opening the public sphere to that which it implicitly or explicitly excludes.

Heterodoxy Appropriating Biblical Authority?: John Toland's *Nazarenus* and
Pantheisticon

In 1711, Joseph Addison narrated a short episode about John Toland (1670-1722) in *The Spectator*. Laying on his deathbed, Toland uncharacteristically requests a curate to hear his confession.¹ Toland is penitent: his works subverted religion and belief in god, he admits, and, sadly, they will continue to do so long after his death. The curate, however, reassures him: your cause is so weak, your books are so poorly argued, and what is more, only your friends and acquaintances read them anyway, so there is no real danger of doing any mischief. Toland, whom Addison reports, “had still so much the frailty of an author in him,” is galled back to health, sends away the curate, and indignantly asks his friends “where they had picked up such a blockhead.”

Addison's story is obviously apocryphal, but Toland, a topnotch manufacturer of apocrypha in his own right, probably had it coming. In any case, Addison's pithy Whiggish sarcasm succeeds in getting to the heart of the matter: How influential was Toland? Did anyone actually take his books seriously? Did his influence travel via a

¹Joseph Addison, *The Spectator* (London: Thomas Bosworth: 1854 [10 September 1711]), No. 166., Vol. 2, 45-46. Perhaps this story prompted a letter that was printed in *The Spectator* two months later: A contributor complains of a “freethinking” figure (Toland) who recently arrived in Devonshire: he lacks commonsense, he is an “infidel thinker” and pretends to the vague and conceited title of “freethinker” just because he is an atheist. *The Spectator*, p. 253.

radical, clandestine network of friends, or was he also, as Justin Champion argues, “mainstream”?²

I consider the perspective, elaborated by Champion, that Toland’s influence on mainstream culture lay in his ability to appropriate the style and form of religious knowledge, with the consequence that he was also able to appropriate the authority of religion for his own, heterodox works. This perspective on language and power echoes Pierre Bourdieu, who argues that linguistic practices reflect and reproduce social power.³ Successful institutions, Bourdieu argues, establish and maintain linguistic practices that symbolically reproduce power. Competently replicating the idioms of dominant institutions (such as the Church or the State) allows a speaker or author to arrogate to herself the legitimacy and authority of those institutions. For example, when scholars speak and write with footnoted historical objectivity, they communicate more than just content—they convey, by proxy, the authority of the university, and thus their own status as an authorized, authoritative knowledge-creator.

I consider Champion’s perspective—that Toland competently appropriated the idiom of religious knowledge and was therefore able to appropriate the authority of religion for his own works—with respect to two of Toland’s texts that pursued heterodox

²Justin Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture: 1669-1722* (New York: Manchester University Press: 2003), 11.

³Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 2003), 5.

ends through conservative means. *Nazarenus* (1718)⁴ and *Pantheisticon: or, the Form of Celebrating the Socratic-Society* (1720)⁵ assumed the form of biblical criticism and liturgy, respectively. Was Toland successful in dissembling? That is, did he successfully attach his own texts to the legitimating discourses of his day, as in Champion's view? Do these texts demonstrate that dominant discursive forms—and the authority they confer—are vulnerable to appropriation, even by the most heterodox of content?

Based on the content of these texts and the responses they received, I suggest that taking on the style and form of orthodoxy can only take an author so far. The responses to *Nazarenus* were uniformly negative; apparently, employing the form of (or masquerading

⁴ John Toland, *Nazarenus*, ed. Justin Champion. (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation: 1999 [1718]). Two editions appeared in the first year of publication; there was another run in 1732. A summary of both *Nazarenus* and its most vocal critique appeared in French in 1718 in the *Bibliothèque Angloise*, and a complete French translation, perhaps by d'Holbach, appeared in 1777.

⁵ The original, 1720 edition of *Pantheisticon* was in Latin and circulated clandestinely. Carabelli identifies three Latin additions appearing in 1720. Part of *Pantheisticon* was translated into English in 1740 by Arthur Ashley Sykes, whose extended refutation of *Pantheisticon* (unintentionally?) provided a detailed summary of its arguments and reprinted long, newly translated segments of the text itself. *Pantheisticon* was translated in its entirety in 1751. It was translated into German in 1856 (in part) and in 1897 (in full). In the years following its initial publication, sections were translated into French and circulated in both published and manuscript form, though it was not translated into French in its entirety until 1927. John Toland, *Pantheisticon: Sive Formula Celebrandae Sodalitatis Socraticae* (Cosmopoli: 1720); John Toland, *Pantheisticon: or, the Form of Celebrating the Socratic-Society* (London: Sam. Paterson: 1751) (hereafter cited as *Pantheisticon*). Arthur Ashley Sykes, *The Principles and Connexion of Natural and Revealed Religion Distinctly Considered* (London: J. and P. Knapton: 1740), 64-84. For more on *Pantheisticon*'s francophone fate, see Pierre Lurbe, "Traduire, trahir, se trahir: le cas du *Pantheisticon* de John Toland." *Cultural transfers: France and Britain in the long eighteenth century*. ed. Ann Thomson (Oxford: SVEC: 2010), 233-242.

as?) biblical criticism was insufficient as a tactic to appear as a credible voice in the dominant, Christian discourse. *Nazarenus*, I argue, did not *appropriate* so much as it *exposed* the facile nature of biblical criticism and ecclesiastical authority while promoting individual reason as an alternative authority. Likewise, *Pantheisticon* did not successfully appropriate the divine authority of a dominant discourse by employing a liturgical style. Instead, I argue that *Pantheisticon* was a genuine attempt to get back to the foundational and benevolent purpose of liturgy: the notion that society is an indispensable element of reason. If these texts succeeded, it was not, as Champion would argue, because they were able to navigate and appropriate the linguistic tactics of the dominant discourses of Church and State. Rather, if these texts were successful at all, it was because they were able to latch on to or even construct an alternative basis for authoritative knowledge.

When grafted onto heterodox content, styles and forms that normally act as a symbolic indicator of the legitimacy and authority of a text might import that legitimacy and authority as well; if readers treat the text as legitimate and authoritative, or at least seriously grapple with the text's claims, we might reasonably infer that the orthodox style and form successfully fulfilled their symbolic function. If, on the other hand, a heterodox text fails to convince or elicit serious response despite its orthodox style and form, we might reasonably find that there is a limit to the ability of style and form to perform this symbolic function.

Toland's Background

John Toland was born in Ireland in 1670 in humble circumstances. He died in England in 1722 in still humbler ones. In between, he was educated in Glasgow and Oxford before moving to the Netherlands and falling in with a radical set that revolved around Benjamin Furly's well-stocked library. Returning to England, Toland embarked on a career as a radical and prolific contrarian after his first major work, *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696) provoked scandalized responses. Throughout his life, Toland corresponded with royalty, the Whig elite,⁶ and influential thinkers of his generation; he was a polarizing figure among his contemporaries, who described him as a libertine, atheist, freethinker, pantheist, and Spinozist. Voltaire would later describe Toland as a principled radical: if only he'd been more moderate, the impoverished Toland could have made a fortune, but instead he chose to vociferously oppose Christianity's hate and vengeance.⁷ Whatever one thought of his ideas, Toland's poverty at least testified to his sincerity.

His success was not primarily due to the originality of his thought.⁸ Incredibly well-read, Toland excelled at packaging elite scholarship for the concerns and literary

⁶ Champion's analysis of a "lent list" among Toland's manuscripts reveals him to be actively circulating ideas among a heterosocial, British Whig elite. Justin Champion, "'Manuscripts of Mine Abroad': John Toland and the Circulation of Ideas, c. 1700-1722," *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 14 (1999), 9-36, 27.

⁷ Voltaire, *Lettres à Son Altesse Monseigneur le prince de*** sur Rabelais et sur d'autres auteurs accusés d'avoir mal parlé de la religion chrétienne*, Amsterdam: Marc Michel Rey, 1767, 408.

⁸For a contrary perspective, see Manlio Iofrida, *La filosofia di John Toland: spinozismo, scienza et religione nella cultura europea fra '600 e '700* (F. Angeli: 1983).

style of the public sphere, and it was primarily by repopularizing and adapting the ideas of earlier, mid-seventeenth-century republican authors such as James Harrington, Algernon Sidney, and John Milton, that Toland had political impact.⁹ Toland was influential in part because he was able to employ different literary styles and forms, tailoring his rhetoric to suit different social milieus.¹⁰ Rhetorical style and form was, for Toland, a medium of negotiating the social milieus in which he sought influence.

The legitimating discourses of Toland's own day were that of orthodox Protestantism and the State, and the fact that the State's relationship to religious authority was being vigorously contested at this time only presented Toland with a greater opportunity to appropriate and challenge the dominant legitimating discourses with his own heterodox interventions.¹¹ Christianity was the hegemonic authority to which knowledge had to conform if it were to be legitimate and authoritative, and the styles and forms of one's discourse signaled conformity to the rituals and processes of the production of orthodox discourse and knowledge. Writes Champion, "the hegemonic authority of Christian culture meant that there was a defined structure for the production of orthodox discourse and knowledge. Conformity to that set of speech-codes was the

⁹ Justin Champion, "Introduction," in John Toland, *Nazarenus* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation: 1999), 2.

¹⁰ Justin Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture: 1669-1722*. (New York: Manchester University Press: 2003).

¹¹ For an overview of the religious and political debates surrounding this period, see Margaret Jacob, "John Toland [and?] the Newtonian Ideology," *Journal of the Warburg and Courland Institutes*, 32 (1969), 307-331.

process whereby legitimate (and therefore potentially successful) discourses became authorised... Transgressive projects were then both conceived and articulated within the idiom of orthodoxy.”¹²

In this context, conformity to Scripture was the criterion of truth and authority—but what exactly conformed to Scripture was not clear. For Protestants, history presented an especially daunting hermeneutic challenge, as generations of ritualistic, heretical accretions had to be carefully scraped away to reveal a purer, more original religion.¹³ The Church’s authority rested on its perceived proximity to the true beliefs of the early Church, so purging the false doctrines appended by a superstitious line of papists was paramount.¹⁴ However, establishing exactly what this primitive church looked like was a tricky historical task. Philology, linguistics, and history became the cornerstones of legitimate scriptural interpretation; if biblical criticism could wield these hermeneutical tools effectively, it could effectively guard against the willy-nilly interpretations of enthusiasts.¹⁵ Toland employed the hermeneutical methods, but crucially, he did not do

¹² Champion (1999), 12.

¹³ The hermeneutical problems confronting religious discourse were discussed widely within the clandestine corpus. Notably, Boulanger, Dumarsais, Challe, and Spinoza considered topics such as the conventional and arbitrary nature of language; the ostensibly natural or divine origin of language and its subsequent devolution; and the inadequacy of our own historical and linguistic knowledge to uncover the uncorrupted divine or natural message. See Claudia Stancati, “Éléments d’une ‘linguistique clandestine’,” *La Lettre Clandestine* 14 (2005-2006): 105-125.

¹⁴ Champion (1999), 39.

¹⁵ Champion (1999), 46.

so for the (legitimate, Christian) purpose of *understanding* heresy, but rather for the purpose of *advancing* heresy.¹⁶ Toland’s manipulation of discursive techniques was an ironic demonstration of the artificiality and superficiality of these biblical hermeneutics. In this way, Toland’s writings were proposing something far more radical than heterodox doctrines; they were a much more fundamental attack on the rituals and methods by which religious power presented itself as legitimate and authoritative.

Toland’s Nazarenus

Toland was in Amsterdam in 1709 when a diplomat showed him an odd document, in Latin with Arabic interpolations. This “discovery,” Toland claimed, was a newly recovered, Mahometan gospel—the lost Gospel of Barnabas. Christians ought to accept this new gospel as divine, Toland argued, since they have long acknowledged that Barnabas wrote a lost gospel, and anyway, Mahometans acknowledge the same god as Christians. Toland proceeded to circulate this manuscript among his fellow freethinkers, eliciting their feedback and revising his own comments accordingly so as to produce a text that would be broadly appealing. This text would eventually become *Nazarenus* (1718).

Nazarenus presents the Gospel of Barnabas along with Toland’s own commentary. In it, Toland articulates a familiar complaint about manipulative clergy: they themselves are to blame for the existence of atheists, not sober philosophers. Toland

¹⁶ Champion (1999), 47.

celebrates true humanity and argues for the proximity, socially, philosophically, and religiously, of Christians and Muslims. Toland's stated purpose is to reveal true Christianity, rescuing it from its endless divisions, and proposing in its stead a civic, pluralistic religion.¹⁷ Finally, he elaborates on the historical and textual processes necessary to discern true, uncorrupted religion, drawing on Spinoza, Hobbes, and Simon.

Nazarenus is at once biblical criticism and a critique of biblical criticism. In the First Letter of *Nazarenus*, Toland, playing the sincere theologian, makes the altered, profane nature of Scripture obvious while claiming to defend Scripture vis-à-vis Islam:

“The minute the learned may alter, add, or substitute, what to them shall seem most becoming the divine spirit, there's an end at once of *Inspiration*, (according to these gentlemen) and the book becomes thenceforth their own: meaning that it is then the production of different times and diverse authors till nothing of the original be left, tho the book continues as bulky as ever. But it must be carefully observed, that the Mahometan *system of inspiration*, and that of the Christians, are most widely different: since we do not so much stand upon words, phrases, method, pointing, or such other niceties; as upon the matter it self, and the design of the whole, tho circumstances shou'd not be always so exact. Tis here we cast our sheet-anchor, and tis here we are confirm'd by matter of fact: notwithstanding the 30000 variations, which some of our Divines have discover'd in a few copies of the New Testament: nor have the copies of the Alcoran escap'd such variations (which is impossible in nature for any book to do) whatever the Mahometans pretend to the contrary, and even some of themselves have produc'd such different readings.”¹⁸

Here Toland turns the style and form of biblical criticism against itself. By highlighting textual inaccuracy and cultural variation, he casts doubt on Scripture, and by extension, the Church's legitimacy and authority.

¹⁷ Champion (1999), 97.

¹⁸ *Nazarenus*, 140.

In addition to this dismantling, however, Toland has a positive project. He posits another, alternative source of credibility: reason, uncramped by partiality, will allow “men of candor [to] accurately judge of the things themselves, without regarding whether he be a Clergyman or a Layman that delivers them.”¹⁹ Toland’s own legitimacy as a biblical scholar ought to rest on impartial reason alone, indifferent to his institutional status.

Another way Toland replaces religious authority with the authority of individual reason is by emphasizing clarity of style in writing. Rhetorical flourishes obfuscate and manipulate; clear language facilitates clear reasoning for every individual. Toland writes,

“But my text is plain and perspicuous enough, even to the meanest capacity...every man who clearly conceives any subject, may as clearly express it. Witty conceits and harmonious flourishes are for another-guess sort of writing: but obscurity is to be avoided in all sorts, and nothing to be affected but not to be misunderstood; if too great a care of being intelligible, can be reckon’d affectation.”²⁰

Criticizing the clergy, he argues:

“If the Stile of the man they love not, be chaste and unaffected, stript of the enthusiastic cant of the Fathers, the barbarous jargon of the Schools, and the motly dialect of later Systems, then his Principles are vehemently suspected; and by how much more they are intelligible, judg’d to be by so much the more dangerous.”²¹

Indeed, throughout *Nazareus*, Toland repeats the theme that the Church is unnecessary for establishing truth. Individual reason is sufficient:

¹⁹*Nazareus*, 117.

²⁰*Nazareus*, 122.

²¹*Nazareus*, 127.

“Nothing in the Scriptures was ‘plain and incontestable but a few moral precepts, which are more amply perspicuously, and methodically delivered in other books as they are very easy and intelligible without books at all.”²²

Privileging the role of individual reason, Toland inverted the source of authority in biblical criticism: the authority of a text depended more on the individuals *spoken to* rather than the person speaking.²³ Thus by appropriating the mode of biblical criticism, Toland challenges the very institution that makes biblical criticism a credible mode of knowledge production.

Toland spilled plenty of ink in *Nazarenus* communicating his pious inquisitiveness and sincere desire to learn. But not only did no one believe that Toland was pious or sincere, no one believed that Toland *could believe that they would believe it*. For at least a decade after its publication, the most positive public reference to *Nazarenus* was arguably Desmaizeaux’s factual report that Toland wrote it.

But if success cannot be gauged by positive responses, it can perhaps be gauged by the volume of negative ones. The year *Nazarenus* appeared, it elicited several comprehensive rebuttals. Thomas Brett argued against the merits of Toland’s argument against the genuineness of the New Testament canon; after all, how could the early Church, so close to the apostles, have gotten it wrong?²⁴ In a lengthy rebuttal, James

²²*Nazarenus*, 289-90.

²³ Steven Daniel, *John Toland: his methods, manners, and mind* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press: 1984), 54.

²⁴ Thomas Brett, *Tradition Necessary to explain and interpret the Holy Scriptures...Containing some remarks on Mr. Toland’s Nazarenus* (London: James Bettenham: 1718), i-xxiii.

Paterson criticized Toland for trying to reconcile Christianity and Islam.²⁵ The most comprehensive negative response came from Thomas Mangey, who was aghast that Toland could be so stupid as to think the Gospel of Barnabas was real.²⁶ Not only did Mangey argue that the text was intolerable, but he also dismissed *Nazarenus* as pedestrian (probably the worst critique, from Toland's point of view). *Nazarenus* and Mangey's rebuttal were summarized for francophone audiences in the *Bibliothèque Angloise* that same year.²⁷

Other responses in the first year discussed *Nazarenus* with reference to a hubbub caused by the unacceptably latitudinarian disposition of the Bishop of Bangor, whom Toland had defended. Thomas Dawson took Toland's praise of the Bishop as the basis for attacking the latter's impiety,²⁸ as does one Mathias Earberry.²⁹ Gilbert Dalrymple intervened to rescue the Bishop from the unjust association, attacking Toland in the

²⁵James Paterson, *Anti-nazarenus By way of Answer to Mr Toland; Or, A Tretise proving the Divine Original and Authority of the Holy Scriptures against Atheists...*(London: S. Butler: 1718).

²⁶ Thomas Mangey, *Remarks Upon Nazarenus. Wherein the Falsity of Mr. Toland's Mahometan Gospel; And his Misrepresentation of Mahometan Sentiments, in respect of Christianity, Are set forth...*(London: William and John Innys: 1718).

²⁷*Bibliothèque Angloise* (Amsterdam: 1718), 301-326, 327-335.

²⁸ Thomas Dawson, *An Introduction to the Bishop of Bangor's Intended Collection of Authorities...*(London: Jonah Bowyer: 1718), xliii.

²⁹ Matthias Earberry, *The Old English Constitution Vindicated...*(London: 1718), xxiv.

process.³⁰ Five years later, the *Bibliothèque Germanique* would lament that the Bishop had ever been tangled up in Toland's nonsense.³¹

These responses demonstrate that, in the year of its publication, *Nazarenus* elicited only negative responses, although some of them were very substantive. After 1718, however, the attacks seem to descend to the ad hominem, save for two: In 1726, Jeremiah Jones defended the canonicity of the New Testament against *Nazarenus*—specifically, he objected to Toland's argument that a Turk could be a genuine Christian.³² In 1737, Carl Gottlob Hofmann also defended the authenticity of the New Testament against Toland.³³ Nineteen years after its publication, the arguments in *Nazarenus* were still eliciting substantive, if critical, engagement. While *Nazarenus* was disliked by anyone who bothered to publicly respond to it, responses to *Nazarenus* were quick to appear, numerous, and often substantive. By contrast, *Pantheisticon* (as we shall see) did not provoke a comprehensive rebuttal until 20 years after its admittedly constrained publication.³⁴

³⁰ Gilbert Dalrymple, *A Letter from Edinburgh to Dr. Sherlock... With a Word or Two relating to Mr. Toland* (London: J. Roberts: 1718).

³¹“Les éloges que M. Toland donna à l'Evêque de Bangor, fournierent à des gens soupçonneux un prétexte d'accuser ce Prélat de quelque conformité de sentimens avec lui. Rien n'étoit plus faux.” *Bibliothèque Germanique* (1723) 54-55, 54.

³² Jeremiah Jones. *A New and Full Method of Settling the Canonical Authority of the New Testament*... London: J. Clark and R. Hett, 1726.

³³ Carl Gottlob Hofmann. *Introductio In Lectionem Novi Testamenti* (1737), 23-26.

³⁴ Arthur Ashley Sykes, *The Principles and Connexion of Natural and Revealed Religion Distinctly Considered* (London: J. and P. Knapton: 1740).

What might we conclude from the example of *Nazarenus* with respect to the close connection between social authority and ideas? *Nazarenus*, though it was an erudite work of biblical criticism, was nevertheless excluded from the social authority to which biblical criticism normally referred. Though Toland appropriated the idiom of biblical criticism, the responses to *Nazarenus* indicate that he was not able to appropriate the authority of biblical criticism. He was successful, however, in using biblical criticism to ironically demonstrate the fallibility of biblical hermeneutics, promoting individual reason in its stead. If Toland's dissembling could not make his works seem authoritative, at least it would diminish the authority of the idiom, and even enhance the reputation of individual reason as an alternative basis for authority.

Toland's Pantheisticon

Pantheisticon was conceived at least as early as 1711, when Toland indicated in his correspondence to Baron Hohendorf his intention to complete a liturgy.³⁵ When he published it nine years later, in 1720, it was at his own expense, and very few copies were printed. *Pantheisticon* is straightforward about its intended audience: it was written for the use of members of a clandestine organization—the “Socratic-Society” mentioned in

³⁵ Toland to Hohendorf, 7 Mar. 1712, BM Add. MS 4295.

the subtitle.³⁶ He controlled the distribution personally.³⁷ Even as a published text, *Pantheisticon* was intended to be kept under wraps.

There is some debate over the intended audience of *Pantheisticon*. Margaret Jacob argues that it was a liturgy written for a Masonic lodge, and she links Toland to Freemasonry by way of a document in Toland's possession but written by Prosper Marchand circa 1710, in which he records the drunken shenanigans of a secret society of philosophically-inclined men.³⁸ Philip McGuinness has discovered that two prominent Belfast citizens (as well as a Presbyterian church), owned *Pantheisticon*, a fact that is compatible with Jacob's hypothesis that the *Pantheisticon* was a serious liturgy for a Masonic lodge, since it would not be surprising to find it in the possession of that city's leading citizens.³⁹ While there is no evidence that Toland was a Freemason, he associated

³⁶ Margaret Jacob discovered among Toland's papers a record of a meeting authored by Huguenot bookseller Prosper Marchand that testifies to a meeting that refers to a Grand Master, brothers, and a constitution. It is reasonable to infer that Toland was inspired to write *Pantheisticon* for this or a similar group, especially since that was the impression of Desmaizeaux and *Pantheisticon*'s reviewers. See Margaret Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (London: George Allen & Unwin: 1981).

³⁷ Desmaizeaux attests to the limited distribution of *Pantheisticon*. John Toland, *A Collection of Several Pieces of Mr. John Toland*, ed. Pierre Desmaizeaux, 2 Vols. (London: Printed for J. Peele: 1726), lxxviii.

³⁸ Margaret Jacob (1981), 267-269.

³⁹ Philip McGuinness, "John Toland and Eighteenth-Century Irish Republicanism," *Irish Studies Review*, 19 (1997), 15-21.

with many known Freemasons and, even if he was not part of the organization himself, some Freemasons helped to circulate his ideas.⁴⁰

It would be prudent to differentiate between Toland's "Socratic-Society" and Masonic lodges, however. As Stephen Daniel points out, pantheist sodalities and other philosophical societies were widespread, and Toland certainly participated in small philosophical groups, but these groups were not necessarily Masonic in nature.⁴¹ Toland describes his "Socratic-Society" as being in number "about the number of the muses" while Masonic lodges could have many more; and there is no suggestion of levels through which a member could move which characterize Freemasonry.⁴²

More to the heart of the matter, there are philosophical differences between this pantheist Socratic-Society and Freemasonry: Toland was resolutely anti-Newtonian; in *Pantheisticon*, nature itself is worthy of praise and does not require a god or prime mover to set it in motion or give it order. By contrast, Freemasonry was officially Newtonian and was mostly populated with Newtonians. God, not nature, was central to the Masonic universe, and indeed, Jacob speculates that this is a reason for *Pantheisticon* never being

⁴⁰ Jacob reports that Prosper Marchand and Jean Rousset de Missy were both Freemasons and associates of Toland's (Rousset having likely met Toland in the Netherlands in 1704), and they helped to publish and circulate Toland's texts. Jacob (1981), p. 197-8. Note, however, that Rousset was integral in circulating Toland's *A Letter from an Arabian Physician*, a text that Daniel denies is authentically Toland's. Stephen Daniel, *John Toland: His Methods, Manners, and Mind*, Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1984, pp. 213-14, p. 15.

⁴¹ Stephen Daniel, *John Toland: His Methods, Manners, and Mind* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press: 1984), 213-14.

⁴² Daniel (1984), 213. *Pantheisticon*, 12.

officially adopted by Freemasons.⁴³ Finally, at least two accounts distinguish between Freemasons and *Pantheisticon*'s intended audience: Desmaizeaux, Toland's close friend and posthumous biographer, reports that Toland crafted the *Pantheisticon* for the use of the members of a philosophical society where the worshippers were, as the title implies, *pantheists*, whom Desmaizeaux defines as people who "acknowledge no other God than the Universe."⁴⁴ Finally, in his *Dieu et les hommes*, Voltaire clearly distinguishes between Freemasons and a sect called Freethinkers (*les Francs-pensants*) who are "beaucoup plus étenduë que celle des Francs-maçons." Among the Freethinkers, Voltaire lists "pour les principaux chefs de cette secte, milord Herbert, les chevaliers Raleig[h] and Sidney, mylord Shaftsburi, *le sage Loke* moderé jusqu'à la timidité, le grand Newtown, qui nia si hardiment la Divinité de Jésus-Christ, les Colins les Toland, les Tindal, les Trenchard, les Gordon, les Wolston, les Wolaston, et surtout le célèbre mylord Bolingbroke."⁴⁵ In Voltaire's view, then, Freethinkers were more numerous than Freemasons, and since he includes Newtonians and anti-Newtonians in their number, we can infer that it was a broader, more inclusive category.⁴⁶ Ultimately however, whether or

⁴³ Jacob (1981), 24.

⁴⁴ Desmaizeaux, "The Life of Mr. Toland," lxxviii.

⁴⁵ Incidentally, Voltaire mentions Toland 29 times in his works (by this author's count), and he always mentions him favorably. Usually, Voltaire lists Toland as part of a group of Freethinkers and notes that, for all their radical notions, they are far more preferable than theologians, who are actually to blame for social discord. Dr. Obern, tran. Jacques Aimon [Voltaire], *Dieu et les hommes, œuvre theologique; mais raissonable*, (Berlin: Christian de Vos: 1769), 113.

⁴⁶ Voltaire's inclusion of Newtonians—indeed, Newton himself—among the Freethinkers does not square with Jacob's description of Freethinkers as a resolutely anti-Newtonian

not people were Freemasons or not seems less important than whether or not they were able to circulate texts, and it is obvious enough from the historical record that Freemasons like Jean Rousset de Missy and Prosper Marchand did help to popularize Toland's ideas.⁴⁷ Ultimately, whether or not the intended audience of *Pantheisticon* was Freemasons or some other clandestine philosophical society, its purpose was to encourage social and philosophical camaraderie via eating, drinking, and formal ritual.

By and large, Toland's plan to keep *Pantheisticon* under wraps worked: compared with *Nazarenus*, *Pantheisticon* garnered little attention—it did not even elicit much invective from the religious establishment. In the years following its publication it was never advertised in newspapers, though booksellers continued to consistently advertise Toland's *Amyntor* (1699), *Nazarenus* (1718), and *Tetradymus* (1720). This was intentional: published for personal distribution, it was simply not for sale. Since Toland's other, less radical texts had routinely elicited many reviews in addition to vehement and widespread negative reaction, it is reasonable to infer that the lack of response was a

group. Margaret Jacob, "John Toland the Newtonian Ideology," *Journal of the Warburg and Courland Institutes*, 32 (1969), 307-331.

⁴⁷ See above, n. 30. It is also interesting to note that Desmaizeaux, a close friend of Toland and an indefatigable popularizer of his works, also played a central role in popularizing the works of the members of the heavily Newtonian Royal Society in France and the Continent. Moreover, Desmaizeaux's *Recueils de diverses pièces* was an important text for disseminating Newtonian notions abroad. Toland's radical influence was thus not necessarily dependent on an ideologically close-knit group of atheists or secret pantheist brethren, competing with Newtonian ideas. Rather, intellectual and social influence traveled through heterogenous networks. Elizabeth Grist, "Pierre Des Maizeaux and the Royal Society," in *Cultural transfers: France and Britain in the Long eighteenth century*, ed. Ann Thomson (Oxford: SVEC: 2010).

result, not of the public failing to object to the radical nature of *Pantheisticon*, but rather from Toland's strategically restricted publication and circulation. Voltaire would later wonder at how such a radical text as *Pantheisticon* could create so little hubbub. In his *Lettres à Son Altesse Monseigneur le prince de****, he notes that, in Ireland, Toland was oppressed for his more cautious work (*Christianity not Mysterious*), but in England he was never troubled even by his boldest books—*Nazarenus* and the *Pantheisticon*.⁴⁸ It was not the case that Toland “ne fut jamais troublé” as a result of *Nazarenus*, but Voltaire was likely less interested in factual niceties than he was in strategically praising English freedom so as to implicitly criticize the illiberality of the *ancien régime*. If Toland was not troubled on account of *Pantheisticon*, it was because few people outside of his circle were reading it, not because English institutions were so enviably liberal. Indeed, this is how Desmaizeaux describes it: Toland was simply being cautious, given the radical and anti-Christian character of the text. Toland “seems to have been sensible,” he writes, “that he had too much indulg'd his loose imagination; for he got it printed secretly, at his own

⁴⁸ “Dans son premier livre intitulé, *la Religion chrétienne sans mystères*, il avait écrit lui-même un peu mystérieusement, et sa hardiesse était couverte d'un voile. On le condamna, on le poursuivit en Irlande: le voile fut bientôt déchiré. Ses Origines judaïques, son Nazaréen, son Pantheisticon, furent autant de combats qu'il livra ouvertement au christianisme. Ce qui est étrange, c'est qu'ayant été opprimé en Irlande pour le plus circonspect de ses ouvrages, il ne fut jamais troublé en Angleterre pour les livres les plus audacieux. Voltaire, *Lettres à Son Altesse Monseigneur le prince de*** sur Rabelais et sur d'autres auteurs accusés d'avoir mal parlé de la religion chrétienne* (Amsterdam: Marc Michel Rey: 1767), 38.

charge, and but a few copies, which he distributed with a view of receiving some presents for them.”⁴⁹

Despite this limited publication and distribution, parts of *Pantheisticon* were translated into French and disseminated in both published and manuscript form.⁵⁰

Segments also reached the francophone public via book reviews.⁵¹ In its French translation, *Pantheisticon* was slightly tailored to appeal to an aristocratic audience uncomfortable with the term “republican,” and its natural philosophy was corrupted, probably as a result of the French translators’ lack of scientific knowledge.⁵²

Toland’s choice to package his ideas in the liturgical form could seem surprising for two reasons. For one, he is opposed to systematization. In *Letters to Serena*, Toland

⁴⁹ Desmaizeaux, “The Life of Mr. Toland,” lxxviii.

⁵⁰ Lurbe, 233-242. In *La Face cachée des Lumières*, Miguel Benítez lists nine extant French manuscripts. Miguel Benítez, *La Face cachée des Lumières: Recherches sur les manuscrits philosophiques clandestins de l’âge classique* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation: 1996).

⁵¹ See Armand La Chappelle, *Bibliothèque Angloise, ou Histoire littéraire de La Grande Bretagne*. Vol. 8. (Amsterdam: David Paul Marret: 1720), 285-322. Also *Bibliothèque Germanique ou Histoire littéraire de l’Allemagne, de la Suisse et des pays du Nord*. ed. Samuel Formey, Amsterdam: Pierre Humbert, Vol. 6, 1723: 24-61. For more on the importance of book reviews to the circulation of British ideas to francophone audiences, see Rachel Hammersley, “The ‘Real Whig’—Huguenot network and the English Republican tradition: *Cultural transfers: France and Britain in the long eighteenth century*. ed. Ann Thomson (Oxford: SVEC: 2010), 19-32. Armand de La Chapelle more than once publicized radical literature by way of denunciation: his hostility towards Huguenot pastor Jacques Saurin’s claims for God’s “beneficial lies” resulted in a vigorous and drawn-out debate with Saurin and Beaumarchais over Saurin’s heterodox claims. See John Christian Laursen, “Impostors and Liars: Clandestine Manuscripts and the Limits of Freedom of the Press in the Huguenot Netherlands,” *New Essays on the Political Thought of the Huguenot Refuge*, New York: E.J. Brill, 1995.

⁵² Lurbe, 233-242.

critiques Spinoza for, among other things, being “too in love with his world.” Systems, because they require all the parts to work in concert, also come apart when even the least fault is demonstrated.⁵³ Second, one of Toland’s most important intellectual influences, John Milton, was vehemently opposed to liturgy in all forms.⁵⁴ Milton had denounced the liturgy as evil in 1641.⁵⁵ An entire chapter of his *Eikonoklastes* (1649) is dedicated to attacking the Prayer Book and its royalist supporters in which he calls the Prayer Book “superstitious, offensive, and indeed, though English, yet still the Mass-Book.” Even a reformed liturgy smacked of popery; true Christians ought not admit of a Prayer Book at all. Milton argues in *De Doctrina Christiana* (1660) that the liturgy is actively anti-religious: “Also opposed to true religion is hypocritical worship, where the external forms are duly observed, but without any internal or spiritual involvement. This is extremely offensive to God.”⁵⁶ A liturgy was by definition a public and therefore socio-

⁵³ “But when a Man builds a whole System of Philosophy either without any first Principles, or on a precarious Foundation: and afterwards when he’s told of the Fault, and put in mind of the Difficultys that attend it, yet neither supplies that Defect, nor accounts for those Difficultys by any thing he has already establish’d, nor yet acknowledges his Mistake; we may reasonably suspect that he’s too much in love with his new World (for such is a System of Philosophy) ever to admit of a better Creator: whereas a Person that proposes no other view but the manifesting and propagating of Truth, and that cannot rest satisfy’d with Fancys or Conjectures, wou’d in such Circumstances be nothing asham’d to confess and amend his Error.” John Toland, *Letters to Serena* (London: Bernard Lintot: 1704), 137-8.

⁵⁴ Timothy Rosendale, “Milton, Hobbes, and the Liturgical Subject,” *Studies in English Literature*, 44.1 (2004), 149-172.

⁵⁵ John Milton, "Animadversions," *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe et al., 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press: 1953-82), 1:661-735, 691; Milton, "Of Reformation," in *CPW*, 1:517-617, 532.

⁵⁶ Milton, *De Doctrina Christiana*, *CPW*, Vol. 6: 667.

political expression of faith, and so it implied a potential conflict between private and public belief. In contrast with Hobbes, for whom private belief exists separately—and safely—away from the civic realm, Milton viewed this bifurcation as an insincere, even schizophrenic, element. Certainly, a liturgy might seem a strange choice for a man like Toland, who, like Milton, decried Anglicanism’s “residual popery.”⁵⁷ Wasn’t a pantheist liturgy inserting popery where there was none to begin with?

Indeed, Toland echoes the Miltonian suspicion of a public belief:

“Inasmuch as...Philosophy is divided by the *Pantheists*, as well as other antient Sages, into *External*, or popular and depraved; and *Internal*, or pure and genuine; no Discord arises among them...[S]hould the Religion derived from one’s Father, or enforced by the Laws, be wholly, or in some respects, wicked, villainous, obscene, tyrannical, or depriving Men of their Liberty, in such Case the Brethren may, with all the Legality in the World, betake themselves immediately to one more mild, more pure, and more free.”⁵⁸

The philosophy of *Pantheisticon* itself even seems to mitigate against a liturgical form. Toland writes in the beginning:

“To use our utmost Efforts, that Cattle-like, we might not follow the Herd of those that go before; going not where we should go, but where they go...Since every Man chuses rather to believe than judge, Life then is never brought to a Scrutiny, Credulity has always the Ascendant, Error handed down from Father to Son, embarrasses our Thoughts in its Mazes, we give headlong into it: In a word, it is the dull Infatuation of being led by the Examples of others, that exposes us to Ruin.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷Champion (1999), 4.

⁵⁸*Pantheisticon*, 56-7.

⁵⁹*Pantheisticon*, “To the Learned and Ingenious Reader.” (There are no page numbers in this beginning section).

How could a liturgy—uniform, communal, ritualistic—be an appropriate form for a philosophy that extols individual reason and eschews tradition? Perhaps employing the liturgical form was intended to import the symbolic authority of the Church for this heterodox pantheist philosophy? But the evidence cannot sustain such a proposition: there is no evidence that *Pantheisticon*'s liturgical form lent it even a patina of authority. Given the blatantly un-Christian content of *Pantheisticon*, the idea that Toland employed liturgy as a strategy so as to appropriate religious authority is untenable. Legitimate reform of the liturgy was left to the moderate, Newtonian faithful like Samuel Clarke and William Whiston, whose Newtonian and Lockean liturgical reforms fell within the scope of reasonable dissent.⁶⁰ It is not masquerading as Christian doctrine; it is unabashedly pantheist. *Pantheisticon* was directed towards the already-converted, so to speak. The second liturgy begins:

President: Keep off the prophane People.

Respondents: The Coast is clear, the Doors are shut, all's safe.

President: All Things in the World are one, And one is All in all Things.

Respondents: What's All in all Things is GOD, Eternal and Immense, Neither begotten, nor ever to perish.

President: In him we live, we move, and exist.

Respondents: Every Thing is sprung from him, And shall be reunited to him, He himself being the Beginning, and End of all Things.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Liturgical reform revolved around the necessity to defend the legitimacy of true Anglican ceremony from innovation. Whiston's and Clarke's proposed liturgical revisions questioned the doctrine of the Trinity. [would that have been reasonable to any orthodox Anglican? It is Socinian.] See Bryan D. Spinks, *Liturgy in the Age of Reason: Worship and Sacraments in England and Scotland, 1662-c. 1800*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008.

⁶¹ *Pantheisticon*, 70-1.

In this excerpt, Toland alludes to the New Testament teaching that “In Him we live and move and have our being” as well as to the Judeo-Christian notion that God is “the Alpha and Omega.” Even so, it is hard to imagine a reader mistaking this for a Christian text—and indeed, no reader did.

Instead, *Pantheisticon*, I argue, was attempting something Milton had written off: a recovery of true, uncorrupted liturgy. Readers are informed on the first page that “Man, as a sociable Animal, can not live well, nor happy, nor at any rate, without the Help and Concurrence of Others” and this was the original impetus for sorting ourselves into families, cities, and voluntary associations, such as those ancient Greek and Roman voluntary associations called “*Brotherhoods, Friendships, Societies*” which were established “either for the Pleasure or Instruction of the Mind.”⁶² What made liturgy a promising style and form was its sociable expression of reason—the quintessentially Tolandian notion that philosophy’s natural habitat is in society.

By and large, these lofty, sociable ambitions were lost on the reading public. It is not entirely clear how *Pantheisticon* was received among its intended, clandestine audience—the “Socratic-Society” mentioned in the subtitle, and possibly the secret society in the Hague that Jacob describes. However, the public’s response to *Pantheisticon* fell into two categories: negative, and none at all. Edmund Curll—Toland’s first (and sympathetic) biographer—falls into the latter category. He declines to comment

⁶² *Pantheisticon*, 10-11.

on Toland's *Nazarenus*, *Tetradymus*, and *Pantheisticon*, "lest I should be stigmatized with the opprobrious Name of a *Free-Thinker*," he explains.⁶³

Predictably, most reviews were negative for religious reasons. In the *Bibliothèque Germanique*'s review of *Histoire de la Vie et des Ecrits de M. Toland* by Mosheim, the scandalized reviewer notes, "It is audacious that such a profane book saw the light of day, that it was titled PANTHEISTICON, and that it ridicules the Divine service."⁶⁴ This scandalized reviewer sees *Pantheisticon* only as a derisive satire of religion. Moreover, the reviewer refers to an appalling prayer to Bacchus infamously interpolated into Toland's text.⁶⁵ Though this interpolation is not attributed to Toland himself, because it was probably added by someone sympathetic to his ideas, the reviewer reasons that Toland is guilty by association. Finally, that there were very few copies attests not to Toland's caution, but to a less noble intention "d'en tenir le prix fort haut."⁶⁶

⁶³ Edmund Curll, *An historical account of the life and writings of the late eminently famous Mr. John Toland* (London: J. Roberts: 1722), 89.

⁶⁴ "Il eut l'audace de mettre au jour son Livre Profane, qu'il a nommé PANTHEISTICON, et d'y tourner en ridicule le service Divin." *Bibliothèque Germanique*, 55.

⁶⁵ "Omnipotens & sempiterna Bacche, qui hominum corda donis tuis recreas, concede propitius ut qui hesternis poculis egroti facti sunt, hodiernis curentur, per pocula poculorum, Amen!" Quoted in, among other places, Voltaire in his *Lettre à S.A. Monseigneur le prince****, 38.

⁶⁶ *Bibliothèque Germanique, Bibliothèque Germanique ou Histoire littéraire de l'Allemagne, de la Suisse et des pays du Nord*. 1723. Ed. Samuel Formey. Amsterdam: Pierre Humbert, 55.

Francis Hare's 1721 defense of orthodox Anglicanism rejects Locke's too-liberal religious tolerance, remarking with horror that, under the Lockean scheme, just about anyone could set up a church: "none are excluded from this privilege but downright *Atheists*, such as the impious Author of the *Pantheisticon**, and a few such *Infidels*, who are either too stupid to understand an Argument, or too thoughtless to attend to one, or too vicious to give a practical assent."⁶⁷ Taking his complaint further in a footnote, Hare perpetuates the rumor about Toland being the author of a scribbled prayer to Bacchus interpolated in the published text. The heretical prayer is reprinted—with a slight omission (lest the reader's soul be inadvertantly imperiled by a fuller account?). "Thus prays this *Pantheist*," accuses Hare, "whose impudent Blasphemies loudly call for the Animadversions of the Civil Power."⁶⁸ Despite its liturgical form, *Pantheisticon* clearly failed to amuse in the slightest the royalist, high Anglican Hare. Jakob Brucker's *Historiae critica philosophae* (1734) labels *Pantheisticon*, "profane" and "full of impudence." It sows the seeds of a wicked Spinozism and satirizes in the vein of Bruno's *Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*.⁶⁹

The review of the *Pantheisticon* in the *Bibliothèque Angloise* in 1720 is negative but for a different reason. Instead of taking *Pantheisticon* to be a derisive parody, the

⁶⁷ Francis Hare, *Scripture Vindicated From the Misinterpretations of the Lord Bishop of Bangor: In his Answer to the Dean of Worcester's Visitation Sermon Concerning Church-Authority*. London: Jonah Bowyer, 1721, xxi.

⁶⁸ Hare, note on p. xxi.

⁶⁹ Jakob Brucker, *Historia Critica Philosophiae*, Vol. 4 (Bern(?): Christoph. Breitkopf: 1734), 702.

reviewer conceives Toland's motivation to be a sincere attempt to put forth a clear version of his pantheist religion, pointing out that Toland had earlier promised to do so.⁷⁰ Unfortunately, he complains, Toland's universal religion is too hastily sketched; pantheist philosophy is given in "gros Caracteres."⁷¹ If, as *Pantheisticon* claims, pantheistic societies are already such an expansive sect, existing in great numbers in London, Paris, Venice, Holland, and Rome, then this book is not really anything original; if it is, on the other hand, a *secret* society, then why is Toland publishing it?⁷² Toland is unoriginal at best, disingenuous at worst.

William Warburton, who is generally negative towards Toland in *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated* (1738), echoes the *Bibliothèque Angloise's* disappointment. Noting that Toland's purpose in life was "to shed his venom on every thing that was great and respectable,"⁷³ Warburton nevertheless concedes that he

⁷⁰ The reviewer quotes Toland's promise given in *Nazarenus*: He begins his article with a quote from *Nazarenus* (Preface, xiv), where Toland says "je donnerai, Dieu aidant, un compte de ma Religion, qui sera clair, dépouillé de toute Litterature & couché en Maximes simplement exprimées, sans Commentaire qui les obscuruisse. Je vous promets d'avance que ce ne sera pas une Religion de pure Machine, ou de grossier Artisan, consistant plus dans un respect stupide pour des Formulaires reçus & dans un Cercle languissant de Rites que l'on fait par routine, que dans un Service raisonnable & une Pieté sans affectation..." *Bibliothèque Germanique*, 287-8. On Toland's ability to spread rumors in order to cultivate public anticipation for his publications, see Champion (1999), 18.

⁷¹ *Bibliothèque Germanique*, 288.

⁷² *Bibliothèque Germanique*, 291.

⁷³ William Warburton, *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated, On the Principles of a Religious Deist, From the Omission of the Doctrine of a Future State of Reward and Punishment in the Jewish Dispensation* (London: Fletcher Gyles: 1738), 447.

approached *Pantheisticon* optimistically, hoping to uncover a brand of religion uncorrupted by idolatry. “But I had the mortification to find nothing there but an indigested heap of common-place quotations from the *ancients*,” writes the disillusioned Warburton, “and an unmeaning collection of common-place reflections from *modern* infidels, without the least seasoning of logic or criticism, to justify the waste of time to the reader, or to make the labour supportable to one’s self. And the authority of the man, which is nothing, could not engage me to any farther notice of his book.”⁷⁴ Note that in Warburton’s view, the “authority of the man” is no substitute for the credibility-granting power of an institutional authority.

Apparently, by the time *Pantheisticon* was translated into English 31 years after its original publication, the anti-Toland climate had tempered. Warburton’s attitude is arguably positive in his commentary on the works of Alexander Pope (who, incidentally, occasionally wrote favorably of Toland). With respect to Pope’s line, “That NATURE our Society adores, / Where Tindal dictates, And Silenus snores,” Warburton comments, “See the *Pantheisticon*, with its liturgy and rubrics, composed by Toland.”⁷⁵ A milquetoast note, to be sure—but an improvement over “indigested heap.” Warburton then equates Toland’s pantheist philosophy to St. Paul’s refrain, “In Him we live and

⁷⁴ Warburton, *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated*, 565.

⁷⁵ Alexander Pope, *The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq. Volume V, Containing The Dunciad in Four Books*. ed. William Warburton (London: J. and P. Knapton: 1751), 212.

move and have our being.”⁷⁶ While he assumes *Pantheisticon* to be atheistic, he nevertheless seems to consider its pantheistic philosophy an expression of a reasonable belief system.

Judging from readers’ responses and the content of the text itself, it is evident that *Pantheisticon* did not succeed in arrogating to itself the authority of religious discourses, despite its liturgical form. Still, *Pantheisticon* pursued and constructed another form of authority, rooted in individual reason and sociability. *Pantheisticon* aimed to provide the ritual glue for the construction of an alternative form of sociability—a recovery of true liturgy as an expression of the idea that reason is inseparable from social association. The best setting for philosophy is in a simple environment, in the company of friends, over a good meal.

Conclusion

Appropriating the style and form of authority does not always bring it about. *Nazarenus* employed biblical criticism to promote individual reason; *Pantheisticon* employed liturgy to animate an alternative form of sociability. Too radical to be perceived as a sincere if reform-minded Christian, Toland forfeited the opportunity to

⁷⁶ William Warburton, the editor of Alexander Pope’s collected works, makes an interesting comparison between the “Atheist’s Liturgy” written by the “infamous Toland” and St. Paul: the latter’s “*In him we live and move and have our being*” smacks, he says, of Toland’s (and Spinoza’s) pantheism. Alexander Pope, *The works of Alexander Pope Esq., In nine volumes, complete. With his last corrections, additions, and improvements; ... Together with the commentary and notes of Mr. Warburton*, (London: A. Millar: 1760), Vol. 3, 365-6.

benefit from the legitimacy and authority of hegemonic discourses, but he gained an opportunity to posit alternative sources of authority.

Plaire and utilité: How Women Styled Themselves as Authorities in the Eighteenth-Century French Public Sphere

This chapter investigates how women wrote so as to seem authoritative in the eighteenth-century French public sphere. By examining the *Journal des Dames* (1759-1778), the most significant journal of the *presse féminine*, I argue that women took advantage of pre-existing idioms of feminine authority so as to transfer their authority into the relatively new, burgeoning, and masculine sphere of print culture.

It is probably not shocking to hear that women in the eighteenth century were at a disadvantage when speaking in the public sphere because, in general, they still are. Women's speech in the public sphere lags even as women have made great strides in education, the workplace, and in other kinds of public engagement, such as voting.¹ Women write only about 20% of op-eds.² Women are cited as experts in the media far less than men; one survey even found that a woman over 65 is less likely to be cited as an expert than a boy between the ages of 13 and 18.³ Women political scientists (and women in most other disciplines) are still cited less than their male counterparts, even when

¹ Christopher F. Karpowitz and Tali Mendelberg, *The Silent Sex: Gender, Deliberation, and Institutions*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014.

² "Who Narrates the World? The OpEd Project Byline Report," The OpEd Project, 2012, <<http://www.theopedproject.org>>. This statistic is based on a 2011 survey of 7,000 op-eds in 10 media outlets over 12 weeks.

³ "Who Narrates the World? The OpEd Project Byline Report."

controlling for a scholar's expertise and prior publications.⁴ While women attend town hall meetings in equal proportions as men, in only 8% of those meetings do they talk more than men.⁵ Why would women speak less in the public sphere? Karpowitz and Mendelberg argue that women speak—and thus influence—less, “because they are less likely to have a key motivation for doing so—a sense of entitlement to authority.”⁶ Communication is a social interaction, and groups with higher social status are also more likely to be listened to and believed. Women, being a historically marginalized group, have struggled to be perceived as authoritative as men in the public sphere. Their relatively lower status causes them to think that their contributions will be valued less than men's, and they are right.⁷

Philosopher Miranda Fricker identifies this phenomenon as a kind of “testimonial injustice”—it is the particular epistemic injustice that results from a hearer granting less deference to a speaker due to a prejudice against that speaker's identity.⁸ This kind of credibility deficit wrongs the speaker in so far as her “capacity as a knower” is “essential

⁴ Daniel Maliniak, Ryan Powers, and Barbara F. Walter, (2013) ‘The Gender Citation Gap in International Relations’, *International Organization*, 67(4), pp. 889–922.

⁵ Frank M. Bryan, *Real Democracy: The New England Town Hall Meeting and How it Works*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. See chp. 8: “The Question of Equality: Women's Presence.”

⁶ Karpowitz and Mendelberg (2014), p. 51.

⁷ Karpowitz and Mendelberg (2014).

⁸ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. See chp. 2 “Prejudice in the Credibility Economy.”

to human value.”⁹ As such, “the epistemic wrong bears a social *meaning* to the effect that the subject is less than fully human. When someone suffers a testimonial injustice, they are degraded *qua* knower, and they are symbolically degraded *qua* human” (emphasis in original).¹⁰ What is more, it is a particularly difficult kind of injustice to remedy, since the author’s ability to convince her reader to remedy the injustice is itself impaired.

It is also the case that the idioms associated with women are viewed as less authoritative. Studies have found that young women are more likely to talk in a way that is perceived as infantile, uneducated, incompetent, unhirable, and lacking in authority.¹¹ Marginalized groups are more likely to employ emotion, narrative, personal testimony, and certain rhetorical elements that cause their contributions to deliberation to seem less authoritative.¹² Both women’s identity and their manner of communicating undercuts their authority in the public sphere. Ideally, ideas floating in the public sphere would be evaluated according to their merit. Yet communication is a social interaction as much as a

⁹ Fricker (2007), p. 44.

¹⁰ Fricker (2007), p. 44.

¹¹ The phenomenon of “vocal fry” is a way of speaking that is negatively perceived. Because it is more common among women than men, these negative perceptions have sexist effects. See Michael J. Higdon, “Oral Advocacy and Vocal Fry: The Unseemly, Sexist Side of Vocal Persuasion,” *Legal Communication and Rhetoric*, 13(2006). Also R.C. Anderson, C.A. Klofstad, W.J. Mayew, M. Venkatachalam, “Vocal Fry May Undermine the Success of Young Women in the Labor Market.” *PLoS ONE* 9.5 (2014).

¹² Melissa S. Williams, “The Uneasy Alliance of Group Representation in Deliberative Democracy,” in *Citizenship in Diverse Societies*, ed. Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman. London: Oxford University Press, 2000. Also see Iris Marion Young, “Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy,” in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.

cognitive one and, as a result, groups with higher social status are also more likely to be listened to and believed. Women, being a historically marginalized group, have struggled to be perceived as authoritative as men in the public sphere. Their relatively lower status causes them to think that their contributions will be valued less than men's, and they are right.¹³

This chapter investigates a particularly crucial point in the evolution of women's inclusion, or exclusion, in the public sphere: eighteenth century France, when modern print culture was taking off.¹⁴ As newspapers and periodicals began to proliferate and literacy rates rose all across Europe, new questions arose about how to communicate and who had the authority to communicate. Slightly more democratic and more accessible than correspondence, word of mouth, or expensive publications that ruled the news market before, the emergence of modern print culture represented an opportunity for women, heretofore confined to more private spheres, to go public. It was a critical juncture. This chapter asks: How did women take advantage of the periodical press, and how did they write so as to seem authoritative in a public sphere rife with prejudice against women and their speech?

I argue that women—mostly bourgeois (some aristocratic), literate women—navigated the gender prejudices that diminished their contributions to the public sphere

¹³ Karpowitz and Mendelberg (2014).

¹⁴ I do not mean to suggest that the public sphere was *only* print. As Robert Darnton points out, oral communication was the main source for Parisians' everyday news before the Revolution. Robert Darnton, "An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris." *American Historical Review*, 105 (2000), 1-35, p. 30.

by writing strategically. Women were acutely aware of how their writing was hemmed in by gender prejudice. If they wrote too brusquely, they were accused of being masculine and would be mocked and dismissed; if they wrote too prettily, they would be thought of as feminine, and would be regarded as irrelevant to the public sphere. How did women write strategically so as to overcome this double-bind? How did they challenge, circumvent, or chip away at gendered prejudices? How did they style themselves as authoritative contributors to the public sphere?

In the mid-eighteenth century, women were already recognized as authorities in one institutional setting: *salons*. The *salonnière* was a facilitator of conversation, an arbiter of style, and a gatekeeper to *la société*. I argue that, by adapting the idiom of the credible, authoritative *salonnière* to bourgeois virtue, women in the printed press attempted, and sometimes succeeded, in fashioning themselves as authoritative authors in the public sphere.

In what follows I describe the emergence of the institution of the modern, masculine, bourgeois public sphere as well as the idioms associated with the *salonnière's* authority. In the second half I describe how the *Journal des Dames* adapted that idiom to the bourgeois virtue of the public sphere.

The emergence of the bourgeois public sphere in eighteenth-century France

In the mid-eighteenth century the French press expanded greatly, just as the British press had done a half century earlier. The medium of the public sphere was print—especially newspapers and journals, that were widely circulated and read aloud in

places like coffeehouses, clubs, and salons. Profiting from the rise of literacy and the newly ubiquitous printed material, the bourgeois public sphere enabled individuals to appeal to a wider segment of their co-citizens. While novels, religious commentary, classics, and reference books abounded, the periodical press in particular, because of its more ephemeral nature, benefitted from advances in technology that made printing cheaper.

In addition, the French press benefitted from a period of censorship relaxation during the Regency (1715-1723). Afterwards, the monarchy would never really manage to rein back in a press with a taste for liberalization. Furthermore, by revoking the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and thereby putting an end to state toleration of Protestants, Louis XIV had created a formidable opposition: educated and French-speaking Huguenots established a critical publishing industry-in-exile, guaranteeing a regular flow of literature from the Netherlands and England to France. In sum, Huguenot and other foreign influence, technology, and a small amount of liberalization all contributed to the dramatic expansion of the French press in the eighteenth century.

The press was not a value-neutral purveyor of information to the masses. It circulated printed information to literate classes, generally for the edification of bourgeois interests. Because the public sphere was also characterized by its institutional independence from the Court and aristocracy, it was a space of ideas, debate, and preference formation beyond the control of the monarchy. Thus the press gave relatively sudden and outsized influence to the values of an emerging segment of society.

Bourgeois

Crucially, the expanded press grew around the interests of the emerging bourgeoisie and not the monarchy, aristocracy, or the poor, illiterate masses. The monarchy's power was manifest in the military and pomp; the aristocracy's power rested on traditional land rights and hereditary nobility; the power of the masses was in their sheer numbers and periodic paroxysms of violence. These classes lacked either the ability or the motivation to harness the press.

But as Habermas argued in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, the bourgeoisie needed information, desired more freedom, and, conveniently, owned and operated the printing presses. As the bourgeoisie was involved in increasingly global economic concerns and was seeking out newer and expanded investment opportunity, it required a constant and reliable stream of news. The need for accurate and up-to-date commodity prices morphed into a need and a desire for news in general. In this way, broadly available news and increased literacy contributed to the rise of public opinion as a force for change.¹⁵

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to clarify what I mean by the terms "bourgeois" and "bourgeois values." Habermas's *Öffentlichkeit* is often translated as "bourgeois public sphere," but "bourgeois" could also be translated as "civic" sphere. This is perhaps why Habermas's bourgeois public sphere seems to encompass every social and economic institution that operated apart from or against the state, including

¹⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT University Press, 1991, pp. 14-26.

coffeehouses, salons, newspapers, clubs, philanthropic societies, guilds, and word-of-mouth. In addition, the public sphere that Habermas envisioned had little to do with a traditional Marxist definition. Michael McKeon interprets Habermas as saying that bourgeois public sphere was not defined by class; it was simply a sphere of conversation in which social status was not the sole or defining criteria for entry.¹⁶ While the public sphere contributed to and was a necessary precursor to the development of class consciousness, it was not originally a site of class consciousness.¹⁷

To be sure, “bourgeoisie,” defined in economic terms as the owners of the modes of production, did not constitute a large part of society in eighteenth-century France. As James Collins has shown, France remained a predominantly agrarian society throughout the eighteenth century.¹⁸ More recent data has shown that France’s industrial output increased sevenfold over the eighteenth century.¹⁹ Even so, compared to England, the bourgeoisie in France was small. The Habermasian impulse to define “bourgeoisie” so broadly and to disconnect it from its Marxist denotation has perhaps introduced some conceptual confusion and led to some uncritical use of the term by scholars of the

¹⁶ Michael McKeon, “Parsing Habermas’s ‘Bourgeois Public Sphere’,” *Criticism*, 46.2 (2004), pp. 273-277, p. 275.

¹⁷ McKeon (2004), pp. 273-4.

¹⁸ James B. Collins, *The State in Early Modern France*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

¹⁹ Sarah Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary, 1750-1850*, Harvard University Press, 2005.

eighteenth century, as it leads them to label “bourgeoisie” as basically any group that is not the aristocracy, church, or illiterate agricultural laborers.

In addition, Sara Maza has argued that there is little evidence to suggest that many French labelled themselves as “bourgeoisie” or used “bourgeoisie” as a primary category for drawing social distinctions.²⁰ Maza works from the premise that a class can only exist if it has developed class consciousness, and class consciousness requires a group to label itself. The lack of any self-designation as “bourgeoisie,” then, leads Maza to assert that there was in fact no bourgeoisie in eighteenth-century France. While “bourgeoisie” did exist as an official social designation, its meaning was limited to a small urban class defined less by any one activity or set of values than by its legal right to certain tax exemptions.²¹ Far from a meritorious, industrious middle-class, Maza contends that, “the Old Regime bourgeoisie was a shadow aristocracy.”²²

I do not agree with Maza’s contention that the French did not use “bourgeois” to describe themselves. In the *Journal des Dames*, at least, the term is used fairly regularly, though whether the use of the term indicates class consciousness is debatable. “Bourgeois” has various shades of meaning. One play, *Zamir, Tragédie Bourgeois, en trois Actes*,²³ uses “bourgeois” in sense of the aesthetic theory popularized by Diderot, who posited that

²⁰ Maza (2005). See especially chapter 1, “The Social Imaginary in Prerevolutionary France.”

²¹ Maza (2005), p. 22.

²² Maza (2005), p. 23.

²³ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juin, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (2), pp. 225-248.

drama should emphasize realistic characters and emotions. Most often, though, the *Journal* uses “bourgeois” simply to indicate a town-dweller or citizen.²⁴ Likely using “bourgeoisie” in this sense is one contributor to the *Journal des Dames* who writes in to recommend the use of the feminized neologisms *autrice* and *editrice*. She defines these terms as designating “une femme qui travaille à acquérir un droit de bourgeoisie dans la république des Lettres.”²⁵ When an offended man writes in to complain that the women of the *Journal* are usurping men’s rightful place in society, he titles his piece *Remonstrances Aux Bourgeoises du bon ton, par un Complaisant révolté* [Remonstrances of an amiable rebel against fashionable citizens].²⁶ The “citizen” meaning, however, carried the additional connotation of being someone who was *not* a member of the aristocracy. In one extract, *De la description du siege de Sienne, dans les Commentaires de Montluc*, an episode is recounted in which a group of women gather to defend their town, and the author specifies that the group was made up of both “Gentil-femmes” and “Bourgeoises.”²⁷ This story highlights the patriotic, arguably republican connotation of the bourgeois citizen. “Bourgeois” is used in the same way to describe a citizen from

²⁴ This is the definition given in French dictionaries at the time. See the Académie Française’s 1694 dictionary, which defines “bourgeois” as “citizen, inhabitant of a town.”

²⁵ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de fevrier, 1762, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (5), p. 128.

²⁶ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de septembre, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (3), p. 232.

²⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (14), p. 16.

Beauvais who saved her entire town from oblivion.²⁸ Elsewhere, when Maisonneuve reports on a protest in Madrid, she says that “*La populace a insulté la maison de l’Intendant*” (emphasis added), but she clarifies that, “*Le Clergé, la Noblesse, et la Bourgeoisie n’ont eu aucune part à cette espèce de sédition.*”²⁹ In other words, the bourgeoisie is distinguished from the aristocracy, but it is also distinguished from the populace in general. In the *Journal des Dames*, then, “bourgeoisie” usually refers to a group that is neither “la populace” nor “la noblesse.” A bourgeois was the average good citizen. Rather than challenging Habermas’s amorphous distinction, the use of “bourgeois” in the *Journal des Dames* seems to bear it out. For the purposes of this study, I define “bourgeoisie” as the *Journal* did—socially rather than economically—to refer to a class of mostly urban-dwelling merchants, artisans, and business-owners who were generally literate and not members of the aristocracy.

If the bourgeoisie is so broadly defined, can anything useful be said about its values? Could such an amorphous collection of individuals be said to share a set of bourgeois values? I think so. Just as the bourgeoisie is defined negatively against the aristocracy, bourgeois values developed as explicit or implicit critiques of aristocratic values. Hence where one finds explicit or implicit critiques of aristocratic values, one is also likely to find bourgeois virtue.

²⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de février, 1766, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (15), p. 85.

²⁹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de aout, 1766, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (16), p. 107.

Bourgeois values emphasized industriousness and education, which were implicit critiques of an idle, frivolous class. Bourgeois values opposed luxury because it was wasteful and because it promoted *amour propre*, which was both morally and politically corrupting. Bourgeois values promoted sincerity as opposed to the artificiality and dissimulation that characterized the instrumental marriages and social interactions of the aristocracy.

Novels were a major source of bourgeois virtue, and Rousseau's novels *Emile* and *Julie* were especially influential.³⁰ Indeed, they were so popular and inspired such devotion, particularly among women, that Rousseau gained a cult following. He elaborated a sentimental vision of genuine love between spouses and of a close, affectionate bond between mothers and their children. Why was the well-maintained and loving patriarchal family unit, including a prudent wife and well-educated children such a crucial symbol of bourgeois virtue?³¹ First of all, the family was a stance *against* the purely instrumental marriages of the aristocracy. In her analysis of familial images in the decades surrounding the Revolution, Lynn Hunt argues that eighteenth-century images of domestic bliss and parental love gradually delegitimized absolute monarchy since they eroded notions of obedience as stemming from compulsion.³² Rousseau was especially

³⁰ Robert Darnton has persuasively made the connection between novels and the delegitimation of absolutist monarchy. See Robert Darnton, "Women Readers Respond to Rousseau," in *The Great Cat Massacre*. New York: Basic Books, 1984.

³¹ Maza (2005) has pointed out, "bourgeois" always maintained a positive connotation when attached to domestic life. p. 26.

³² Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1992.

influential in establishing new paradigms of obedience as stemming through willingness, genuine love, and respect. Most illuminating is the episode in *Julie* where Julie's father angrily commands his daughter to marry the man he has chosen for her. Beating her to the point of miscarriage, he is still unpersuasive. Ultimately Julie submits to her father's will out of love and devotion. Hunt argues that this episode is emblematic of a broader reconceptualization of the source of legitimate power. The "shift toward the good father fatally undermined absolutist royal authority," she writes, "Julie's father gets what he wants, but only because Julie agrees to it."³³ The image of the coercive, absolutist monarch was losing ground to a notion of obedience grounded in voluntary consent. As Montesquieu had made clear decades before Rousseau in his *The Spirit of the Laws*, instrumental marriages were necessary in an absolute monarchical system because the arbitrary power and limited social and economic opportunity made advantageous matches a matter of survival. By contrast, broader political, social, and economic opportunity freed relationships from being corrupted by instrumental motivations. Genuine, loving bonds stood in stark contrast with the kind of spousal relationships that occurred amongst the aristocracy. Bourgeois husbands and wives were able to connect sentimentally as well as intellectually. One piece in the *Journal des Dames* distinguishes the bourgeois couple, who are found together, from the Parisian aristocratic couple, who are always apart, remarking that "l'époux dîne a'un côté, la femme de l'autre; elle va aux spectacles, tandis

³³ Hunt (1992), p. 25.

qu'il va se promener: c'est avoir le goût du petit Bourgeois que de se rencontrer, de se promener avec sa femme. Madame va avec tout autre qu'avec son mari."³⁴

Second, the bourgeois family stood for broader and better education. If more people were to play an active part in running the world than just a elite pool of aristocrats, it was necessary to have more and better knowledge of it. In the new vision of the family, mothers were responsible for providing children with their earliest and most important learning. Women's nurturing had implications beyond just the family, affecting the way the world would be run, even preparing their sons for a more participatory politics.³⁵ The emphasis on education also had the effect of improving women's status in the family and, since women required education to fulfill this role, it had the effect of improving many women's social status as well.³⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau popularized these sentimental and pedagogical conceptions of women with incredible success, even if other parts of his thought were ignored or only ambivalently accepted.

The June 7, 1781 edition of *Affiches du Poitou* carried a piece in which an author argued that education for women can be useful "to give them some of our knowledge" and because it "adorns the mind, forms the judgment, and assists in the conduct of

³⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 90.

³⁵ Nicole Fermon, *Domesticating Passions: Rousseau, Women, and Nation*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997.

³⁶ See Mary Trouille, "The Failings of Rousseau's Ideals of Domesticity and Sensibility," in *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 24.4. (1991): 451-483.

business.”³⁷ The author argues that education makes women a little more charming, entertaining, and graceful, and a little less bored and lazy. With education, women are better able to soften society. Most of all, “they become able to satisfy their duty and their own tenderness very early in assisting their own children with this knowledge.” However, under no circumstances, the author concludes, should women’s education disrupt their housework or encourage them to be intellectuals. Charming, maternal, and educated (to a point), the bourgeois woman was meant to soften men’s mœurs and socialize children. This image is condescending, but there are some positive, empowering elements—elements that women would seize on to argue for a more expansive public authority.

Third, the well-run family was thought to be a microcosm of the rational economy, and prudent management was a stark contrast to and implicit critique of the wasteful luxury and dissoluteness of the aristocracy and monarchy. An influential perspective on aristocratic women and the *salonnières* was that they were corrupt, dissipated by luxury, selfish, lacking in familial feeling; they were alienated from real virtue. By contrast, the bourgeois has genuine love for her family, genuine moral virtue, and she has a necessary, feminine role to play in society. Arguing for women to return to the wholesome domestic sphere was an implicit critique of aristocracy and absolutism.

Jack Censer has noted that writing for the eighteenth-century French press meant adapting one’s tone and message to bourgeois values, even for people not belonging to that class. The poor, because their very poverty could render them morally suspect, were

³⁷ Censer (1994), p. 73.

especially in need of a bourgeois sheen.³⁸ In his study of the “affiches,” or advertisements, that the poor took out in newspapers to seek work, Censer notes that even the servant class had adapted their pitches to bourgeois virtues. The poor presented themselves as industriousness, bent on self-improvement, intelligent, humble (yet dignified), and appreciative of and aspiring to a domestic ideal.³⁹ Contributors to the press succeeded most when they conformed to bourgeois values.

Masculine

In Habermas’s narrative, the bourgeois public sphere emerged as a space where arguments could be evaluated by reason according to their merit. It was a place where one could appeal to the reason of one’s co-citizens. Proceeding from this premise, the liberalization of the market and of the press should, theoretically, have had positive effects on the freedom of women to publish and take part in public debate.⁴⁰

³⁸ Jack R. Censer, *The French Press in the Age of Enlightenment*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

³⁹ Censer (1994), p. 64.

⁴⁰ This is precisely what Carla Hesse argues in *The Other Enlightenment*. Hesse studies the revolutionary period to argue that, contrary to the belief that “masculine” republicanism in revolutionary France cloistered women and deprived them of their relative freedom under the *ancien régime*, in fact, publications by women actually increased in the revolutionary decade. Hesse also shows that women published in a wide variety of genres, thereby debunking the myth that there was a feminine genre of writing. Hesse’s data lead her to conclude that the public sphere was not in fact gendered male: if women’s ideas were suppressed, it was not the result of prejudice against their gender but rather prejudice against the content of their ideas. Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.

However, freedom of the press and market liberalization did *not* have the same consequences for women as it did for their male counterparts, because the public sphere was in fact gendered male. How can a space be gendered? To say that the public sphere was gendered means, most straightforwardly, that it was a space where women were mocked, ignored, or had less authority than men simply on the basis of their gender. Despite seeming like a sphere of equal and meritorious intellectual opportunity, women's contributions to the public sphere were often mocked as intellectually pretentious. The French press is rife with misogynist denigrations of women's speech, who come off ridiculous at best, whorish at worst. One such article, "Apology for the Babbling of Women" was reprinted widely throughout the 1760's.⁴¹ This anecdote begins with a woman arguing against women's speech: women are too talkative and destroy social life with their constant babbling, she says.⁴² But a man responds, justifying women's babbling: its excessive simplicity and extreme repetition is well-suited for the instruction of children. For male children, however, it is necessary to outgrow this mode of thinking. This illustrates a common trope whereby women were mocked in the press and told that their knowledge ought to be limited to raising children and managing the home. In other words, women's contribution to society was through their bourgeois domestic virtue.

⁴¹ It first appeared in the January 20, 1762 issue of *Petite Affiches*, was reported a week later in the *Affiches de Bordeaux* and appears yet again years later in an the June 30, 1769 issue of *Annonces, affiches, et avis divers de l'Orléanais*. This is just a record of appearances within the papers sampled by Censer (1994).

⁴² Censer (1994), p. 72.

A gendered space may also be one that values more highly modes of communication and forms of interaction more typically associated with men.⁴³ Joan Landes's seminal *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* argues that the exclusion of women was central to—not incidental to—the creation of the bourgeois public sphere.⁴⁴ She notes that men's critiques of women's social power were often framed as critiques of feminized language.⁴⁵ This meant that women could not appeal to the reason of their male counterparts as easily or even in the same kind of language. The women reported on in this study were aware of and often exasperated by the male prejudice that constrained their manner of writing. In the November 1761 issue of the *Journal des Dames*, the *editrice* Beaumer complains,

“Eh! Messieurs les Critiques, car c'est moi qui suis cette femme, vous m'impatientez, vous me donnez de l'humeur, quoique je vous aye bien promis de n'en point avoir; comment vous concilier? Vous vous plaignez que mon Journal est trop sérieux, d'autres l'accuseront de frivolité.”⁴⁶

A certain frivolous style makes women stupid, but a more ponderous style keeps them from being seen as women at all. She goes on,

⁴³ This definition of a gendered space is derived from Karpowitz and Mendelberg (2014), p. 2.

⁴⁴ Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Landes (1988) argues that the critique of aristocratic women's artificial and highly stylized language as signalling vanity, corruption, and despotism originated with Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*. See Part I, chp. 1.

⁴⁶ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), p. 104.

“Encore une fois, Messieurs, je fermerai l’oreille à toutes vos censures discordantes... mais n’allez pas vous imaginer que le *JOURNAL* ne traite que des sujets renfermés dans le cercle étroit de la toilette; nous sommes faites pour entendre la raison aussi bien que ces hommes à qui nous avons l’honneur de la faire perdre tous les jours.”⁴⁷

Prejudice against women’s language and identity means that men will make fun of women no matter what they do. “Et de quoi ne se moquent-ils pas?” complains Beaumer, “ils pensent que M. *Rousseau de Genève* nous a remis à notre place en nous renvoyant parmi les animaux.”⁴⁸ Other editors also critiqued this double-bind. When the *editrice* Montanclos gives a new prospectus, she writes that her original goal for the Journal—to be reasonable—was met with negative public reactions, yet when she tried to write more beautifully, she was again met with negative reactions:

“J’ose croire que mes vues, ainsi dirigées, étoient raisonnables, et devoient assurer le succès de l’Ouvrage. Cependant, que de contradictions dans les jugemens du Public! Plusieurs disoient, après la lecture des premier volumes, *ce Journal est agréable, mais on y loue tout, et cela deviendra fade*. Cet avis m’ayant été répété plusieurs fois, j’ai cru devoir mettre plus de fermeté dans l’annonce ou l’analyse de chaque Ouvrage. Je me suis permis d’en relever les défauts, après en avoir fait connoître les beautés avec toute la sincérité de l’admiration; dès-lors, on m’a blamée d’une autre façon; les murmures ont éclaté contre l’Homme de Lettre qui a fait tel ou tel extrait, et contre moi qui pense comme lui. D’autres personnes, au contraire, ont applaudi à l’impartialité de nos jugemens; elles ont vu que nos intentions étoient bonnes...”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *Journal des Dames*, novembre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), pp. 104-105.

⁴⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), p. 116.

⁴⁹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32), pp. 7-8.

The various male editors of the *Journal* also discerned the double standard that their women contributors faced. Louptière argues on behalf of the maligned Mme de Puisieux: “Si les talens, l’érudition, la philosophie et les autres titres de supériorité, sont des crimes pour une femme, Madame de Puisieux est plus coupable que jamais.”⁵⁰ He defends her further on the grounds that she stays well away from the vagaries of emotion, writing “Si l’on pouvoit douter des avantages que l’étude procure au beau sexe, il suffiroit opur s’en convaincre de remarquer avec quelle stoïcité et quel enjouement Madame de Puisieux envisage une perspective qui fait frémir tant de femmes.”⁵¹

The recognition of this double standard was not limited to the *Journal*, but appeared in the larger *presse féminine*. The editor of the *Courrier lyrique, ou Passe-temps des toilettes* (1787-1789), Adélaïde-Gillette Billet Dufresnoy, for example, advises her readers to ignore the mockery to which women are perpetually subjected.⁵² It was thus not the case that the public sphere, as embodied in the periodical press, was a gender-neutral space open to talents. Prejudice against women’s speech—and what was perceived to be a “feminized” style of writing, meant that women were at a distinct disadvantage when appealing to the reason of their co-citizens.

⁵⁰ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (2), p. 103.

⁵¹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (2), p. 105.

⁵² Suellen Diaconoff, "Periodical Print Press for Women: An Enlightenment Forum for Females." In *Through the Reading Glass*, SUNY Series in Feminist Criticism and Theory, ed. Albany: State U. of New York Press, 2005.

Did the *Journal des Dames* manage to convince others, namely men, that they were legitimate, authoritative contributors to the public sphere? Some things would suggest that the *Journal* did succeed: it had a relatively wide circulation; aristocrats and monarchs allowed the *Journal* to be dedicated to them; and perhaps most convincing, men who were prominent players in the periodical press thought fit to publish in the *Journal* and correspond with its *editrices*. On the other hand, prejudice endured. Instructive on this count is Maisonneuve's correspondence with Marmontel. Maisonneuve had criticized an opinion of Marmontel's, and they exchanged several letters as he defended his position. One of these letters, reprinted in the *Journal*, begins by remarking that, "Le titre même de votre Journal semble en exclure les discussions épineuses, et la réponse que vous me faite l'honneur de me demander, exigeroit des détails dont peu de femmes s'amuseroient."⁵³ Apparently, the *Journal* was legitimate enough to merit responses from Marmontel, but his condescension suggests that he did not treat Maisonneuve as seriously as he would have a man.

Though women met with mockery in the printed press, there was at least one domain in which women's speech was welcome—indeed, dominant. In the world of the salons, women ruled.

⁵³ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de fevrier, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (12), p. 42.

The salonnières

In stark contrast to the situation of the vast majority of women in eighteenth-century France, some rich women in eighteenth century France possessed immense cultural power. *Salonnières* were recognized as arbiters of taste. They facilitated discourses characterized by variety and charm, and they facilitated a pleasant and easy sociability. They facilitated the careers of artists, and they socialized the non-elite so that they could successfully conform to the opinions and manners of aristocratic society.⁵⁴ Behind the scenes, the life of a *salonnière* was disciplined and rigorous: the upkeep of important correspondence and the careful orchestration of social networks required intelligence and constant labor.

Salon hosts (men as well as women) were instrumental gatekeepers in providing the social and financial capital that would support artists and authors.⁵⁵ If one pleased a *salonnière* by, among other things, having pleasant conversation, coming up with *bons mots*, and offering frequent compliments, one was accepted into *le monde*, thereby gaining the necessary social cachet and often the financial resources to launch a

⁵⁴ Landes (1988), p. 24.

⁵⁵ For my description of the salons, I rely largely on Antoine Lilti, *The World of the Salons*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. I also rely on Landes (1988), especially Part I, chp. 1, and Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994. Salons were regularly-occurring dinners hosted by women, men, or couples with dependable, mixed-gender attendees. Salon discourse was characterized by civility and politeness. Finally, salon sociability was characterized by “the absence of an explicit objective other than sociability itself.” In other words, though salons might have political, diplomatic, philosophical, or artistic bents, ultimately, the primary goal was “pleasurable entertainment” (Lilti, p. 22).

successful career. The institution of the salon had its own idiom, and learning to competently employ that idiom was a crucial aspect of becoming a legitimate and authoritative member of that institution. While some salons may have been of a more philosophical, political, or diplomatic persuasion, it was nevertheless paramount in salons of all types that the conversation be kept pleasant. “Wit, urbanity, conversation, politesse, and pleasure were the earmarks of salon society,” notes Landes.⁵⁶ As gatekeepers to *la société*, *salonnières* dictated the terms of good taste.

Because they taught the manners and affability that facilitated social success and advancement, *salonnières* were equated with a superficiality. Critics who longed for a return to more traditional gender roles accused salons of operating in the realm of appearances and of being nothing more than elegant brothels.⁵⁷ The term “reign of women” became code for “corruption.”⁵⁸ However much these women *salonnières* collected and corresponded with the brightest minds of their century, and however intelligent they might have been, serious erudition was avoided, lest she be labelled a *bel esprit* and her salon viewed as a *bureau d’esprit* (“office of false wit”). Publication was treated by *salonnières* as if it were a highly contagious venereal disease: it was the damning evidence of intellectual promiscuity.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Landes (1988), p. 25.

⁵⁷ Landes (1988), pp. 25-26.

⁵⁸ Landes (1988), p. 27.

⁵⁹ For more on women and the perils of publication in the eighteenth century, see *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France*, eds. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Dena Goodman, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Prominent, pervasive cultural images mocked and denigrated women who were perceived as harboring intellectual pretensions. This was of course nothing new, but eighteenth-century French writers, instead of letting this misogyny atrophy, breathed new life into it. Molière, Pallisot, and Rousseau arguably did the most damage. In Pallisot's *Les Philosophes* (1760), the main woman is mocked "because she confuses sociability with genuine knowledge, and the salon with the academy."⁶⁰ Molière popularized the trope further in *Les Femmes savantes* (1776), which skewered Mme Geoffrin for being a ridiculous *femme savante* (a wise woman) and accused her of the social crime of transforming her salon into a *bureau d'esprit*.⁶¹ "The punishment awaiting women of the world who also aspired to be women of letters," remarks Antoine Lilti, "was ridicule, the principal danger that menaced the prestige of the salon."⁶² Accordingly, they "carefully avoided any intrusion into the flourishing print domain."⁶³

Instead of rejecting such misogyny as a patriarchal injustice, ample evidence suggests that *salonnières* tended to internalize the equation of publication with indecency. They sincerely avoided publication themselves and criticized women who did. The salonnière Mme. d'Épinay writes in her private diary, "a woman is quite wrong and acquires only ridicule when she sets herself up as a *savante* or a *bel esprit* and believes she can back up such a reputation; but still, she is absolutely right in acquiring the most

⁶⁰ Lilti (2005), p. 45.

⁶¹ Lilti (2005), p. 45.

⁶² Lilti (2005), p. 45.

⁶³ Lilti (2005), p. 46.

knowledge possible for her.”⁶⁴ Mme Necker wrote down her ideas but refused to publish them—she seemed to sincerely believe that it was *outré* to publish, and her husband was afraid of the ridicule it would bring.⁶⁵ Julie de Lespinasse is known today for an amorous correspondence that she never believed would be published, as well as things for entertainment in the salon, but nothing more. Mme Geoffrin was adamant about her intellectual incompetence and more often than not, she did not read the authors whom she hosted or the books she trafficked. Her library contained *no* scholarly or philosophical books.⁶⁶ Women of the salons sought at all costs to *avoid* the “impertinent reputation,” as Mme du Deffand put it, of being a *bel esprit*.⁶⁷ The comtesse du Boufflers actually brought legal charges against the accusation that she was an author. In one letter, she begs a correspondent in Holland to find and burn any news that says she is an author.⁶⁸ The more successful a *salonnière* was, the more susceptible she was to ridicule, and thus the more she assiduously avoided being labeled an author.

Some *salonnières* tried to combine publication with being a woman of *la société*, but in general they fared poorly. For Mme de Genlis and later Mme de Staël, publication meant that they were “permanently exposed to satire.”⁶⁹ Mme de Boccage’s example is

⁶⁴ Lilti (2005), p. 46.

⁶⁵ Dena Goodman, “Suzanne Necker’s *Mélanges: Gender, Writing, and Publicity*,” in Goldsmith and Goodman, eds. (1995).

⁶⁶ Lilti (2005), p. 44.

⁶⁷ Lilti (2005), p. 47.

⁶⁸ Lilti (2005), p. 47.

⁶⁹ Lilti (2005), p. 47.

instructive: when she acquired literary fame, many of her salon members, including Collé and Marmontel, mocked and deserted her. Melchior Grimm and Voltaire developed low opinions of her. A possibly apocryphal story circulated that Voltaire placed a crown of laurels on her head in mock recognition of her literary accomplishments, all the while making devil horns behind her back.⁷⁰ A successful salon was not built on literary reputation but rather, as Mme Geoffrin's successful attempt demonstrates, on aristocratic ties and generous patronage to men of letters.⁷¹ Mme de Graffigny is a rare example of a woman author who did not meet ridicule; she succeeded in publishing the *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747) to popular acclaim.⁷² Notably, however, she eschewed the title of "author" even as she authored popular books.⁷³

Salons were credibility-granting institutions, and they functioned as creators and arbiters of opinion. But the opinion of the salons was the opinion of *le monde*, whereas the opinion of the press was the opinion of *le public*. Gradually, the modern publishing apparatus was replacing the salons as the producer and circulator of culture, news, and opinion. Joan Landes argues that, ultimately, "the salon declined in importance with the

⁷⁰ Lilti (2005), p. 48.

⁷¹ Lilti (2005), pp. 87-88.

⁷² The success of Graffigny's *Lettres* maybe due in part to the form that she adopted: the epistolary novel. Letters were thought to be a feminine genre. Janet Gurkin Altman, "Women's Letters in the Public Sphere," in Goldsmith and Goodman, eds., (1995), p. 111.

⁷³ Landes (1988), p. 50.

rise of the mass media and modern industry.”⁷⁴ Perhaps the salons viewed *le public* as stupid or vulgar, but its growing influence and authority could not be ignored.⁷⁵ Landes equates the demise of the salons with the demise of women’s authority in general. A more qualified perspective, however, is that it was the gradual decline of the cultural authority of one kind of woman: the rich, intelligent, often aristocratic, *salonnière*.

The bourgeois woman, by contrast, was ascendent. Despite deeply misogynist prejudices that barred women’s participation in the growing sphere of public influence, women did not simply sit back and concede print culture to men. They too sought to take advantage of this new sphere of influence and commercial activity.

The Presse Féminine and the Journal de Dames

The periodical press was growing in leaps and bounds in France in the eighteenth century, and women often contributed to periodicals such as the *Gazette de France* (1631-1792), the *Journal des savants* (1665-1792), the *Mercure de France* (1724-1791), Melchior Grimm’s *Correspondance littéraire* (1754-1773), and the *Année littéraire* (1754-1776). Jack Censer notes that women constituted a fairly large proportion of the readership of these journals—between 14% and 30%.⁷⁶ William Beik reports that, by 1790, about 71% of men in northern France (including Paris) were literate, while about 44% of women were, and in southern France, about 27% of men were literate while about

⁷⁴ Landes (1988), p. 23.

⁷⁵ Lilti (2005), p. 191.

⁷⁶ Censer (1984).

12% of women were.⁷⁷ Of those women and men who could read, women still read periodicals at lower rates, but the lower literacy rate for women accounts for much of the difference.

There were even some periodicals that appealed to an audience constituted primarily—though not exclusively—of women.⁷⁸ While these journals could potentially form the basis of a more comprehensive study in the future, in this study I concentrate my attention on the most important, successful, and longest-running periodical in the corpus of the *presse féminine*, the *Journal des Dames* (1758-1777), housed in the Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal in Paris and in the Bibliothèque François Mitterand.⁷⁹ Simply put, the *Journal* is the most comprehensive window into women’s contributions to the French periodical press in the eighteenth century. It contains over 60 volumes, spanning over two decades. Over the course of its twenty-year run, the *Journal des Dames* had nine different editors, three of whom were *editrices*: Mme de Beaumer (October 1761-April 1763),

⁷⁷ William Beik, *A Social and Cultural History of Early Modern France*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 291.

⁷⁸ Jean Sgard identifies 19 journals that constitute the *presse féminine*, which he defines as periodicals that were either edited by women or were written primarily for women, though Suzanne Dianocoff’s survey of some of these periodicals that were written by men reveals these periodicals to be informing—or more often, preaching to—women about virtue and fashion. A stricter definition of *presse féminine* would whittle Sgard’s original 19 periodicals down to six that actually featured substantial contributions from, or were edited by, women: *La Spectatrice* (1728-29), *Nouveau magasin français de Londres* (1750-51), *Courrier de la nouveauté* (1758), *Journal des dames* (1759-1777), *Journal de Monsieur* (1776-1783), *Courrier lyrique et amusant* (1785-1787).

⁷⁹ *Journal des Dames*, janvier 1759 – décembre 1774, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (1-32). *Journal des Dames*, janvier 1775 - avril-juin 1775, Bibliothèque François Mitterand, Z-24526-24537.

Catherine Michelle de Maisonneuve (May 1763-April 1768), and Marie Emilie de Montanclos, who is also called the Baron de Princen after her marriage in 1774 (January 1774-April 1775). Because I am interested in how women styled themselves as legitimate contributors to the public sphere, the volumes edited by these three women comprise the bulk of the journals of interest in the present study.

The *Journal* was priced lower than other monthlies (12 livres per year, compared with around 15 livres per year for a journal like the *Mercure*).⁸⁰ Gelbart estimates circulation to have been well over 300—possibly as high as 1000. This may sound low to modern ears, but the most prestigious periodical, the state’s official *Mercure de France*, had only about 1500 subscribers during this period. The success of the *Journal* even spawned a Dutch imitation: the *Bibliothèque de Dames*.⁸¹ The *editrice* Beaumer claimed that 81 booksellers carried the *Journal*, and she reports that she has shipped the *Journal* to cities all over Europe.⁸² We might infer, then, that there was an international audience, though Nina Rattner Gelbart notes that this could also have been a ploy to make her publication seem more successful than it really was.⁸³ Because it was common practice in the eighteenth century for subscribers to share or even rent out periodicals, it is likely that

⁸⁰ Rattner Gelbart (1987).

⁸¹ Rattner Gelbart (1987).

⁸² *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1763, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (9).

⁸³ Nina Rattner Gelbart, “The *Journal des dames* and its Female Editors: Politics, Censorship, and Femnism in the Old Regime Press.” In *Press and Politics in Pre-Revolutionary France*. Eds. Jack R. Censer and Jeremy D. Popkin. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987.

each issue of the *Journal* reached hundreds or even thousands of people. Even with this limited scope, the *presse féminine* reached a far broader audience than did the influential *salonnières*

That being said, this broader audience was not a *mass* audience. An audience that could read and afford 12 livres a year (or knew someone who could) must have been relatively well-off.⁸⁴ There is also good reason to suspect that some of the audience was aristocratic: from 1774-1775, the *Journal* was dedicated to the Queen, Marie-Antoinette. Because the women who contributed to the *Journal* could write well, it is fair to surmise that they were from rich or middle-class families. The *editrices*, however, for all their connections, were not *salonnières*. Gelbart makes the distinction stark: “The female editors of the *Journal des Dames* recognized the potential of journalism to reach and sway an audience, and they willingly embarked on a career other *femmes de lettres* scorned. The disapproval was mutual, for the editors had no use for the salon set that played hostess to great men, arbitrated matters of literary taste, and made or broke reputations of aspiring male writers. The female journalists were genuinely concerned with bettering the lot of women.”⁸⁵ I differ from Gelbart in that, while I agree the *editrices* wanted to employ a different medium than the *salonnières*, they absolutely adapted the *salonnières*’ linguistic strategies because the discourse of the salons was the

⁸⁴ A typical French laborer during this period could expect to receive about 1 livre for a day’s work.

⁸⁵ Cited in Landes (1988), p. 59.

discourse of women's authority. It was this combination of salon authority and bourgeois virtue that made the *editrices* legitimate and successful contributors to the public sphere.

The women of the *Journal des Dames* did not create legitimacy and authority in the public sphere *ex nihilo*. They seized, consciously or not, on the most ubiquitous example of women's authority that already existed—that of the *salonnière*. They adapted the linguistic strategies by which the *salonnière* exercised her authority to the bourgeois values of the public sphere.⁸⁶ The linguistic strategies employed by women in the *Journal* resemble that of a *salonnière*-bourgeois hybrid, wherein women combined the *salonnière*'s role as arbiter of taste and her particularly feminine capacity for style and charm with considerations of the public good, utility, and a domestic ideal.

Suellen Diaconoff's study of the *Journal des Dames* and three other journals of the *presse féminine* argues that their main concern was providing a basis for women's right to be treated with respect. Diaconoff argues that they achieved this by proposing a new kind of virtue that was self-aware, courageous, energetic, committed, proud of oneself, and eager to meet challenges. "It is through the exercise of this new virtue," writes Diaconoff, "that they promise that women can achieve authority."⁸⁷ My argument does not contradict Diaconoff, but I argue that women in the eighteenth-century French press packaged this virtue in an idiom that connoted feminine power. By combining an

⁸⁶ Landes (1988) portrays the *presse féminine* in general and the *Journal des Dames* in particular as emerging *in opposition* to the linguistic practices and norms of the salon. I argue that, in fact, the *presse féminine* built on the "feminine" linguistic practices of the salon.

⁸⁷ Suellen Diaconoff, "Periodical Print Press for Women: An Enlightenment Forum for Females," *Through the Reading Glass*, Albany: State U. of New York Press, 2005, p. 201.

idiom already associated with women's authority with the ascendant values of the emerging bourgeoisie, women fashioned themselves as legitimate, authoritative contributors to the public sphere.

Even at its most radical moments, the women contributing to the *Journal des dames* never relinquish the idiom of sociability. Ubiquitous is the claim that women are more capable than men of composing works that charm, or more qualified to judge the readability or elegance of an author. While a given contributor may lean more towards a maternal republican image or more towards an egalitarian notion of the sexes, women always lay claim, subtly or explicitly, to their identity as authorities of culture and style. Just as women in the salons were thought to soften men's mœurs through their greater capacity for sociability, the women of the press attempted to do so for the public. The *editrice* Maisonneuve seems to have hit the mark when she is praised by one man: "It is as if a man were thinking it and a woman writing it."⁸⁸

Plaire et instruire: Combining salon style and form with bourgeois virtue

If there is one overriding theme in the *Journal des Dames*, it is *utilité*, or utility. Indeed, the existence of the *Journal* itself is justified on the basis that it will contribute to social utility. One excerpt treats the topic of "l'utilité des Journaux," and whether or not they can influence *l'esprit national*, especially since "La multitude, dit-il, est incapable

⁸⁸ Cited in Nina Rattner Gelbart, *Feminine and Opposition Journalism in Old Regime France: Le Journal des Dames*. Los Angeles: University of California Press. 1987, p. 153.

d'étudier et d'apprendre."⁸⁹ Maisonneuve summarizes the author's conclusion that "l'amour du bien public qui les produit, rend l'Auteur et l'ouvrage bien respectables."⁹⁰ According to this logic, the *Journal des Dames* was justified if it were sufficiently dedicated to the public good and worked to produce a more virtuous citizenry.

Yet there was one catch: it was not enough for women to present useful information, they also had to make that *utilité* pleasurable. They had to please (*plaire*) while also instructing (*instruire*). Women thus had a higher bar to jump over to justify their existence in the public sphere. However, their ability to couch information in sociable forms and soften men's *mœurs* in the process was also a potential justification for women's authority in the public sphere.

The upmost concern of all of the *editrices* of the *Journal* was that it should both please and instruct. The *editrice* Beaumer's March 1763 Prospectus summarizes her editorial policy thus: "nécessaire et agréable."⁹¹ Boldly, she writes, "Il seroit bien glorieux pour mon sexe de ne pas seulement borner notre Journal à l'Extrait de quelques Livres, mais de le rendre plus vaste; mon but est l'utilité."⁹² She will include moral and

⁸⁹ *Ephémérides du Citoyen ou Chronique de l'esprit national, Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de decembre, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (14), pp. 69-70.

⁹⁰ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de decembre, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (14).

⁹¹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1763, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (9), p. 197.

⁹² *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1763, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (9), p. 197.

philosophical subjects, for posterity and for the current generation. Though Mme de Beaumer is so often portrayed as the most fiery and radical of the editors of the *Journal des Dames* (a reputation imparted to her by Gelbart's seminal study and reiterated, without modification, by Gutwirth, Landes, and others), Beaumer's editorial policy still promises "*des fruits cachés sous des fleurs*," or "fruits hidden among the flowers."⁹³

"La raison aura entrée dans notre Journal, pourvu qu'elle s'y montre avec le sourire des Graces. On ne craindra pas d'associer aux Arts les Modes les plus frivoles. Si on doit trouver sur une toilette bien composée *Montesquieu et Racine* à côté des pompons et des rubans, il faut qu'une bibliothèque de Dame admette la brochure la plus légère."⁹⁴

To think that Beaumer was radical while the next two *editrices* were maternal or more moderate gives a false notion not only of Maisonneuve's and Montanclos's feminism, but it portrays Beaumer as more starkly and uncompromisingly radical than she was. In fact, what stands out in reading the *Journal des Dames* is not any stark difference between the *editrices*, but the uniformity of their common commitment to being charming and pleasing while also instructing. Informing Gelbart's notion of the declining radicalism of the three *editrices* is the notion that Rousseau was increasingly influential as the century progressed. During mid-century, it is argued, women enjoyed relative freedom and power in French society, but by the 1770's, the onset of domesticating republic ideology and a Rousseauian revolution in female psychology had taken hold. Yet more recent feminist scholarship of the eighteenth century has suggested that in fact the "maternal" thread

⁹³ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), p. vi.

⁹⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), p. v.

associated with republicanism was in fact popular throughout the century and did not begin with Rousseau.⁹⁵ Indeed, the *editrices*—even Beaumer—embraced a vision of women as charming and virtuous agents of socialization, even as they railed against women’s exclusion and oppression. As Beaumer suggests above, an association with the Graces was important: feminine and inspirational, they, like the *salonnières*, provided a template for women’s speech and inspiration. Balancing reason with talent and beauty, they were the *Journal des Dames* ideal: “En un mot, on cherchera à plaire, à la fois, à la Vertu, à l’Esprit et aux Graces.”⁹⁶

For her part, the *editrice* Maisonneuve announces, “Joindre l’utile à l’agréable, voilà mon but.”⁹⁷ For too long, she says, women’s intellect has been consumed with trivialities when it should be directed towards more substantial fare:

“[N]ous donnons de l’esprit aux femmes, mais c’est, à peu plus près, l’instinct que nous accordons aux animaux: nous convenons qu’elles sont destinées à plaire, propres pour le ménage, habiles dans les jeux, les bagatelles; qu’elles ont du goût pour la frivolité: mais nous ne voulons pas, contre l’expérience, qu’elles soient capables d’apprendre, de réfléchir, de méditer, d’approfondir; qu’elles puissent lire avec fruit; qu’il leur soit possible d’égaliser les hommes: quoiqu’il n’y ait aucune différence réelle entre les deux sexes: quoique mille et mille exemples démentent les partisans d’un Philosophe moderne, qui veut que toutes les facultés communes aux deux sexes ne leur soient pas également partagées: que partout où la femme fait valoir ses droits, elle a l’avantage; et partout où elle veut usurper

⁹⁵ Lesley H. Walker, *A Mother’s Love: Crafting Feminine Virtue in Enlightenment France*, Cranbury, New Jersey: Rosemont Publishing, 2008.

⁹⁶ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), p. vi.

⁹⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 7.

ceux des hommes, elle reste au dessous d'eux...mais doucement, ne montrons pas tant de sçavoir...⁹⁸

What is more, Maisonneuve rejects the notion that women are perfect, and she rejects the contrary notion as well—that only a few women can attain real genius: “une sçavante n’est point un phénomène.”⁹⁹ She will strive to please her readers, she says, who enjoy things other than frivolity, and who also avoid the pedantic tone common to journalists.¹⁰⁰ Maisonneuve prints a fawning letter from a reader, complimenting the way that she has “joint à cette utile impartialité l’avantage d’être un des plus agréables Ouvrages périodiques.”¹⁰¹ In another issue, Maisonneuve gives a fairly long extract of a *conte moral* and she comments afterwards that the author: “Il nous instruit avec gaité; et c’est la meilleure maniere d’y réussir.”¹⁰² She also stresses that women want to fill their time, not with trifling literature, but with substantive readings: “Comme il y a plusieurs Dames qui se livrent à la Littérature, et qu’il y en a plusieurs qui cherchent à se procurer une lecture instructive, intéressante et amusante, pour remplir ces vuides que creuse

⁹⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 7.

⁹⁹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 8.

¹⁰⁰ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 9.

¹⁰¹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de Aout, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (13), p. 34.

¹⁰² *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (14), p. 55.

l'oisiveté.”¹⁰³ Towards this end, she informs readers that a bookstore, the *Cabinet Littéraire*, has all the newest publications, to amuse or instruct. One can get a yearly pass for 18 or 36 livres. If you're going to the country, you can even check out 8 or 10 volumes at a time!¹⁰⁴ Maisonneuve is clearly committed to the notion that pleasant forms of discourse ought to be employed towards useful and industrious ends.

Just like Maisonneuve and Beaumer, Princen emphasizes the combination of utility and pleasure. The *Journal*, she writes, will join the Muses with all the Virtues.¹⁰⁵ She justifies her project by appealing to the common good: “Si quelques anecdotes cheres à la vertu, aux sciences, à la gloire ou au bonheur public, intéressent aussi mon Sexe, je me ferai un devoir de les recueillir. La cause de l'esprit ne doit jamais nuire à celle du cœur.”¹⁰⁶

Of course, all of the *editrices* recognized the fine line that they walked. At any moment, their useful content could be decried as too masculine, and their pleasing content could be dismissed as too feminine. Princen pens a particularly fiery condemnation of the injustice of a gendered double-standard when she writes:

¹⁰³ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 109.

¹⁰⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 110.

¹⁰⁵ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1774, Mme la Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (30), p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1774, Mme la Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (30), p. 12.

“il n’ étoit pas permis aux Femmes de se distinguer par des connoissances utiles et agréables, sans courir les risques de se voir en bute à la jalousie ou aux traits piquants de la critique. Quelques-unes après avoir surmonté des difficultés sans nombre, et s’être mises au-dessus du préjugé encore plus difficile à vaincre, ont cueilli des lauriers qu’elles avoient disputés aux hommes; d’autres ont suivi leur exemple: enfin la carrière est ouverte aux deux Sexes...”¹⁰⁷

A little later Princen explains:

“On ne voit pas, les femmes de mérite, se donner en spectacles au Public, qui se rit de la frivolité de celles qui l’amuse. . . Une femme instruite fait se mettre à la portée de tout le monde; elle ne se trouve déplacée nulle part; elle fait les délices de sa société; on la revoit toujours avec un nouveau plaisir: tel est l’avantage d’un esprit cultivé sur la beauté.”¹⁰⁸

Every woman who edits the *Journal des Dames*, and most of the men, indicate this editorial policy, usually repeatedly.

Contributors, too, embrace this ideal. One piece that claims to be a woman’s reflections on herself (but that is in fact a highly idealized portrait) illustrates how bourgeois values have conspicuously replaced the capricious, Rococo visions of an aristocratic ideal:

“C’est à moi d’abord qu’elle doit être utile; et dès-lors, elle me devient agréable. L’amour-propre même, qui a sur nous un pouvoir inévitable, m’engage à la préférer à ces vêtemens chargés de pompons et de fleurs artificielles. Je me dis: si je suis jolie, cette robe me suffit pour le paroître.”

She reports that she owns a, “petite bibliothèque des livres qui m’indiquent l’usage salutaire des plantes et l’art de les préparer; et je quitte sans regret la lecture

¹⁰⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de fevrier, 1774, Mme la Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (30), pp. 165-166.

¹⁰⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de fevrier, 1774, Mme la Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (30), p. 169.

d'Anacréon."¹⁰⁹ Botany is far more useful to this women than poems, apparently.

Strikingly, she concludes by asserting her right as a woman to be published, explaining that women are made to soften men's mœurs: "Je suis femme. J'ai des droits incontestables pour paroître dans cet ouvrage périodique,"¹¹⁰ adding,

"les femmes sont en effet l'ouvrage chéri de la nature; qu'elle nous fit, pour adoucir l'humeur sombre et quelquefois cruelles de l'homme, pour porter dans son cœur un sentiment de tendresse et de douceur, qu'elle seule, en le formant, ne put jamais venir à bout d'y placer."¹¹¹

As this venture into botany suggests, utility is broadly defined. Volumes about childbirth and childrearing are promoted.¹¹² The latest proposals for education reform are debated.¹¹³ Public lectures and free courses are advertised.¹¹⁴ The latest news about

¹⁰⁹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juillet, 1774, Mme la Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (31), p. 112.

¹¹⁰ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juillet, 1774, Mme la Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (31), p. 114.

¹¹¹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juillet, 1774, Mme la Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (31), p. 115.

¹¹² A typical example is the *Mémoire sur la vitalité des Enfants*, by JJJ Hoin, a surgeon from Dijon. This is an informative volume, where the author examines "à quel terme doit être l'accouchement, pour que l'enfant puisse vivre." *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (12), p. 102.

¹¹³ One example is the *Lettre à Mme de Maisonneuve, sur le projet d'une Maison d'Education*. *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de septembre, 1764, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (11); *Lettre à Mme de Maisonneuve, sur le Traité de l'Education civile*.

¹¹⁴ One example is the *Cours gratuit de Géographie et d'Histoire*, *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1764, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (11), p. 117.

vaccination is reported.¹¹⁵ A work by Fontenelle is summarized in which he surveys such topics as “le baromètre”, “la machine pneumatique” and “la transpiration des plantes,” as well as telescopes, gravity, refraction, fire, electricity, theory of colors, the moon, and “l’exposition du système Newtonien.”¹¹⁶

Surveying a variety of subjects was useful because the bourgeois wife and mother were expected to possess a wide range of skills and broad knowledge so as to be effective instructors for their children. Also, a lively mind and conversation was a must for the bourgeois wife, since she needed to be an interesting companion for her husband. Crucially, variety also guarded against women’s *amour propre*: by refraining from an intense study of a particular topic, the contributors to the *presse féminine* guarded against the semblance of arrogance. In the salons, variety was a strategy for keeping conversation from becoming too specific: men were free to pursue a subject with intensity, but for women, intensity of study indicated intellectual pretension.¹¹⁷

In addition, variety also served to promote pleasure by keeping things interesting and lively. A benefit to the society of women was that they prevented knowledge from

¹¹⁵ On Parlement’s inquiry into a smallpox outbreak, *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10); *Inoculation*. On one doctor’s undertaking to study whether inoculation works, and a German woman who discovered an easy method for controlling smallpox, *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (12), pp. 117-118.

¹¹⁶ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de décembre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), pp. 200-201.

¹¹⁷ One notable exception is Mme du Châtelet, who made important contributions to math and physics and, through her translations, introduced the Francophone world to Newton.

becoming ponderous. For this reason, variety was stressed by each of the various editors of the *Journal des Dames*, whether man or woman. Maisonneuve even introduced a new tagline for the *Journal*: “*Si l’uniformité est la mere de l’ennui, la variété doit être la mere du plaisir.*”¹¹⁸

Guarding themselves against accusations of untoward intellectual ambition, the women who edited and contributed to the *Journal des Dames* insisted constantly that their goal was to make public life more charming and to make women more useful and, ultimately, to contribute to the stock of the common good. Women in the periodical press thus represented a new agreement: they would be made more industrious and useful through their encounters with the public sphere, and the public sphere would be made more pleasing through its encounters with women. “Est-il, Madame, un plus sûr moyen de défaire nos Belles de leur ton de frivolité, qu’en leur faisant sentir ce goût naturel qu’elles ont pour les Lettres, qui ne demande qu’à être développé,”¹¹⁹ writes one male contributor, adding later, “Les Dames sont sensibles; leur caractère de douceur les portent à compatir aux autres bien plus que nous.”¹²⁰

Sometimes pleasure was envisioned as the handmaiden of utility. Other times, utility becomes the thing that is pleasurable. When women describe themselves as taking

¹¹⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 1.

¹¹⁹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de fevrier, 1762, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (5), p. 194.

¹²⁰ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de fevrier, 1762, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (5), p. 197.

real pleasure in bringing about the common good, they portray themselves as men's moral and intellectual equals, just as concerned about humanity and just as able to make meaningful contributions to it. This is the reasoning behind the *Journal's* frequent arguments in favor of women joining French academic societies.

One of the more intriguing transformations of *plaire* into *utilité* is accomplished by a Mme Benoit in her *Lettre d'une femme sincere*¹²¹ and her *Seconde lettre d'une femme sincere*.¹²² In her contributions, she explains how she went from a *coquette* under the influence of *amour propre* to an other-regarding woman who identifies her own *plaisir* with the good of all. She begins by describing her realization that artificial attempts at *pleasing* do not in fact succeed in giving much pleasure to many people:

“Avant que la raison eut écarté le voile qui me cachoit la véritable route, je pensois qu'un peu de figure, beaucoup de parure, des ajustemens coquets suffisoient pour plaire, mais l'expérience m'a appris que ces agrêmens tous seuls plaisoient à quelques-uns, étoient indifférens ou nuisibles aux yeux des autres...”¹²³

But she begins to discern what it truly means *to please*. She argues that, in giving herself to others, she was in fact giving herself to herself: “j'ai compris que pour plaire

¹²¹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juillet, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (3).

¹²² *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de septembre, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (3).

¹²³ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juillet, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (3), p. 55.

généralement il faudroit me sacrifier sans cesse aux autres et à moi-même.”¹²⁴ Being too self-interested, she failed to see that she was in fact not working for her own interest at all, but she found that by rejecting fortune and an easy life, she could exercise agency (*la franchise*) and feel a deeper satisfaction:

“Un amour du bien être, le goût de l’opulence, l’envie de briller m’auroit volontiers portée à accepter des offres qui auroient entièrement satisfait mon ambition; mais outre les principes de vertu et d’honnêteté, j’avouerai avec ma franchise ordinaire que j’ai eu encore de puissans motifs pour dédaigner les occasions de fortune.”¹²⁵

Mme de Benoit completes the re-orientation from *amour propre* to a love of humanity:

“[I]l vaut mieux faire le plaisir de mille, que la félicité d’un seul. Je ressemble aux Philosophes du jour. Mon système est qu’il faut toujours envisager l’humanité en général, et sacrifier le bonheur d’un particulier au bien de la Société. Est-il rien de si agréable que d’être assez libre, pour recevoir avec plaisir l’hommage de toute la terre!”¹²⁶

It is not difficult to detect in Mme de Benoit’s essay a colloquial and feminine echo of Rousseau’s *The Social Contract*, specifically the notions that one must identify one’s own good with the good of all, and that, in giving oneself up to others, one in fact receives back all that one gives up and more. Though the fact of her writing at all seems an ironic contravention of the Rousseauian prohibition on women speaking in public in

¹²⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juillet, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (3), p. 56.

¹²⁵ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juillet, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (3), p. 60.

¹²⁶ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juillet, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (3), p. 63.

the *Letter to d'Alembert*, she gives a Rousseauan justification for her letter: “c’ étoit la seule maniere d’en faire une censure utile, sans blesser l’amour-propre de personne.”¹²⁷

It is always the case that erudition is justified by appealing to the common good. One contributor, who describes herself as lacking all worldliness, describes her abiding desire to love “et de mériter l’estime générale.” She possesses “le désir de me rendre utile” and so has dedicated herself to study and the avoidance of boredom and laziness.¹²⁸ When some readers complain of Montanclos’s decision to include a medical treatise in the *Journal*, she argues “Eh! qui s’intéresse plus vivement à la santé des défenseurs de la patrie, que des mères tendres, des épouses chéries, des sœurs aimables, qui regrettent d’être séparées de l’objet de leur affection, qu’elles savent exposé à des dangers continuels, dont ce livre apprend à les préserver.”¹²⁹ In the *Lettre de Mme *** à Mme ****, the former explains to her friend that she is sending her a work of philosophy—which saves us, she explains, as opposed to laziness, which damns us.¹³⁰ By relentlessly driving home the theme of usefulness, bourgeois editors and readers justified their

¹²⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juillet, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (3), pp. 65-66.

¹²⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1762, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (5), p. 8.

¹²⁹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1775, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque François Mitterand, Z-24526-24537, janvier-mars, p. 361.

¹³⁰ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 93.

presence in the public sphere by distancing themselves from and condemning every vestige of useless frivolity that smacked of aristocracy.

Education was explicitly linked with the good of humanity and good citizenship. When the *Journal* advertises a course of study for young women, it cites the author of the course, who argues that,

“Les femmes font parties de la société; quelques-unes lui font honneur par leur mérite, d’autres en sont l’ornement... Les méritent-elles? Oui sans doute, mais celles-là seulement qui concourent au bon ordre et au bien général; celles qui se croient faites pour la société, et non pas celles qui imaginent que la société est faite pour elles.”¹³¹

She will respect religion, and she will be a “bonne Citoyenne, elle ne troublera jamais l’harmonie de la société; elle y fera tout le bien qui dépendra d’elle, et se croira toujours heureuse d’avoir des occasions d’exercer sa bienfaisance envers tous les humains.”¹³²

Education is thus equated with a capacity for expanding one’s sentiments to encompass all of humanity. It is notable, however, that even though the author thinks that “toutes les femmes naissent à-peu-près avec les mêmes avantages,” the author nevertheless assumes that the education he offers is for women who will one day have servants of their own.

His future pupil will be a “[m]aîtresse douce et bienfaisante, elle ne regardera pas ses domestiques comme de vils esclaves qui remplissent leur destinée.”¹³³

¹³¹ *Suite du Cours d’Etudes pour les jeunes Demoiselles, Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1774, Mme la Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (30), p. 32.

¹³² *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1774, Mme la Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (30), pp. 33-34.

¹³³ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1774, Mme la Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (30), pp. 25.

Education is generally not viewed as an end in and of itself. For women, education is justified because it promotes individual virtue and the common good. The *Journal* conveys an image of mothers as primary educators of their children, and pedagogical texts are frequently advertised and reviewed.¹³⁴

Women directly address the idea that they should not be as educated or as intelligent as men. Asks one 18-year-old contributor, “mais de jeunes mains ne cueillent-elles pas tous les jours des lauriers dans le champs de Mars? Minerve seroit-elle plus sévère que le Dieu des combats?”¹³⁵ When men wrote to Beaumer to complain about her promoting a new French translation of Seneca, apparently perturbed that such philosophical fare would be recommended for women, Beaumer defends the recommendation by arguing that Seneca will help women to learn about virtue.¹³⁶ She advises the complainants, “il faudra bien vous accoutumer à nous regarder comme des êtres qui pensent sous leurs coëffures et sous leurs pompons...”¹³⁷

While Rousseau was often praised in the *Journal des Dames*, his gendered pedagogy (and indeed his gendered notions of citizenship and public engagement in

¹³⁴ For example, *Principes généraux et raisonnés de l'Ortographie Française or Alphabet pour les Enfants sur quarante-une Cartes à jouer*, *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de fevrier, 1762, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (5).

¹³⁵ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juin, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (2), p. 251.

¹³⁶ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), p. 44.

¹³⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), p. 105.

general) was most often rejected. With respect to his *Traite de l'Education*, Beaumer writes,

“l’Ecrivain qui nous a renvoyé manger du gland sous les chênes, n’aura-t-il pas eu quelquefois des idées bizarres sur l’*Education*, et se fera-t-il bien souvenu que c’étoit pour des hommes qu’il écrivoit des Livres, et non pour des êtres, qui ne ressemblent nullement aux nôtres. Combien de Philosophes nous ont fait hair notre nature! n’en viendra-t-il pas qui nous racommoderont avec l’humanité? Et pour-quoi vouloir que nous ayons des ailes, quand à peine nous nous soutenons sur nos pieds. Quiconque aura la volonté de nous donner des lunettes, s’il veut que son présent nous soit avantageux, qu’il les accommode à la foiblesse de notre vue; sans cela, l’on ne voit plus que des verres inutiles, qu’on commence par admirer, et qu’on finit par briser”¹³⁸

The powerful *Lettre De Madame de *** à Mademoiselle de**** merits being quoted at length. This author hopes that female authors cause a bit of jealousy amongst men.¹³⁹ This letter is a call to arms for women to become Women of Letters, and to reject the fopperies of their toilette as the purpose of their foppish existence. She exhorts her sisters,

“courage, Mesdames, point de quartier, faisons leur voir que nous pouvons penser, parler, étudier, critiquer comme eux; qu’on ne dise plus, *Madame étoit à sa toilette, qu’elle avoit de l’humeur! qu’est-ce qu’une femme occupée du soin frivole de plaire?* qu’on dise, *nous l’avons trouvée dans son cabinet, entourée de Corneille de Racine, de Crébillon, de Voltaire, de Montesquieu; sur sa toilette étoit un amas de Livres de toutes le couleurs, elle nous à lû un Ouvrage sensé et profond.* Voilà les éloges que j’envie pour mon Sexe. Je scais bien que nous sommes foibles et délicates, que le travail nous épouvante, qu’il y a quelque plaisir à s’entendre répéter qu’on est jolie, mais prenons une ferme résolution; mériter l’éloge de femme d’esprit, de femme éclairée, vaut bien la petite gloire que mes Compagnes trouvent à subjurer les hommes: nous sçaurons les retenir

¹³⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), pp. 63-64.

¹³⁹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), p. 78.

par les talens; pourquoi sont-ils volages? Nous ne les enchaînons qu'avec des nœuds de fleurs, et les fleurs se fanent; les chaînes des arts et du génie, loin de se briser, se resserrent et avec le tems, deviennent plus fortes, nous ne craignons plus d'inconstans. C'est alors que nous serons leurs souveraines et qu'ils seront nos esclaves; leur orgueil ne saura plus où se réfugier... (79) Dans le fond de leur ame, ils nous regardent comme des êtres inférieurs, ils s'amuse de nous, nous sommes au rang de leurs plaisirs; mais sont-ils obligés d'avouer que nous leur sommes utiles, que nous les instruisons, que nous les formons aux arts, aux vertus, aux occupations de citoyen; pénétrons-nous bien de cette malheureuse vérité, on fait la guerre et la paix sans nous... cherchons des amis qui nous instruisent, qui nous montrent nos fautes, et non de fades adorateurs qui emploient le peu d'esprit qu'ils ont reçu de la nature à vouloir nous séduire; j'attends cette révolution avec impatience. Je m'efforcerais d'être une des premières à l'exciter."¹⁴⁰

In the June 1761 issue, a young Mlle de Bermann poses a question to readers:

“Lequel seroit le plus utile dans notre siècle d'écrire des ouvrages purement de Littéraire ou de Morale?”¹⁴¹ In her essay, Mlle Bermann ultimately decides in favor of moral works because they are rarer, more necessary, and because sometimes they do attain literary ends. In addition, they are just as appropriate for young women as they are for men (“de jeunes mains, ne cueillent-elles pas tous les jours des lauriers dans le champs de Mars?”) On the other hand, a moral work that is too dry falls flat and accomplishes nothing. By piling reason upon reason, these ineffective works,

“ont négligé les graces de la diction, comme des ornemens étrangers à leurs sujets... et presque tous n'ont donné que des pensées froides et ennuyeuses; faut-il peindre avec force, animer le tableau, donner du feu et de la vivacité aux couleurs? Le pinceau leur tombe des mains; leur plume languissante et foible

¹⁴⁰ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), pp. 78-80.

¹⁴¹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juin, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (2).

trace avec peine des esquisses imparfaites, ils écrivoient sur les passions comme des hommes qui n'en avoient aucune.”¹⁴²

Mlle de Bermann is a clear example of how women were conscious of style as a moral issue; it was a key part of bourgeois women's cultural functions of promoting sociability and softening men's *mœurs* in the public sphere. An awareness of the gendered implications of style, form, and genre pervades the *Journal des Dames*.

Because writing in certain genres, styles, and forms could convey the pleasurable, sociable quality of knowledge, women employed them strategically to establish their authority in the public sphere. Women did not abandon the more “feminine”, and potentially frivolous, styles and forms. Instead, they strove to reclaim and rehabilitate them by using them to communicate bourgeois virtue. Combining the linguistic strategies of the salon with bourgeois ideals, women fashioned themselves into legitimate, authoritative contributors to the public print sphere.

Against frivolité

Undeniably, the *bête noir* of feminine bourgeois virtue was *frivolité*. Frivolity was associated with aristocratic excess and corruption, and was thus intrinsically opposed to bourgeois virtues. Maisonneuve's *Rêve d'Aristobule* recounts a dream about being in “*Bagatellopolis*, capitale du Royaume de *Frivolarque*.”¹⁴³ This land—sounding

¹⁴² *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juin, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (2), p. 257.

¹⁴³ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 13.

suspiciously like Paris—is full of different kinds of fools, and the dreamer finds a lot of frivolous authors. Government is not effective, however, and merchants forget their commerce, and “tous les Citoyens, d’un accord unanime; s’occupent à faire danser pantins.”¹⁴⁴ This “dream” connects frivolity with political corruption and a general neglect of civic duty. It dramatizes the fundamental concern about women in the public sphere: that their feminine frivolity will end up corrupting society and politics. The *editrices* of the *Journal* were committed to convincing the public that this equation was flawed.

To be legitimate writers, then, women had to reject frivolity and its counterpart, *coquetterie*. Young women were especially at risk of frivolity and were continually warned. Fashion was usually criticized, as in Mme de Puiseux’s article about “les défauts et les ridicules à la mode.”¹⁴⁵ A lengthy article debating the use of rouge is instructive, if tedious: after dozens of pages, the author concludes that a woman can wear only a little, and even then must follow “les traces que la nature à empreintes sur leur joues.”¹⁴⁶ An aversion to adornment was considered a point of pride. An anecdote is printed about a woman foregoing an expensive coiffure in order to feed a family.¹⁴⁷ One letter to the

¹⁴⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 15.

¹⁴⁵ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (2), p. 101.

¹⁴⁶ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juin, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (2), p. 283.

¹⁴⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1774, Mme la Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (30), p. 114.

editor explains how the *Journal* has inspired a regular meeting of pretty, intelligent ladies who talk about politics, literature, philosophy, history etc., and who don't spend but half an hour at their *toilette*.¹⁴⁸

The *Journal* communicates the sense that women had grown bored with frivolity and were even offended by it. Louptière, a male editor, prints a letter from the Mme la Vicomtesse De Vienne, who encourages him to tone down the excitement in his writing so as to “tracer aux Dames une voie sûre pour s’attirer l’estime attachée aux talens et à la vertu.”¹⁴⁹ In response, Louptière promises that, “Accoutumé à la cajolerie littéraire, les plus beaux suffrages ne me gâtent point, j’ai appris de bonne heure à les dépouiller de la magie du style et de la politesse.”¹⁵⁰ Frivolous literature came in for severe criticism. Maisonneuve dismisses *La Philosophie des Vapeurs, Ou Lettre raisonnées d’une jolie Femme*, saying that it gives an entirely frivolous image of a woman.¹⁵¹ “Figurez-vous, Madame,” she adds, “que depuis trois mois que je l’ai dans les mains, elle n’a pu parvenir à avoir une migraine complete.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de août, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (3), p. 180.

¹⁴⁹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de avril, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (2), p. 81.

¹⁵⁰ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de avril, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (2), p. 83.

¹⁵¹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32).

¹⁵² *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32), p. 157.

Combatting frivolity also meant replacing coquetry with authentic and monogamous marital unions. The *Journal des Dames* frequently published short poems commemorating couples' marital unions. The goddess Hymen is frequently invoked. Authentic love between spouses may or may not begin with romance, but the end is always the same: a mellowing of passion and youth into virtue and mutual respect. The most common refrain with respect to love is that "la beauté passe et la vertu reste."¹⁵³ Replacing frivolity with sincere love and respect was an implicit critique of aristocratic values and an endorsement of bourgeois ones.

Frivolity is framed as a vice because it causes women to be lazy and to neglect self-improvement and the common good. Beaumer advises, "Evitez l'oisiveté, Mesdames, elle est la mère des vices," instructs Mme de Beaumer, "Livrez-vous à l'étude des Belles-Lettres: faites-vous Hommes; car ne sommes-nous pas Hommes, lorsque nous pensons aussi-bien qu'eux? Eh! pourquoi ne penseroit-on pas avec autant de discernement sous de coëffures, que sous des chapeaux?"¹⁵⁴

Frivolousness is considered to be in direct competition with education and philosophy. One author argues that the women's heads have become as light as their

¹⁵³ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de décembre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), p. 257. Also see *La Rose, Fable* ("rapidement notre Beauté s'en va") *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de février, 1763, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (9), p. 145.

¹⁵⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1763, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (9), pp. 198-199.

feathery coiffures.¹⁵⁵ She reports that, as soon as she escapes the eyes of frivolous society, she surrenders herself to the serious reading of Rousseau, Diderot, d’Alembert “et de tant d’autres Auteurs modernes, qui me paroissent aussi bons moralistes, que les Anciens. Je réfléchis sur ces différens ouvrages, j’extraits les passages auxquels ma raison a applaudi, je relis plusieurs fois, pour pouvoir les comprendre...”¹⁵⁶ This passage also illustrates how the *Journal des Dames*, more often than not, aligns itself with the philosophes and the partisans of Enlightenment. In addition to defending the philosophes against their contemporary detractors, it also consistently defends the merits of the Ancients.

Taken to its extreme, the aversion to frivolity turned into yet another kind of misogynist hierarchy as more educated and “virtuous” women were embarrassed by and sought to distance themselves from the masses of trivial women. One anecdote tells of a rich woman who generously arranged to marry off one village girl each year. One year, she chooses the girl who seems most enthusiastic about enjoying herself. Why would she make such a decision? her friends ask. “*La fille, avide de plaisirs, dit-elle, a besoin d’un mari, et des soins d’un menage pour changer ses goûts, et l’empêcher de s’égarer. La*

¹⁵⁵ “Avez-vous cru que nos têtes, agréablement ornées de plumes variées, auroient moralement contracté la légèreté de nos coëffures?” *Lettre de Madame la Marquise d’Am... A la Solitaire des Isles d’Hières Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32), p. 224.

¹⁵⁶ *Lettre de Madame la Marquise d’Am... A la Solitaire des Isles d’Hières Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32), p. 225.

*fille modeste et tranquille peut attendre sans danger.*¹⁵⁷ Similarly, the *editrice* Montanclos prints extracts from a dying father's advice to his daughters, and it is full of misogynist warnings about the danger of immodesty. "La modestie et la réserve sont regardées comme le plus grand charme des femmes. Plus la compagnie est nombreuse, moins elle doit se dispenser de garder le silence...on peut prendre part à la conversation, sans prononcer une syllabe."¹⁵⁸ Far from critiquing this work, Montanclos declares such advice "trop utile à notre sexe" and promises to give it a longer extract in the next issue.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, among all the *editrices*, Montanclos seems to harbor the most disdain for the frivolity of young women.

Frivolity, in sum, functioned as the corrupt, aristocratic foil to the ideal bourgeois woman and bourgeois values like the common good, social utility, industriousness, education, good citizenship, prudence, and domestic virtue. The price of women's entry into the public print sphere was the shedding of frivolity and the constant projection of bourgeois ideals.

The aversion to frivolity manifested not only in the content of the journal, but also in the style, form, and genre of how women wrote, for the superficiality of women was equated with a superficiality of language. On the one hand, women's speech was

¹⁵⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de septembre, 1774, Mme la Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32), p. 110.

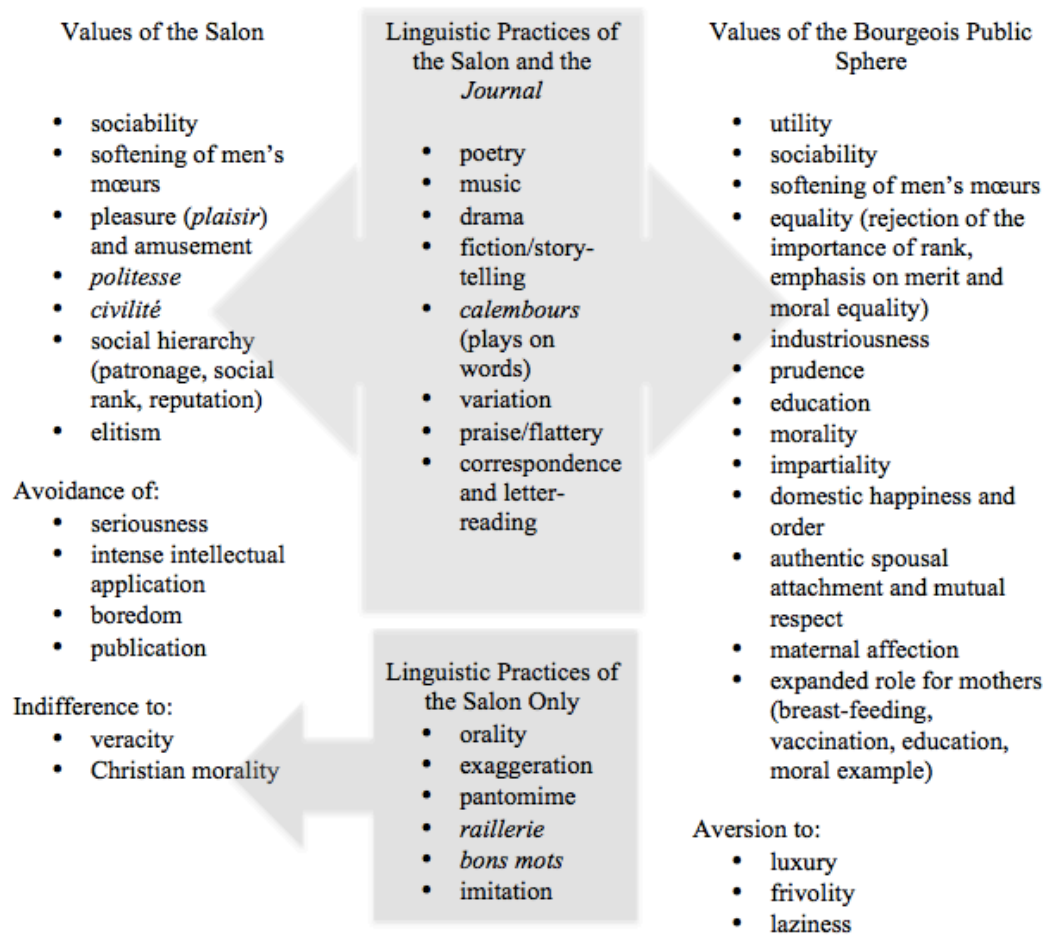
¹⁵⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de decembre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32), pp. 252-253.

¹⁵⁹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de decembre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32), p. 255.

positively portrayed as lending charm to men's language, socializing them to think and speak about difficult subjects with style. This is Denis Diderot's sympathetic argument in his essay "On Women." On the other hand, women's speech, with its emphasis on style over content, could be viewed as superficial, deceptive, and corrupting. This is Rousseau's view in *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theater*, where he argues that the virtue of republican Geneva would be imperiled by women's public speech.¹⁶⁰ Truth and reason were associated with the public virtue of men, and in this entailed a backlash against women and their stylistic, ostensibly facile, language in the public sphere.¹⁶¹ In eighteenth-century France, language was gendered, and feminine language could charm and soften at best, corrupt at worst. The *Journal des Dames* adapted salon discourse to bourgeois values and, in the process, reshaped women's social and civic purpose: from *plaire* to *utilité*.

¹⁶⁰ In his *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theatre* (1758), Rousseau had argued that certain styles of communication encouraged an *amour-propre* that corroded civic virtue. His argument contrasted pleasant styles of communication that lead to effeminization and corruption with useful styles of communication that encouraged masculine civic virtue. The consequence of this gendered dichotomy of communication—entertaining/feminine/corrupt versus useful/masculine/virtuous—was that arguments written in “feminine” styles and forms came to be seen as inappropriate for speaking about public matters, while women writing in “masculine” styles and forms were written off as illegitimate intruders on male prerogative. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Letter to d'Alembert on the Theater,” in *Letter to d'Alembert and Writings for the Theater*. Translated and edited by Allan Bloom, Charles Butterworth, and Christopher Kelly. Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2004.

¹⁶¹ See Landes (1988), chapter 3, “The New Symbolic Politics.”



Poetry

In the salons, poetry was intended to advertise the author's talent, flatter someone, amuse, celebrate worldly events, and, frequently, to accompany gifts. Usually salon poetry treated trivial topics--"From Mme de B*** to Mme de Laborde on sending her an eggcup," for example, or "To Mme *** on a butterfly that she caught."¹⁶² Salon poetry,

¹⁶² Lilti (2005), p. 159.

Lilti observes, “consisted of amiable nothings and fleeting but graceful images of the ‘futility’ of the age.”¹⁶³

As in the salons, poetry printed in the *Journal des Dames* was meant to flatter, amuse, celebrate, and accompany gifts. In stark contrast to the salons, however, the *Journal’s* poetry generally treated the topic of bourgeois virtue. It flatters a woman’s prudence, wisdom, good mothering, or natural beauty; the worldly occasions it celebrates are marriages; instead of egg cups, poems accompany books of philosophy.

Poems celebrating marriage are always addressed to new couples of rank, but they never focus on class. Also absent are any indications that a motive other than genuine love brought a couple together. Instead, these ubiquitous odes to Hymen focus on the domestic bliss and love that the couple will continue to share as their virtuous passion mellows gradually into life-long respect. *Maisonneuve* reprints a poem by Voltaire that begins with a common sentiment:

Que l’hymen et l’amour se rassemblent pour vous:
Soyez encore amant, en devenant époux.¹⁶⁴

An anonymous poem makes an egalitarian observation:

L’amour égale sous sa loi,
La Bergere ainsi que le Roi.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Lilti (2005), p. 159.

¹⁶⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juillet, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (13), p. 99.

¹⁶⁵ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juillet, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (13), p. 102.

More generally, love and admiration are portrayed as outcomes of women's personal virtue and even sometimes her intellectual talents. The *Épître à Mme***, a generic poem typical of the fare commonly found in the *Journal des Dames*, links a woman's virtuous qualities to genuine love. It concludes:

J'aime en vous votre caractère,
Vos traits, votre esprit, votre ton,
Jugez vous-même, je vous prie...
Et sans cette coquetterie,
Si je n'avois pas bien raison
De vous aimer toute ma vie.¹⁶⁶

Poetry flatters women's virtue. *A Monsieur le Prévôt des Marchands*, decries false coquetterie and extols genuine virtue—a common theme:

Où le cœur, peu d'intelligence,
Accepte des baisers rendus en grimaçant
D'ennuyeux compliments, de fades politesses,
Masquent la haine et la sincérité...
Il suffit d'être véridique...
Ne doit rien à son rang, et tout à ses vertus.¹⁶⁷

Note that the poem is addressed to a merchant, is decidedly anti-aristocratic, and it extols familial virtue and sincerity while at the same time equating the nobility with insincerity.

One poet provides a verse to accompany a portrait, privileging the importance of her virtue over her outer beauty:

¹⁶⁶ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de decembre, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (14), p. 7.

¹⁶⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1763, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (9), p. 65.

Elle eut plus d'attraits en partage,
Que le pinceau n'en a rendu
Et dans le cœur plus de vertu,
Que de beautés sur son visage.¹⁶⁸

And proving that the praise of women's minds and virtue can be every bit as hyperbolic as the odes inspired in the salons, one author, probably Montanclos herself, writes in one poem:

Vos vers que l'on croit sans *défaut*
De traits pétillans étincellent;
Mais après tout, ils ne décelent
Que l'esprit dont brilla Sapho.

adding later:

Vous, femme? ô le plaisant projet!
Vous voulez vivre avec les sages!
Vous serez seule à leur banquet.¹⁶⁹

Beaumer's poem, *Les Caprices de la Fortune*, drives home a clear-as-day moral of a princess, Hippolite, whose virtue nevertheless ends in tragedy:

Heureux le mortel assez magnanime
pour envisager avec indifférence
les richesses et les honneurs!
L'élévation, presque toujours funeste
à ceux qui la désirent,
l'est quelquefois à ceux même
qui la méritent le plus.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1764, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (11), p. 116.

¹⁶⁹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32), pp. 16-17.

¹⁷⁰ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de avril, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (2), p. 35.

Poems teach virtue, especially to the young. A poem addressed to a young woman leaving for the city warns the woman against throwing overboard Colin, her country boyfriend, for a cool urban type. There is more than a hint of Rousseauian distrust of civilization:

“Des bijoux, des pompons, des nœuds, des diamans:
Colin t’offroit des fleurs, présens de la Nature.”¹⁷¹

Poetry is also used to praise women of letters and publicize their past and present intellectual accomplishments. A short *Madrigal à Mme la Comtesse Turpin* praises her beauty and sagesse. A poem praises Mlle Berman for winning the Academie de Nancy’s 1662 prize in literature; it extols her beautiful laurels and her wisdom.¹⁷² Another poem makes a straightforward argument for more education for women since, like men, they have souls and want to be useful:

“Pour réparation, va sans délais l’instruire,
Que je suis assez fol, assez hardi pour dire,
qu’on n’a pas jusqu’ici, connu l’utilité.”¹⁷³

Poetry extols education and Enlightenment. One poem praises Voltaire, who raises Newton to new heights and revives Democritus and Plato.¹⁷⁴ The reviewer takes

¹⁷¹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1763, Mme de Maison neuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 35.

¹⁷² *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1762, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (5).

¹⁷³ *Médisances, Justifiée, Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maison neuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 40.

¹⁷⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1762, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (5), p. 46.

this poem as an occasion to warn the king of the dangers of fanaticism.¹⁷⁵ Far from distracting from instruction, the *Journal* promotes the notion that poetry facilitates Enlightenment. Severe reason must be softened by love, after all:

La raison et l'amour, tous deux
m'accabloient de peines sans nombre;
D'argus l'une avoit les cent yeux,
L'autre un bandeau toujours plus sombre,
Je demandois avec transport
Que le Ciel m'ôtât ma tendresse,
Ou que son pouvoir mît d'accord
Et mes plaisirs et ma sagesse.
Le ciel m'exauce dans ce jour;
Il donne à la raison sévère
Le bandeau du charmant Amour,
Qui voit à son tour la lumière.¹⁷⁶

Another poem praising la Fontaine supports the notion that truth ought to be married to charms:

La morale a besoin, pour être bien reçue
du masque de la fable et du charme des vers;
la vérité plaît moins, quand elle est toute nue,
et c'est la seule vierge en ce vaste univers
qu'on aime à voir un peu vêtue.
Si Minerve même ici-bas

venoit enseigner la sagesse,
il faudroit bien que la déesse

à son profond savoir joignît quelques appas:
le genre human est sourd, quan on ne lui plaît pas.
Pour nous éclairer tous, sans offenser personne,
la savante Minerve a pris vos traits charmans:

¹⁷⁵ “[L]e spectre [du fanatisme] lui a fait entendre que le Roi avoit tout craindre des restes de la Ligue, du faux zèle et du Fanaticisme...” p. 52.

¹⁷⁶ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1762, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (5).

en vous voyant, je le soupçonne;
j'en suis sûr, quand je vous entends.¹⁷⁷

While the *Journal des Dames* is replete with poetry, the poems are a very long way from celebrating egg cups and butterflies. They praise genuine love and eschew coquetterie. The ideal women they extol are beautiful but always natural and intelligent. Poems praise knowledge, education, and, above all, virtue. Finally, poetry is justified because it promotes virtue, social utility, and the socialization of knowledge. Emulating the salons, the *Journal* converted poetry into a vehicle for bourgeois virtue.

Correspondence

Despite the fact that most correspondence was written by men, correspondence was nevertheless associated with well-off women.¹⁷⁸ Letter-writing desks and materials were luxury goods, and only an elite possessed the education and leisure to write letters. Though the association between aristocratic French women and correspondence went back at least 200 years, the eighteenth century template for this association was established by Mme Sévigné (d. 1696), whose correspondence, first published in 1725, was immensely popular. She was regarded as France's most talented epistolarian.¹⁷⁹ In

¹⁷⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de fevrier, 1768, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (28), pp. 1-2.

¹⁷⁸ Fritz Nies, "Un Genre féminin?" *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* (1978): 994-1005.

¹⁷⁹ Janet Gurkin Altman, "Women's Letters in the Public Sphere," in *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France*, eds. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Dena Goodman, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995, pp. 105.

Louis Philipon de la Medeleine's 1761 letter manual, he suggests three main models for emulation: Mme de Maintenon, Mme de Sévigné, and Voltaire. When it came to writing letters, women were authorities.

Letter-writing was also a private, individual activity. As Dena Goodman has argued, the fact that women had the private space to write meant that women could be authors of their own experience.¹⁸⁰ This was one way women could exercise autonomy in a patriarchal world, and this private space to think and write was crucial for the development of gender consciousness.

In the salon world, correspondence was a way of sending and receiving news, and of maintaining one's relevance—one had to make sure that one was not forgotten. Correspondence between friends relayed gossip. Correspondence between *salonnières* and monarchs could bolster the former's reputation and be a medium for disseminating a favorable impression of the latter.

In addition, as Janet Gurkin Altman argues in her "Women's Letters in the Public Sphere," letter manuals from the 1760's until the Revolution indicate that the press, by printing aristocratic correspondence, symbolically opened the Old Regime to public

¹⁸⁰ Dena Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2009.

scrutiny.¹⁸¹ Public scrutiny of correspondence reflected a desire for a more participatory republic that included women as well as men.¹⁸²

I argue that the *Journal des Dames*, by printing correspondence, was reprinting or mimicking an aristocratic form, but, by emphasizing morality, education, and an aversion to frivolity and luxury, it was doing so in service to the bourgeois values of the public sphere. Many of its “letters,” whether real or contrived, are just thinly veiled mechanisms for delivering a pedantic lesson to young women about the importance of choosing *utilité* over *frivolité*. Letters often underscore the ever-present theme that beauty is an inconstant foundation for one’s fortunes or happiness, and that genuine domestic bliss is founded on virtue and (some) education: “c’est le seul moyen de satisfaire un mari: la beauté passe et la vertu reste.”¹⁸³ In another letter, a young woman describes how vain and self-centered she once was: “L’amour-propre a dirigé mes actions.”¹⁸⁴ She describes her path to virtue as a cautionary tale so that it might prove a useful lesson to women. Her melodramatic,

¹⁸¹ Janet Gurkin Altman, “Women’s Letters in the Public Sphere,” in *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France*, eds. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Dena Goodman, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995, p. 110.

¹⁸² Altman (1995), p. 115.

¹⁸³ “*Lettre d’une Dame de Dieppe, à Madame de Beaumer*” *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de décembre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), p. 257. For more on this theme, see also the *Lettre de Mme de Maisonneuve, à Mme de****, *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 16; also *Lettre à Madame de ****, *Sur un Ouvrage intitulé le vrai Philosophe*, p. 108.

¹⁸⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de février, 1775, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque François Mitterand, Z-24526-24537, janvier-mars, p. 214.

self-pitying lamentations of her wayward past seem calculated to scare young women into embracing virtue. “Que les femmes me lisent, qu’elles me méprisent; mais qu’elles évitent mon sort.”¹⁸⁵

Correspondence also provided an example of how women could be active participants in the Republic of Letters, and it indirectly included readers in that more exclusive world. Maisonneuve reprints a young woman’s letter to Voltaire in which she includes a few of her own literary works for his perusal:

“Heureusement je rime sans prétention, et mes ouvrages restent dans mon portefeuille. S’ils en sortent aujourd’hui, c’est parce qu’il y a long-tems que je desirois d’écrire à *l’homme de France* que je lis avec le plus de plaisir, et que je me suis imaginée que quelques pièces de vers serviroient de passeport à ma lettre.”¹⁸⁶

Lest anyone accuse her of immodesty or intellectual pretension, she adds, “Je n’ai point eu d’autres motifs, monsieur.”¹⁸⁷ The private nature of her personal correspondence is a testimony to her modesty.

Indeed, one important function of correspondence is that, in theory, it could inoculate a woman against accusations of *amour propre*. If a letter did end up published, it was not the writer’s doing. Thus one woman justifies herself, “J’en ai beaucoup à vous dire, Madame, mais je n’ai point d’amour propre; et si ma lettre vous ennuie, je vous

¹⁸⁵ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de fevrier, 1775, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque François Mitterand, Z-24526-24537, janvier-mars, p. 224.

¹⁸⁶ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de avril, 1768, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (29), pp. 2-3.

¹⁸⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de avril, 1768, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (29), pp. 2-3.

permets de la brûler pour en faire un exemple.”¹⁸⁸ Beaumer prints a letter from the Princess Gallitzin that includes the Princess’s translation of *The Isle of Mephisto*. Lest anyone accuse her of vainly promoting her own intellect, however, the Princess explains that she produced the translation “sans aucun dessein de la rendre publique; je sens très-bien qu’elle n’a que le prix que vous avez eu la bonté de lui prêter.”¹⁸⁹ A reader might well question the disinterestedness of someone who sends her work to the editor of a journal, but the frame of private correspondence at least provides a veneer of humility.

Finally, some letters are interesting just for the fact that they demonstrate how women have satisfying intellectual discussion among themselves. The *Lettre de Mme la Fresle de Weuiglen à Mme de Desmoutiers*, is a conversation among friends about the Italian theater.¹⁹⁰ Letters publicize women’s intelligence and cultivated tastes, and they exemplify to readers a model of intellectual sociability. In a letter to the Princess Gallitzin, the *editrice* Beaumer praises Catherine the Great as “votre auguste Souveraine,”¹⁹¹ and she includes a letter that Voltaire had written to d’Alembert that also

¹⁸⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de avril, 1775, Mme de Montanclos, Bibliothèque François Mitterand, Z-24526-24537, avril-juin, p. 101.

¹⁸⁹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1763, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (9), p. 211.

¹⁹⁰ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de fevrier, 1763, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (9).

¹⁹¹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1763, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (9), p. 213.

praised Catherine.¹⁹² In this letter, Beaumer give readers an example of how to participate in the Republic of Letters; she associates herself and the *Journal* with royalty and Enlightenment figures; and, to top it off, Voltaire’s praise of Catherine is an authoritative endorsement of a woman’s ability. Because it is (ostensibly anyway) a private letter, the praise can be seen as more genuine and avoids the accusation of *amour-propre*.

In general, the *Journal des Dames* printed correspondence in order to teach and praise virtue. Correspondence also associated the *Journal* with important figures, and it demonstrated that women’s conversations with each other—on topics ranging from virtue to education to theater and politics—were sufficiently intellectual and important enough to merit reprinting. Women had an intellectual life all their own.

Drama

Drama had been an important part of salon culture. Salon attendees would dress up and entertain themselves with their own amateur theater productions.¹⁹³ Every issue of the *Journal des Dames* includes at least one excerpt of a play, usually accompanied by the editor’s own comments about the play.

The dramas reprinted for readers tend to have obvious morals. They often involve smart, virtuous, young women protagonists. Maisonneuve describes a typical ingenue: “une espece de Philosophe femelle de trente-six à trente-sept ans, qui croit déjà qu’il

¹⁹² *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1763, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (9), p. 215.

¹⁹³ Landes (1988), p. 25.

n'est plus permis d'aimer à son âge...une femme encore aimable, qui ne parle que morale et vertu...”¹⁹⁴

The moral value of the theater was of particular interest just as the first volumes of the *Journal* were going to press: Rousseau had just published his *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theater*, in which he argued that the theater is not appropriate for a moral society, and it only encouraged *amour propre*. In his letter, Rousseau makes clear that women, ideally, are so modest so as to be silent. He also argues that men speaking *about* women, even to praise them, damages women's modesty. If theater did exist, it should be only for men; women in public only corrupt republican virtue.

The women of the *Journal des Dames* do not warm to Rousseau's perspective on the theater. Instead, they relentlessly continue their rehabilitative calling, turning drama's purpose to rendering moral themes interesting. Maisonneuve reviews one play that treats anglomania and the fashion for calling oneself a Philosophe: “Comme ce goût pour la philosophie tient quelquefois à l'amour de la vertu, l'Auteur a eu raison de peindre son Eraste sous des traits qui n'ont rien d'odieux.”¹⁹⁵

Moral themes were not enough to elicit a positive review, however. Maisonneuve harshly reviews an English patriotic play, concluding that, for all its enthusiasm for

¹⁹⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de Aout, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (13), p. 99.

¹⁹⁵ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (14), pp. 112-113.

liberty, it comes across as “peut-être plus mâles et plus hardies que dans les nôtres” and, what with its meandering plot, “on ne supporterait pas sur notre théâtre.”¹⁹⁶

Oftentimes plays are set in exotic locales, and sometimes they have bourgeois settings. The first theater piece that is excerpted and reprinted in the *Journal des Dames* is from Diderot’s mildly successful play, *Le Père de famille*, which, unusually for the time, celebrated domestic attachment in the context of the bourgeois nuclear family. Diderot’s aesthetic philosophy emphasized the true representation of emotion and verisimilitude.

Plays tend not to have explicitly feminist themes, but *Ouillaume Tell* does.

Maisonneuve reprints the monologue of Tell’s wife, Cléosé:

Que les femmes ailleurs dans l’état soient sans voix,
qu’ailleurs leur ascendant fasse taire les loix;
où les mœurs ne sont rien, il n’est rien qui suprenne:
mais chacune de nous est ici citoyenne;
chacune toujours libre, et partageant vos droits;
en cultivant ses champs, s’occupe de ses loix,
et si dans vos conseils, si dans vos assemblées,
vos femmes avec vous ne sont point appelées...
...Tu parles de tyrans: que nous importe à nous
d’être esclaves par eux ou de l’être par vous?¹⁹⁷

Finally, in reviewing plays, *editrices* demonstrated their skill and cultural authority. Maisonneuve offers critiques for both the Comédie Française and the Comédie Italienne. Particularly funny is her critique of the Italians: “Cela a causé un ennui au

¹⁹⁶ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois d’avril, 1766, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (15), p. 109.

¹⁹⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, 1767, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (19), pp. 84-85.

Grimm pointed out the impossibility of the Baron d'Holbach's funny anecdote; d'Holbach became furious.¹⁹⁹

In the *Journal des Dames*, fiction certainly entertains, and it shows off the skill of the (often woman) author, but, truth is important; genuine emotion and realistic characters are the mark of a skilled author. Novels were suspect, yet instead of eschewing novel-reading as a morally pernicious pastime, the *Journal* aims to rehabilitate novels so that they no longer represent a frivolous genre.

Stories almost always convey an unambiguous moral or pedantic purpose. One story features a protagonist who prays constantly for the poor; the reader learns to eschew luxury.²⁰⁰ In another story, *La Petite Maison, Imprimée je ne sais pas où dans un coin du monde*, the reader learns the importance of reputation and honor over status and wealth, and mothers learn that their true legacy is passing on virtue to their children.²⁰¹ Maisonneuve criticizes the editor of a collection of stories by pointing out the dearth of moral considerations: “Enfin il n’y a presque jamais de but moral, et quoique l’Auteur

¹⁹⁹ Lilti (2005), p. 165. At d'Holbach's funeral, Grimm eulogized d'Holbach thus: “he loved news as a child loves toys...he put very little choice into it: good or bad, false or true...there was even nothing that he was not ready to believe...He even took pleasure in having people recount in the smallest detail an event all of whose circumstances demonstrated its falsity.”

²⁰⁰ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (2).

²⁰¹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1762, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (5).

puisse dire, nous ne croyons pas que la nécessité de la morale dans les Contes ne soit qu'une affaire de mode."²⁰²

In one mawkish narrative, *La Paysanne Philosophe*, Beaumer writes from the perspective of Flore, a poor peasant girl with a penchant for philosophizing. Orphaned, she is taken in by a Comtesse and her early hardship flowers into a happy, scientific disposition. She seeks "le désir de me rendre utile," and "mériter l'estime générale" and she avoids boredom and laziness.²⁰³ This portrait evidently pleases Beaumer, who interjects that "la modestie et la timidité ne font qu'ajouter un nouveau prix à ses talents décidés."²⁰⁴ The story, mostly devoid of conflict or plot devices, is really a character study in female virtue. What is more, the writing style corresponds to the portrait of this simple, happy, and useful woman. Beaumer explains,

"il y regne une simplicité qui attache; peut-être désireroit-on que le style fût plus correct, plus élevé, qu'il y eût plus de vraisemblance; moins d'épisodes et de trivialités, ou du moins que les épisodes fussent plus liées au sujet, et qu'on eut supprimé les trois quarts du dernier volume..."²⁰⁵

²⁰² *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (14), p. 65.

²⁰³ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1762, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (5), p. 8.

²⁰⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1762, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (5), p. 8-9.

²⁰⁵ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1762, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (5), pp. 31.

Some fictional pieces have explicitly feminist themes. In an imagined conversation between two friends,²⁰⁶ Victoire and Sophie debate women's education while embroidering. Sophie observes that Victoire's classes in music, dancing, and clavecin are totally useless and impart very limited skills to women. It is all fine and good to hear someone sing for half an hour or so, but what then? Sophie goes on to argue, "Si nous pouvons apprendre davantage et si cela est utile, pourquoi ne le pas faire? Sommes-nous différentes de nos freres...?"²⁰⁷ In all times, she notes, there have been successful women in the sciences. If women's educations prepared them to do more than just please others, they would regularly excel in the sciences. When Victoire frets that women are already too prideful, Sophie argues that knowing science is the best means of humility, since it instructs us as to the limits of our knowledge. Education can stave off the boredom that comes from being cloistered in one's home all day. Finally, Sophie says that she wants to be educated so as to better care for her children.²⁰⁸ Predictably, Victoire ends up completely convinced of the need for a more useful education.

Such a dialogue could have easily lent itself to an essay or a treatise, but the effect of *Maisonneuve's* fiction is to lend this (admittedly pedantic) argument a bit of entertainment value. Moreover, couching a suggestion for a total overhaul of women's

²⁰⁶ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10).

²⁰⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 25.

²⁰⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), pp. 31-32.

education in the polite, non-threatening milieu of cousins embroidering softens its radical flavor. Maintaining the integrity of a familiar social ontology can make an epistemic break more bearable.

On the other hand, not every subject required a narrative form. Montanclos reviews a novel by a M. Blondel, “Architecte du Roi,” who, happily, portrays women as men’s intellectual equals and identifies patriarchal prejudice as the obstacle to women’s advancement.²⁰⁹ She praises his inclination to emphasize women’s artistic accomplishments, and he correctly identifies lack of education and prejudice as the obstacles to women’s further accomplishments in the arts.²¹⁰ Regretfully, however, Montanclos is compelled to give the novel a mixed review: “Nous sommes fâchées de ne pouvoir pas en porter un jugement plus favorable. Mais il ne nous est pas permis de rendre un compte infidèle de ce que nous avons senti en le lisant.”²¹¹ Montanclos’s commitment to impartiality is her highest editorial duty. Ultimately, she deems his novel to be insufficiently inspiring and unsuited to the form of a novel. While the *Journal* was clear about its commitment to promoting women, editors took exception to the notion that

²⁰⁹ *L’Homme du Monde, Éclairé par les Arts, Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32).

²¹⁰ *L’Homme du Monde, Éclairé par les Arts, Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32), p. 130-131.

²¹¹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (13), p. 136.

anything that praised women would be given a free pass. Criticizing the novel affords Montanclos the opportunity to demonstrate her virtuously impartial mind.

Fiction could also be a window through which women could glimpse exclusively masculine milieus and read their (ostensibly) philosophical conversation. A tale by a M D'Arnaud describes three men at a café arguing about Bacon, Locke, and Newton. Unfortunately for the reader, a fourth man, blowing smoke, claims to be a still greater thinker, and proceeds to outline his philosophy for 43 pages.²¹²

Fiction also facilitated feminist criticism. A common trope is the “oriental tale”: tales set in “exotic” locales like India or Persia, and which usually celebrate virtue and love. These settings, however, could also present opportunities for a critique of European culture. In *Nahami, Anecdote Turque*, the author begins by explaining that the philosophes have said that customs and laws depend on climate,

“mais ils ont oublié de nous expliquer, si la nature du cœur humain dépendoit aussi; car si ses penchants se rencontroient à peu près les mêmes par-tout, il seroit peut-être embarrassant de les concilier avec tant de coutumes et de vertus différents. Il y a, par exemple, en Turquie, beaucoup de femmes dont l'intelligence est si bornée, qu'on ne sauroit leur faire entendre le grand principe, que *la Polygamie n'est qu'une affaire de calcul.*”²¹³

In another episode, a Portuguese lady speaking with the king of Portugal asks if her husband would be pardoned if he found her committing adultery and murdered her. The king replied that her husband would indeed be pardoned. In that case, the lady

²¹² *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (13).

²¹³ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (14), p. 7.

continued, you have to pardon me for having surprised my husband in an adulterous affair and having murdered him and his lover. “Je vous demande, sire, le même pardon que vous n’eussiez pas refusé à mon mari, si j’eusse été convaincue du même crime.”²¹⁴ To be sure, this story is a bit morbid, but it also highlights the need for just and equitable laws.

Much of the *Journal des Dames* is comprised of excerpts from published fiction, theater pieces, and fictional stories from contributors. Angus Martin’s survey showed that 11.1% of the *Journal* was devoted to prose narratives and 11.9% to reviews of novels and short stories. These tended to be non-controversial elements. Martin argues that “the *Journal*’s fiction can be considered outside this polemical framework. It played its role as a largely noncontroversial element in the content, being part of the specifically ‘feminine’ camouflage, when camouflage was needed.”²¹⁵ Similarly, Nina Gelbart has argued that these more anodyne contributions were meant to disguise the *Journal des Dames*’s more radical character.

But were women really concealing their more radical agenda? Even if the fiction in the *Journal des Dames* does not often articulate radical ideas, it is still a manifestation of women’s cultural authority to read and pass judgment (and as we will see, often very harsh judgment!) on literature. Gelbart and Martin perceive the presence of fiction as softening the *Journal*’s radical message, but I think this misses the fact that women

²¹⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1766, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (17), p. 19.

²¹⁵ Angus Martin (1991), p. 244.

publishing their judgments about literature—including their unambiguous panning of works—was a novel and successful translation of the *salonnière*'s power into the public printed sphere.

Praise and flattery

Flattery was the social glue of the salons. It was “inscribed within a reciprocal system of compliments in which the demands of civility come to the aid of both parties’ *amour propre*. Praise...nourished sociability... The salons were like mutual admiration societies.”²¹⁶ Flattery was not cherished because it was sincere but rather because it perpetuated the social hierarchy and connections of patronage that reigned in the salons. Flattery was a system by which everyone massaged everyone else’s *amour propre*.

Bourgeois virtue, on the other hand, replaced *amour propre* with authenticity and genuine love. Envious social comparison was replaced by the common good. Compliments and flattery were best when they were sincere. The objects of praise were behaviors that conformed to bourgeois virtue: modesty, selflessness, education, and patriotism.

True virtue was a classless phenomenon. Montanlos includes a short piece about a woman poet who, not being of high status, is praised for having done good work even while being in humble circumstances, concluding, “*La Couronne est pour les talents, et*

²¹⁶ Lilti (2005), p. 146.

non pour la richesse.”²¹⁷ Maisonneuve’s *Éloge Sommaire de Marie Millet* emphasizes that “la vertu se trouve dans tous les états. Je pense que chez les filles du commun, c’est le cœur qui est vertueux; que dans les personnes d’un haut rang, c’est l’esprit qui aide à triompher du cœur et qui le maintient dans les bornes du devoir.”²¹⁸

By far, the most common function of praise and flattery in the *Journal* is to bring attention to women’s accomplishments and abilities. *Editrices* constantly reiterated the critique that women had too-long been denied recognition because of gender prejudice, and they all considered the *Journal des Dames* to be a vehicle for publicizing and honoring women’s accomplishments in order to demonstrate women’s worth, reason, and virtue. The first woman editor, Beaumer, reports having been inspired to this end by *Les Vies des Femmes Illustres de France*.²¹⁹ She argues that men are loathe to give women their due; they are too attached to their own engrained sense of superiority. Writes Beaumer, “ce sera les hommes qui veulent nous imposer silence, qui trouvent à redire de ce que nous exaltons les femmes; ils les aiment, mais ils ne veulent pas au’elles puissent

²¹⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1775, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque François Mitterand, Z-24526-24537, janvier-mars, p. 41.

²¹⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 113.

²¹⁹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1763, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (9), p. 82. Aublet de Maubuy, *Les Vies des Femmes Illustres de la France*, 3 vols., Paris, 1762.

les éгалer dans les Arts... ils sont nos maîtres, c'est leur faire une injure que de dire que nous sommes aussi habiles qu'eux."²²⁰

Montanclos's prospectus clarifies that "le but particulier de ce Journal est de faire connoître les vertus, l'esprit et les talens du Sexe auquel il est consacré. Ce n'est pas moi qui veux briller; mais c'est moi, je l'avoue, qui veux forcer les hommes à rendre aux femmes la justice qu'ils leur refusent comme à plaisir. Qu'importe à notre gloire, qu'ils adorent les charmes que la nature nous a donnés, s'il veulent dénigrer les vertus ou les talens que le Ciel nous a départis. Je veux faire connoître, s'il m'est possible, que nous pouvons tout savoir, parce que notre esprit est ardent et flexible; et que nous pouvons faire tout le bien dont l'humanité est capable, parce que notre ame nous y porte; et je me promets vien dès-à-présent de no point tarir sur les preuves."²²¹

The *Journal*, then, was constantly advancing examples of educated, accomplished, and virtuous bourgeois women. As such, volumes dedicated to women were advertised, reviewed, and praised. Maisonneuve affirms the *Journal*'s central concern with the history of women, since it is, she says, "aussi utile qu'intéressante."²²²

Editrices often had a recurring section dedicated to praise of contemporary women's recent accomplishments: women who had recently been admitted to this or

²²⁰ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1762, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (5), p. 291.

²²¹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32), pp. 8-9.

²²² *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 97.

that Academy, whose paintings or sculptures had recently been exhibited, who were talented actors or singers, whose books had been published or reprinted, etc. Beaumer argues that publicizing the accomplishments of women inspires virtue in the young: “Si les femmes qui ont des talens distingués et les artistes ne nous font pas connoître leurs productions, comment pouvons-nous les exposer sous les yeux de la jeunesse, pour exciter leur émulation, décider leur goût pour les Science et les Arts, et les éloigner pour jamais des frivolités du siècle que la satire nous attribue...”²²³

While the *editrices* argued that women could be as talented and virtuous as men, Princen and Maisonneuve make provision for sexual difference. While men are constantly praised, Princen says,

“Rarement les Femmes ont ce privilege: Et pourquoi n’en jouiroient-elles pas? leurs vertus, pour être, si l’on veut, moins éclatantes, ne sont-elles pas également dignes d’admiration? une vie simple et modeste, subordonnée aux devoirs de leur état, et marquée par des occupations tranquilles, mais nécessaires au bonheur de la Société, ne vaut-elle pas celle d’un Guerrier, d’un Politique, d’un Savant, n’est-elle pas même plus touchante et plus analogues aux sentimens de la nature?”²²⁴

Maisonneuve complains that gendered prejudice has prevented “une infinité d’autres productions pleines d’aisance et de délicatesse: car c’est là le caractere disinctif des Ouvrages des femmes.”²²⁵ These *editrices* resisted the logic that equated women’s apparently gender-specific productions with inferiority.

²²³ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1762, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (5), pp. 290-291.

²²⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de fevrier, 1774, Mme la Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (30), pp. 219-220.

²²⁵ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (14), p. 10.

It is interesting to note that the women of the *Journal des Dames* evidently felt empowered by gender difference, and they sought to portray gender difference as having positive consequences for society. Some scholars seek to downplay the extent to which the women of the *Journal* embraced gender difference. Nina Gelbart Ratner writes, for example, that “Women were not free, and the literature meant for them served to reinforce their subordinate position by arguing that their charm lay specifically in their difference, their otherness, which automatically precluded equality.”²²⁶ But nowhere does the *Journal* argue that gender difference *automatically* precludes equality. In fact, the *Journal* consistently portrays gender difference as a positive. Women are perceived as having the special ability to soften and charm. The *editrices* were committed to the view that the responsibilities and experience that came from being a wife and a mother were worthy of respect, and that these roles were just as important as any roles men might have. “Mais, nous autres femmes, ne jouons-nous pas un assez grand rôle dans la société?”²²⁷ asks the one contributor, adding later, “Etre citoyenne, épouse, mere tendre, amie vraie, fille respectueuse et sensible, telle est notre frivolité.”²²⁸ Even so, gender difference did not mean that everything about men and women was different: women had as much intellectual potential as men and could excel in the same domains.

²²⁶ Gelbart Rattner (1987), p. 8.

²²⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de fevrier, 1774, Mme la Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (30), p. 178.

²²⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de fevrier, 1774, Mme la Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (30), p. 186.

An important function of praise and flattery in the *Journal* is to demonstrate through example that women's potential equaled men's. One way it does this was by correcting the gender bias of historians who, excluding women from history, allow men to keep all the glory for themselves: "La plupart des femmes qui ont cultivé les Lettres, n'ont-elles pas éprouvé le même fort? Les hommes sont devenus les dispensateurs de la célébrité, et ils sont convenus de la garder pour eux."²²⁹ The *editrices* see the *Journal* as a vehicle for righting historical wrongs by giving women the credit they have always deserved. "C'est à une femme à la venger, autant au'il est possible, des injustices de l'autre sexe," writes Maisonneuve.²³⁰ Contributors agreed. One woman writes to the *Journal* to "demander justice" regarding a tragedy. She explains that a woman named Jeanne Laisné saved a whole town and never got any credit for it because she was a woman.²³¹ "Vous aviez raison de dire dans l'éloge d'une femme de Lettre, que les hommes en faisant l'histoire, s'étoient chargés de dispenser la célébrité, et qu'ils l'avoient gardée toute pour eux. Il y a trois cents ans qu'un simple Bourgeoise de Beauvais sauva la ville contre une armée de cent mille hommes. Si cette action éclatante

²²⁹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (14), p. 9.

²³⁰ ²³⁰ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (14), p. 10.

²³¹ "Lettre d'une Citoyenne de Beauvais à Mme de Maisonneuve," *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de février, 1766, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (15). This letter is printed in the *Journal des Dames* the same year as a play was published about the episode. See M. Araignon, *Le Siège de Beauvais, ou Jeanne Laisné, Tragédie en Cinq Actes*, Paris: Michel Lambert, 1766.

avoit été faite par un homme, on auroit gravé son nom sur tous les monumens, et les Historiens semblent conjurés pour faire oublier celui de notre Héroïne.”²³²

It was important to correct the historical record because, all too often, men marshall history as proof of their monopoly on talent. “Enfin, après s’être emparés des honneurs et de la liberté, ils se sont avisés de faire accroire à l’Univers que des talents brillants n’étoient pas convenables à des femmes vertueuses, et que la renommée n’étoit pas faire pour elles.”²³³ When history testifies only to men’s talents, it implies that there is nothing to gain by developing women’s talents, and the end result is more gendered prejudice and a great loss to society, since the works women would have created never come to be.²³⁴

When individual women received lavish praise, it was not to demonstrate their exceptionality, but rather to suggest that women possessed this capacity as much as men did. Also, these individuals served as examples for young women to emulate. Mme de Puisieux was often singled out for praise because she embodied the reasonable and virtuous image of women that the *Journal* sought to promote. Writes Beaumer, “elle fait

²³² “Lettre d’une Citoyenne de Beauvais à Mme de Maisonneuve,” *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de février, 1766, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (15), p. 85.

²³³ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (14), p. 9.

²³⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (14), p. 10.

voir combien une Femme est exposée aux illusions de la vanité, que le trone de l'Amour-propre et de l'Envie est dans le cœur fémelle.”²³⁵

Also a heroine of the *Journal* was Mme du Boccage, whose salon collapsed after having earned a literary reputation. Maisonneuve describes Mme du Boccage as “une femme faite pour séduire par son esprit, sa grace et sa beauté, a résisté à la séduction d’un sexe corrupteur, aux attraits des plaisirs et aux charmes de la mollesse, pour s’occuper de lectures utiles, et pour enrichir la Littérature de ses productions, l’étonnement doit suivre le plaisir.”²³⁶ Mme du Boccage, “loin d’enfanter des Ouvrages aimables et frivoles, dont ce siecle fait tant de cas, et auxquels notre sexe semble condamné, cette nouvelle Muse dévorée de l’amour de la gloire, et enflammée d’une noble émulation, s’est élancée, d’un vol hardi, sur les ailes de Milton, et a osé disputer aux Voltaires le sceptre de la Poésie épique; c’est alors que notre sexe, que les hommes regardent si injustement, comme foible et timide, sentira cette noble fierté, cet orgueil utile qui rend presque toujours capable de grandes choses.”²³⁷ The epigraph is appropriate: “*Forma Venus, arte Minerva.*”²³⁸ This repeated praise is all the more significant considering that Mme du

²³⁵ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), p. 55.

²³⁶ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1764, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (11), p. 145.

²³⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1764, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (11), pp. 45-46.

²³⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1764, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (11), p. 47.

Boccage had been ridiculed by Voltaire and Mme de Genlis's salon and deserted by Marmontel, among others, on account of her accomplishments.²³⁹

Mme Riccoboni is also frequently praised. Maisonneuve writes that, "Mme Riccoboni est une des personnes des notre siecle qui a le mieux réussi dans le genre qu'elle a choisi, et qu'il y a aujourd'hui très-peu d'hommes en état d'entrer en concurrence avec elle."²⁴⁰ About Riccoboni's *Lettres d'Adélaïde de Dammartin*, the reviewer raves that, "Ce Roman est un des plus agréables qu l'on nous aît donnés depuis longtems. Il est écrit avec beaucoup de legereté et d'élégance; et dès qu'on en a commencé la lecture, on ne peut la quitter...on y rencontre souvent de ces traits ingénieux, de ces tournures vives et naturelles, qui semblent distinguer particulièrement le style des femmes."²⁴¹ Riccoboni could compete with the most talented of men even as she exhibited a "style des femmes."

Not just any praise of a woman would do. The *editrices* revered women who proved that women could be just as good as men; they disdained the pandering that judged women according to different, inferior criteria. To be valuable, praise had to be genuine. Montanclos reviews a work that catalogues the lives of women, praising the first

²³⁹ Lilti (2005), p. 48.

²⁴⁰ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juillet, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (13), p. 90.

²⁴¹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1767, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (18), p. 40.

volume “que nous avons cru *intéressant et glorieux pour notre sexe*.”²⁴² The third volume, however, left her disappointed, since all she found there were a bunch of nobodies: “le plus grand nombre est obscur, et mérite de l’être.”²⁴³ Does *Hortense Stribillini* deserve a place among the Sapphos and the Châtelets of the world?²⁴⁴

Montanclos, in her critique, includes a very long list of women who are included in the volume but ought not to be. This could be a genuine complaint, but it could also be a way of obliquely advertising the sheer number of women who have made literary contributions while simultaneously advertising her own high standards. Reviewing the entry on Marie de Gournay, (here spelled “Gournai”), the *fille d’alliance* of Michel de Montaigne, Montanclos critiques Gournay, saying, “le respect qu’elle avoit pour lui l’empêcha d’associer ses pensées à celles du sage: grande leçon pour notre siècle, qui n’en a guères profité!”²⁴⁵ This observation is also an oblique compliment, because her critique is that Gournay’s excessive deference to her father-figure prevented her from an accurate estimation of her own genius.

²⁴² *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de decembre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32), p. 145.

²⁴³ p. 146. Montanclos was just as unimpressed with Volume IV, which she again accuses of being inflated with inferior women. *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de decembre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32).

²⁴⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de decembre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32), p. 146.

²⁴⁵ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32), p. 150.

Frequently praised were those women who served as the most incontrovertible rebuttals to patriarchal prejudice, namely, queens. Praise of queens not only functioned as a particularly glamorous way to promote bourgeois virtues like prudence, chastity, and education, but it also provided a venue for promoting broader and bolder Enlightenment sentiments. Furthermore, the *editrices* marshalled queens as proof that women in general were capable of being men's equals. There are, writes Maisonneuve, "un nombre infini de Reines et de Princesses, qui se sont distinguées par leurs vertus et leur génie," implying that talented women leaders are no anomaly.²⁴⁶ Maisonneuve explains that Blanche de Castille developed her rare natural qualities by way of "[u]ne heureuse éducation,"²⁴⁷ and that she was "une femme vertueuse, et une chrétienne aussi éloignée du fanatisme."²⁴⁸ In this way, Maisonneuve connects women's equality to their education, and also, notably, to an enlightened vision of religion.

Queens were praised for advancing philosophy and Enlightenment. Queen Christine of Sweden is praised for protecting people of letters and for speaking like a philosopher ("Elle se plaît à parler comme les Stoïciens").²⁴⁹ She sought out and corresponded with people of learning, including "Le célèbre Bayle lui-même" whose

²⁴⁶ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de decembre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32), p. 129.

²⁴⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de decembre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32), p. 130.

²⁴⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de decembre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32), p. 155.

²⁴⁹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de fevrier, 1762, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (5), p. 173.

letter is reprinted in the *Journal*. As popular as Bayle was, he was also recognized as a radical philosopher and widely censored, so it is notable that the *Journal* reprints his letter.

Editrices sought to use the example of queens not to promote their unanimity, but rather to illuminate the potential of all women. In her praise of Catherine the Great, Beaumer writes that, “Les Femmes Russiennes entrent dans la carrière et disputent le prix aux Hommes.”²⁵⁰ After Maisonneuve praised Catherine’s purchase of Diderot’s library, apparently the queen sent her a golden snuff box, prompting from the *editrice* a poem written by way of a thank you.²⁵¹ Montanclos, too, wrote poems praising Catherine.²⁵² The Russian Princess Anastasie de Gallitzen, known mainly for being a dedicated protégé of Catherine, was for some time the dedicatee of the *Journal*, is praised as an intelligent woman who doesn’t waste her time with frivolity.²⁵³

One exception to the praise of enlightened queens is the effusive praise that Princen lavishes on Marie-Antoinette, which concentrates on Marie-Antoinette’s charm and her role as mother. Princen dedicates the *Journal* to Marie-Antoinette, and every

²⁵⁰ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1763, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (9), p. 109.

²⁵¹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de avril, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (12).

²⁵² *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32).

²⁵³ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1763, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (9), pp. 209-210.

subsequent issue includes multiple poems praising the queen. “Marie-Antoinette d’Autriche” is even praised á là anagram: “Reine et Dèité Charmant Tout.”²⁵⁴

Just as the *editrices* would not stand for sub-par praise of common women, not just any praise of a queen was acceptable: A historical opera, *Ernelinde, Princess de Norwege*, is trashed by Maisonneuve: “j’y ai cherché inutilement des vers qu’il fût possible de citer.”²⁵⁵ Incidentally, a few pages later, we find Maisonneuve heaping praise on a woman taxidermist.²⁵⁶ The *editrices* displayed a penchant for looking past the trappings of rank to see genuine quality wherever it lay.

Criticism

Perhaps the area in which the women of the *Journal des Dames* seemed most comfortable was criticism. Criticism was an important function of the periodical press in general,²⁵⁷ but it was one function that women could authoritatively lay claim to. They were not timid in their evaluations, and they criticized often, unapologetically, and sometimes ruthlessly. They are confidently droll. Beaumer, having excerpted a poem,

²⁵⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1774, Mme de Montanclos, ci-devant Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (32), p. 217. The careful reader will notice that, in this anagram, the “a” and the “u” are used twice.

²⁵⁵ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1768, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (28), p. 104.

²⁵⁶ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1768, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (28), p. 117.

²⁵⁷ See Roger Chartier’s description of the periodical press in *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1991, pp. 157-161.

writes, “je n’en citerai que ces vers, qui sont ceux qui m’ont paru être les moins mauvais.”²⁵⁸ Maisonneuve’s review of a book of travel stories simply reports that it is “trop volumineuse, trop prolix, trop remplis de répétitions.”²⁵⁹ Readers, too, contributed amusingly blunt critiques. La Muse Limonadiere writes in to trash Fénelon’s “Tragedie of Alexandre” that had appeared in the previous month’s issue: how sad that he writes about heroes because he can’t imitate them!²⁶⁰

Whence this cool and assertive authority? Women in the periodical press had an unambiguous feminine example for their literary criticism: *salonnières*. The *salonnières* confidently wielded the cultural authority to make judgments about literature. In the salons, women’s authority was performed as critique. Indeed, the women of the *Journal* are most thoroughly *salonnières* in their capacity as critics.

More than any other genre, criticism smacked of the “reign of women” railed against by critics of women’s power. Landes cites the Abbé Michel de Pure’s critique of seventeenth-century *salonnières*: “They call themselves précieuses, form salons, hold meetings, debate issues, judge books, give their opinions about other people’s works, and by an unparalleled tyranny, cannot tolerate a book that is not to their taste, nor a mind

²⁵⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1763, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (9), p. 232.

²⁵⁹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1767, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (18), p. 13.

²⁶⁰ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de fevrier, 1762, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (5).

that does not resemble their own.”²⁶¹ Women’s criticism was a threat to men because it was most often *men’s* language and cultural production that women were judging, rejecting, and ridiculing.

Misogynistic backlash was fierce not because women were not recognized as authoritative critics, but because they so often were. Women’s authority to promote, curate, and review was ceded to them on the basis that they had superior taste and could therefore serve as guardians of cultural standards. Joan DeJean argues that women’s reputation as arbiters of literary taste reached its apex at the turn of the eighteenth century during the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, an intense debate in which French intellectuals took sides over the significance of modern authors and, in the process, generated a self-awareness of their own age as modern. Perrault, a leading advocate for the Moderns and author of *Apologie des Femmes*, construed women’s influence as mostly virtuous, and he portrayed their close association with French literature as indicative of their quintessentially modern taste and judgment. Indeed, to be Modern was to think and judge as a woman.²⁶² On the other hand, Boileau, the leading advocate for the Ancients and author of *Satire on Women*, construed women’s influence as corrupting. Because the Ancients succeeded in controlling much of the literary and intellectual institutions of the Old Regime, they are thought to have won the *Querelle*, but both visions of women persisted and competed throughout the eighteenth century.

²⁶¹ Landes (1988), p. 30.

²⁶² Joan DeJean, “The (Literary) World at War, or, What Can Happen When Women Go Public,” in *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France*, eds. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Dena Goodman, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995, p. 126.

Suffice to say, the women in the *Journal des Dames* seized on the authority of the salonnière as arbiter of literary taste and they used it to promote the new, distinctive bourgeois ideals. Fiction and narratives in general were praised when they possessed a moral or instructive end. Aesthetically, women's comments and critiques reveal a ubiquitous concern with verisimilitude, as when Mme de Beaumer praises a historian for possessing "l'art de montrer la vérité avec bienfiance."²⁶³ Characters were expected to seem real, substantive, and moral. Like the *salonnières*, these contributors were arbiters of good taste, but their standards were very much in line with the emerging aesthetic and literary tastes of the bourgeoisie. In Maisonneuve's evaluation of *L'Heureuse Famille, Conte moral*, she writes that, the author "plaira aux Lecteurs sensibles et honnêtes; les situations en sont intéressantes; les détails vrais et touchans; tout y respire cette volupté tranquille et pure, qui accompagne la vertu."²⁶⁴

In addition to these moral and aesthetic bourgeois values, criticism in the periodical press represented a modest step towards the democratization of interpretation, which functioned as a symbolic proxy for citizenship. As de Jean argues, the press represented a new realm of literary debate, one which subjected fiction to the searching critiques of the unprofessional reader. In one way, this made women particularly vulnerable: their reputations could be the subject of unregulated, prurient interests. On the

²⁶³ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1761, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (4), p. 30.

²⁶⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1766, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (17), p. 68.

other hand, if women could transpose their authority to critique from the salons to the press, they could convert their authority into public influence.

Criticism also showcased women's ability to demonstrate the (ostensibly) impartial brand of rationality that was a hallmark of the public sphere. *Editrices* in their reviews would try to balance their evaluations, often finding something good in a generally bad work, and finding something bad in a generally good work. The effect is to cause the *editrices* to seem fair-minded, balanced, and capable of objective evaluation. "Il seroit bien à souhaiter" says Maisonneuve, "que tous ceux qui cultivent les Lettres pensassent comme M. Mercier." Even so, "On regrette... que son style soit diffus et peu correct."²⁶⁵ Similarly, she remarks charitably of De la Harpe that "Sa morale est douce, aimable et consolante. Mais on diroit que M. de la Harpe ne peut faire un vers, sans entonner la trompette... enfin il afflige ses Lecteurs, et ne les instruit pas."²⁶⁶ Beaumer praises an unlikely tale about a poor-yet-philosophical peasant girl (a common subject in the *Journal*) for its authentic emotion and realistic style, but she reproaches it for its meandering plot:

"il y regne une simplicité qui attache; peut-être désireroit-on que le style fût plus correct, plus élevé, qu'il y eût plus de vraisemblance; moins d'épisodes et de trivialités, ou du moins que les épisodes fussent plus liées au sujet, et qu'on eut supprimé les trois quarts du dernier volume..."²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1766, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (17), pp. 78-79.

²⁶⁶ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (12), p. 51.

²⁶⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1762, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (5), p. 31.

By showing themselves to be capable of careful consideration of different viewpoints, women showed that they were as well-situated as men were to deliberate fairly about the common good. Indeed, in January 1766 Maisonneuve introduced a new cover page to underscore this ability. Above the banner was a bow-topped scale, balancing a flowery quill on the one side with a scroll, book, and man's portrait on the other, while the banner below proclaims the unique virtue of the press: "IMPARTIALITE." The new cover page connotes a balancing of different viewpoints, but it also seems to refer to a balance between beautiful writing and intellectual pursuits.

Criticism demonstrated women's intellectual authority, as when Maisonneuve expresses her disappointment with a work that, while doing a decent job of representing Lucien, fails to consider other Greeks and, among the Romans, only cites Pétrone.²⁶⁸ Criticism is sometimes a shortcut to projecting superiority, even arrogance, and the *editrices* could sometimes be deliciously condescending. Maisonneuve remarks dryly of a poem by a M. de la Harpe that it is, "un peu meilleur que ceux que l'on présente ordinairement en Province pour les Prix d'Académies."²⁶⁹

Nor were women shy about critiquing important figures. Considering Rousseau's harsh criticism of ballet performances that feature scenes from different ballets, Maisonneuve, unimpressed, points out that regular ballets aren't really all that connected

²⁶⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (12), p. 54.

²⁶⁹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (14), p. 62.

anyway, and besides, variety keeps things interesting.”²⁷⁰ Indeed, criticism of Rousseau is common in the *Journal* (though he is also praised).

True to their feminine roles as the guardians of good taste, women editors reject works for having treated trite or *outré* topics. Maisonneuve complains, “On est un peu surpris de ne trouver sous ce titre fastueux que des recherches sur l’*existence des idées universelles*, question Métaphysique très-rebatue et très-inutile.”²⁷¹ Of another, Maisonneuve remarks, “L’*Ode sur la modestie* est comme la plupart des Odes modernes: point d’enthousiasme, des Stance languissantes et des choses triviales.”²⁷²

As cultural arbiters, the women of the *Journal* display generosity towards ancient or revered authors. Maisonneuve criticizes upstarts who denigrate great authors: this is a facile stratagem for advancing one’s own reputation. One reader even commends her for defending Racine. After all, she writes, women are the defenders of good taste—which is important more than ever in this moment, “où l’on s’écarte plus que jamais des grands modeles, et où le gout sans cesse attaqué, annonce la décadence prochaine de notre littérature.”²⁷³

²⁷⁰ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1768, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (28), p. 48.

²⁷¹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de fevrier, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (12), p. 104.

²⁷² *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de octobre, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (14), p. 59.

²⁷³ Lettre à Mme de Maisonneuve, *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de fevrier, 1765, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (12), p. 35.

One of the most common criticisms is that an author has failed to render his or her subject in a lively or graceful manner. One might think that the aversion to *frivolité* and emphasis on *utilité* would mean less of an editorial emphasis on aesthetics, but in fact women seemed entirely willing to demand that works be aesthetically pleasing. One might assume the *editrices* would want to give the impression that women were up to the task of reading boring and dense things, but in fact, asserting the prerogative to judge things boring, without taste, and without style and grace was a mark of intellectual and cultural authority. Far from making women look intellectually lazy, insisting that works be written in elegant, charming, or lively manner was empowering.

Indeed, the demand for good style is often portrayed as an intrinsically feminine need, and as imparting an especially feminine capacity for good taste. Princen gives a middling review to *La Physique des Dames*, by a M. de Rosnay, complaining of the author's lack of style—Doesn't he know that one must make things interesting for women? she asks.²⁷⁴ “Il devoit savoir que, pour se faire lire avec plaisir par les femmes, il faut avoir l'art de présenter à leur imagination des objets agreable, et de remuer l'extrême sensibilité dont la nature a fait présent à leur ame.”²⁷⁵ She blames him for not knowing his audience: “Ainsi M. de Rosnay ne devoit pas se contenter de donner aux Dames, un abrégé de physique qui fût simple, net, méthodique, et même bien écrit, si l'on veut; il

²⁷⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juillet, 1774, Mme la Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (31).

²⁷⁵ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juillet, 1774, Mme la Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (31), p. 77.

devoit le dépouiller de la sécheresse inhérente à ces fortes de matières, et faire plus d'attention aux personnes pour lesquelles il a eu dessein d'écrire."²⁷⁶

Criticism was particularly sharp when an author had maligned women. Beaumer writes of Desmahis's contribution in the *Encyclopédie*, "Femme," that it "a toujours paru très-déplacé par sa gentillesse. On ne peut soutenir une telle lecture une demi-heure, sans avoir mal à la tête; c'est un choc continuel d'antithèses et de pointes."²⁷⁷ Maisonneuve critiques one story, saying that the author fashioned a female protagonist who didn't know enough about politics for her taste—"ce personnage est peut être inutile."²⁷⁸

Aphorisms

Not every editor of the *Journal des Dames* includes aphorisms. Moreover, the aphorisms in the *Journal* seem to convey, uncharacteristically, gender prejudice and stereotypes. Perhaps this is because aphorisms tend to rely on folk wisdom, which is usually just a pithy expression of common prejudice. A sample of Maisonneuve's aphorisms demonstrates just how out of step they were compared with the rest of the *Journal*:

²⁷⁶ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de juillet, 1774, Mme la Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (31), p. 78.

²⁷⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1763, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (9), p. 163.

²⁷⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de decembre, 1766, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26210 (17), p. 49.

“Les passions dans les femmes ne sont jamais médiocres: elles haïssent avec excès, elles aiment avec violence, et elles veulent être aimées de même.”²⁷⁹

“Une femme est souvent moins ridicule par les défauts réels qu’elle a, que par les belles qualités qu’elle n’a pas et qu’elle affecte d’avoir.”²⁸⁰

Some aphorisms celebrate a more virtuous, bourgeois vision of genuine love:

“Une femme doit être beaucoup plus flattée d’avoir fait un ami de son amant, qu’un amant de son ami.”²⁸¹

“Les hommes qui ne savent point rendre leur existence utile, ne la méritent pas.”²⁸²

“Les bienfaits qui nous flattent le plus, sont ceux que nous tenons de cœurs.”²⁸³

“L’acquit de connaissances, fait l’agrément de la Vieillesse.”²⁸⁴

Enigmes and questions

Editrices often posed a riddle or a question for readers to consider and write in about. Some editors of the *Journal des Dames* included word games. Maisonnette

²⁷⁹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonnette. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 18.

²⁸⁰ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonnette. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 19.

²⁸¹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1763, Mme de Maisonnette. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 119.

²⁸² *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1763, Mme de Maisonnette. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 115.

²⁸³ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonnette. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 115.

²⁸⁴ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de novembre, 1763, Mme de Maisonnette. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 115.

started to print a *Logogriphe*.²⁸⁵ These trifles mimicked the charmingly paradoxical flavor of the *calembours*, or plays on words, that was meant to advertise wit.

In the same vein, editors posed clever questions to readers and solicited their responses. Instead of being wholly concerned with the wit and charm of the salon, however, the question in the *Journal* were undeniably concerned with promoting virtue and prudence, especially among the young. Some examples:

“Qui doit plaire davantage à un cœur sensible, d’une Femme qui a déjà aimé, ou de celle qui n’a jamais aimé?”²⁸⁶

“L’on demande pourquoi les vrais amis sont si rares?” (emphasis in original).²⁸⁷

“Pourquoi les femmes galantes sont-elles les ennemies les plus formidables des honnêtes femmes?”²⁸⁸

“Lequel seroit le plus avantageux aux jeunes Demoiselles d’ignorer ou de connoître les ruses de l’Amour?”²⁸⁹

²⁸⁵ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mai, juin, juillet, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10).

²⁸⁶ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de fevrier, 1762, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (5), p. 200.

²⁸⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de mars, 1762, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (5).

²⁸⁸ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de janvier, 1763, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (9), p. 92.

²⁸⁹ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de fevrier, 1763, Mme de Beaumer. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (9), p. 189.

Conclusion: Authority in the public sphere

As we have seen, women, like men, wanted to appeal to the reason of their co-citizens, but their participation in the public sphere was judged by gendered standards. I have argued that women's authority in the public sphere was built on a form of discourse in which women already enjoyed legitimacy and authority, that of the *salonnière*, and that the women of the *Journal des Dames* adapted these forms of salon discourse to the values of the bourgeois public sphere.

But for all of their charming interventions in the *periodical press*, was the *Journal des Dames* a radical, revolutionary force? Nina Gelbart Rattner argues forcefully that the *Journal* was a radical *frondeur* publication; anodyne contributions were meant to disguise the *Journal des Dames*'s more radical character. Angus Martin likewise argues that the fiction in the *Journal* was "a largely noncontroversial element in the content, being part of the specifically 'feminine' camouflage, when camouflage was needed."²⁹⁰

In so far as the *Journal* promoted a vision of the aristocracy as corrupt, it contributed to the conditions that ultimately de-legitimized the *ancien régime*. Robert Darnton has argued that literary works such as novels were the principle agent of absolutism's delegitimation.²⁹¹ Similarly, Jack Censer has described the periodical press

²⁹⁰ Angus Martin, "Fiction and the Female Reading Public in Eighteenth-Century France: The *Journal des dames* (1759-1778)", *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 3:3.3, 1991, p. 244.

²⁹¹ Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995, p. 197.

as contributing to the “general, gradual loss of faith in monarchy.”²⁹² Through these lenses too, the *Journal des Dames* can be considered revolutionary.

On the other end of the spectrum, Suzanne Van Dijk has accused the *Journal des dames* of doing nothing more than spreading conservative ideals. It is true that the *Journal des Dames* represents literate, middle- and upper-class, socially bourgeois women. The women who read, edited, and contributed to the *Journal* were not the radical pamphleteers of the Revolution; they were not the precursors to the disgruntled seamstresses or the organized *poissonnières* whom Dominique Godineau describes as having a radical impact on the Revolution.²⁹³ On the other hand, the *Journal* constantly associated itself with Enlightenment figures such as Catherine the Great, Voltaire, Marmontel, Diderot, d’Alembert, and Bayle. The contributors to the *Journal* praised them all regularly, and Voltaire was praised almost religiously. Commentators may vary in the estimation of the *Journal*’s radicalism, but it is not *conservative* in the sense of promoting reactionary gender roles or uncritical monarchism.

Certainly, the *Journal des Dames* demonstrates that the road to feminist consciousness was not straight or narrow. Yet we can discern some feminist constants: the *Journal* describes male prejudice and unfair stereotypes as the root of women’s inequality, and the contributors to the *Journal* overwhelmingly believe that, given a good education and virtuous socialization, women could be as smart and accomplished as men. They often explicitly call out men for giving women less credit for their

²⁹² Censer (1994), p. 213.

²⁹³ Dominique Godineau, *The Women of Paris and Their French Revolution*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998.

accomplishments, intellectual and otherwise, whether it be an aversion to allowing women into academic societies, forgetting to honor women who have demonstrated patriotic valor, or failing to recognize the abilities of queens present and past. Women were aware that they were being treated as less authoritative *because they were women*. In this way, the *Journal* was radical because it served as a precursor for gender-based identity-building.²⁹⁴ This gender consciousness was a prerequisite for institutional explanations for women's oppression: "Toutes les loix sont favorables aux hommes" deduces one contributor.²⁹⁵

Finally, the *Journal des Dames* is significant, as a step along the way to feminist consciousness. As Suellen Diaconoff argues, the *presse féminine* was radical because women were being validated as a legitimate interest group in the public sphere. In her April 1761 contribution, Beaumer writes optimistically, "Malgré les pertes considérables qui ont affligé depuis quelques années, la classe des Dames Auteurs, elle n'a jamais été si nombreuse et si intéressant."²⁹⁶ The ultimate triumph of women forging ahead into the public sphere was the affirmation of women's voices and the rejection of a doctrine of silence. "Un modeste silence doit être le partage de notre sexe, disent sans cesse les hommes jaloux de notre douce éloquence," writes one contributor,

²⁹⁴ Diaconoff (2005), p. 173.

²⁹⁵ *Articles premier. Lettre qui peut tenir lieu d'Historiette, de Mlle Desgault, à M. de M***. Journal des Dames, Pour le mois de aoust, sept. octobre, 1763, Mme de Maisonneuve. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (10), p. 4.*

²⁹⁶ *Journal des Dames, Pour le mois de avril, 1761, Jean-Charles Relongue de la Louptière. Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (2), p. xi.*

“Travaillez, réfléchissez, et taisez-vous; voilà les trois points essentiels du code d’éducation inventé pour les femmes: mais devons-nous, Madame, souscrire entièrement à des loix tyranniques, parées seulement du dehors de la sagesse? Devons-nous nous taire quand la reconnaissance anime notre cœur? quand l’image de la vertu nous enchante?”²⁹⁷

The very act of publishing something within the milieu of state permission—even if it was merely tacitly approved—was a political act itself.²⁹⁸ Perhaps, then, the greatest triumph of the *presse féminine* is that, in direct contrast to the *salonnière*’s adamant avoidance of *authorship*, the women of the *Journal des Dames* forged a way for women to consciously and unabashedly assert the titles of *autrice* and *editrice*.

²⁹⁷ *Journal des Dames*, Pour le mois de aout, 1774, Mme la Baronne de Princen, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, 8-H-26209 (31), p. 242.

²⁹⁸ Robert Darnton argues that the literary Underground, operating outside of the system of privileges and permissions, was where the most radical Enlightenment literature originated. For women, however, it was arguably the opposite: it was more radical to be a legitimate contributor to the public sphere than to clandestinely circulate radical sentiments in the Underground. Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Creating Authority in a Meaningless Universe: The Style and Form of Denis Diderot's
Jacques the Fatalist

Jacques le fataliste et son maître (c. 1773),¹ Diderot's "novel-that-is-not-a-novel", has no beginning and multiple endings. The narrator lacks credibility, is dismissive or even rude to the reader, and actually *strives* to be boring. The flow of narration is interrupted no less than 51 times, often just so the narrator can relish his power to direct the story. The fictional reader, a character embedded in the narrative, asks no fewer than 47 questions, usually requesting clarification, sometimes registering complaints. Entire sections of *Jacques* have been unceremoniously copied from Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. It was generally judged a critical failure: for a hundred years after *Jacques*'s posthumous publication, it was roundly panned as both immoral and a poor imitation of Sterne or Rabelais.² One critic determined *Jacques* to be, "the least humorous character

¹ John Undank, "A New Date for *Jacques le fataliste*," *Modern Language Notes* 74, no. 5 (1959): 433-437. Diderot was evidently working on *Jacques* as early as 1771 and likely finished it by 1775. It appeared in the *Correspondance littéraire* between November 1778 and June 1780. German audiences became familiar with the text through Schiller's 1785 translation of the Madame de Pommeraye episode and Christlob Mylius's 1792 translation of the entire text. *Jacques* was not published for a broader francophone audience until 1796. A more complete manuscript of *Jacques* was found in the 1970's among the papers that were sent with Diderot's library to his patroness, Catherine the Great, after his death. This is recognized as the most authoritative copy, and the basis for the English translation I use here.

² Jules Assézat's introduction to *Jacques* apologizes, "What really hurts the reputation of *Jacques le Fataliste* most is the form in which it is written. This capital reproach must be attributed to Sterne...the worst of models. His fragmented style, jumping around, is so tiring for the reader." Denis Diderot, *Jacques le fataliste et son maître*, introduction by Jules Assézat, (Paris: Garnier, 1885): p. 4. Other notable bad reviews include Andrieux's (1796) who is shocked by "scandalous tales, even filthy ones about monks, whores and renegades," and Edmond Scherer's (1880) estimation that "between a bad copying of Sterne and a collection of dirty anecdotes...[Diderot] doesn't even seem to be amusing

conceivable.”³ The otherwise appreciative Thomas Carlyle thought it beyond blue—it was “darkest indigo.” That Diderot managed to make crudity so unentertaining was an extraordinary achievement. Indeed, even the fictional reader embedded in the novel itself agrees: it is “an unmade bed of a book, a tasteless mishmash of things that happen, some of them true, others made up, written without style and served up like a dog’s breakfast.”⁴

That Diderot’s novel was so roundly rejected could hardly have been much of a surprise: he was trying to rebuild literature from the ground up. Diderot was acutely interested in the connection between literary style and philosophic knowledge, and he consciously experimented with literary form because he thought that certain kinds of knowledge were unlikely to be communicated by other, more conventional forms of writing. Evolving epistemological and moral theories required similar evolutions in literary forms. This is a view made explicit in texts as diverse and chronologically separate as *The Indiscreet Jewels* (1748, chapter 38), his entry “Encyclopedia” (1755), and *Two Friends from Bourbonne* (1770). Diderot thought that the ability of literature to communicate truth is bound up with its style and form, and what is more, the literary styles appropriate to the truth of one era may cease to communicate the truth of a later era. In his entry “Encyclopedia,” Diderot writes that, “Certain literary genres come to be

himself.” Stendhal recommended that six offensive pages be expurgated. The Catholic Church went further, placing *Jacques* on the Index in 1804. Robert Loy, *Diderot’s Determined Fatalist: A Critical Appreciation of Jacques le Fataliste* (New York: Kings Crown Press, 1950): chap. 1.

³ Loy (1950), p. 15.

⁴ Denis Diderot, *Jacques the Fatalist*, trans. David Coward (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 185.

neglected on account of their failure to reflect real life and current morality, thus losing their permanent poetic validity. Others remain, sustained by their intrinsic value, but only by taking an entirely new form.”⁵ When a society experiences a revolution in its understanding of the world, he argued, new perplexities may erupt for which old literary forms are inadequate.⁶ The philosophical implications of literature are thus conditioned by the historical context of the text and its reader. Forging a new style and form of literature to express this new understanding was precisely what Diderot thought figures such as Richardson and Sterne were engaged in, and he too wanted to develop this emerging genre. More contemporary evaluations suggest that he succeeded: Mayoux’s 1936 article, “Diderot and the Technique of Modern Literature” heralded the twentieth century shift towards recognizing *Jacques* as a modern literary experiment two centuries ahead of its time.⁷

Forging a new style and form for knowledge is a difficult task, however. I have argued in the previous chapters that the authority of language is rooted in institutional

⁵ Denis Diderot, “Encyclopedia,” *Political Writings*, eds. John Hope Mason and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 23.

⁶ Richard Terdiman, “Political fictions: Revolutionary deconstructions in Diderot,” *Yale French Studies* 101 (2001): 153-170.

⁷ For more on the importance of *Jacques* as an example of a modern literary technique, see Loy (1950); Emily Zants, “Dialogue, Diderot, and the New Novel in France,” *Eighteenth Century Studies* 2, no. 2 (1968): 172-181; and Terdiman (2001). For Loy, *Jacques* is a precursor to Sartre, Joyce, Woolf, and the Surrealist movement. Zants links *Jacques* to the modern American novel, with the caveat that Diderot is far too optimistic about humanity’s capacity for goodness to be associated with the likes of Faulkner. Perhaps it is more appropriate to draw parallels between Diderot and Vonnegut: both are characterized by a good humor that seems resistant to nihilism.

authority. Institutions generate idioms—linguistic styles and forms—that can communicate, by proxy, the credibility that those institutions grant. This perspective suggests that an author who wants to write in a totally new style and form will not succeed in arrogating to himself much authority. When an idiom is unattached from institutional authority, or when it is attached to an institution without much authority, a writer cannot hope to gain much authority by employing it. On the other hand, every idiom must start somewhere, and institutions do not come into the world fully-formed. Diderot was consciously trying to forge a new idiom to fit what he saw as a new source of authority: reason and empirical observation.

What evolutions in understanding required a corresponding evolution in literature? To start, Diderot’s empiricism implied a literary realism that grounded all understanding in the “raw data of experience” (Coward, p. xv). However, as I explain below, this “raw data” was not the reliable and predictable reality that many of his contemporaries assumed. His Epicurean brand of materialism emphasized the chaotic flux of a universe that extends far beyond our perception.⁸ Diderot’s literary style communicates this dynamic materialism and its skeptical consequences. More importantly, his style aims to overcome what he felt to be an unacceptable implication of a material universe: the determinism which affords neither freedom nor moral or political agency. In *Jacques*, Diderot confronts determinism by writing in such a way as to provoke the reader to reflect on and transcend her determined existence. To write a more

⁸ See Whitney Mannies, “Denis Diderot and the Politics of a Materialist Skepticism,” *Skepticism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, eds. John Christian Laursen and Gianni Paganini (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

straightforward account of his philosophy would risk determining the reader's consciousness further. But a disjointed, dislocating style might provoke the reader into creating her own story, her own freedom, and her own moral knowledge. Hence the importance of his style is not just, or even primarily, in the philosophical assumptions it communicates, but in the skepticism and free conscious reflection it provokes.⁹ While such a response is not an inevitable result of the way in which *Jacques* is written, it is a more likely result than if it had been written in a more orthodox style.

Diderot's materialist skepticism and the problem of determinism

Diderot was consistently committed to the materialist view that the universe was comprised only of matter and space. Not all eighteenth century materialism was cut from the same cloth, however, and Diderot is often too closely associated with the mechanistic materialism of his more positivist coevals like D'Holbach, La Mettrie, and Helvetius, who were optimistic about the prospect of controlling and directing nature.¹⁰ Diderot

⁹ For more on the intersection of Diderot's materialism and literary style, see Wilda Anderson, *Diderot's Dream* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

¹⁰ Perspectives that assume that the French philosophes embarked on a shared project to extend a monolithic reason are ubiquitous but misleading. Such a perspective may have begun with de Tocqueville and Burke, but was taken up by twentieth-century political philosophers like Isaiah Berlin in "The Counter-Enlightenment," *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, ed. Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 243–46. Also see Michael Oakeshott "The new Bentham," *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991[1932]); Carl I. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932); and more recently, John Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (New York: Routledge, 1995). For a critique of this overgeneralizing tendency, see Dennis C. Rasmussen, "Burning Laws and Strangling Kings? Voltaire and Diderot on the Perils of

vigorously countered Helvetius's claim that judgment proceeded directly from sense perception in his *Réfutation*. When Galiani attacked physiocratic French agricultural policy, it provoked harsh criticism from many philosophes, but Diderot was a vocal defender of Galiani, particularly with regards to his use of the dialogic form that admitted of multiple, contrasting viewpoints.¹¹

Diderot tended to be more skeptical than his contemporaries, not because he was less committed to materialism, but rather because he worked in a tradition of Epicurean materialism that implied an eternally dynamic, imperfectly knowable universe and fallible sense perception.¹² Diderot's entry "Epicureanism" emphasizes that the chaos and vastness of the universe renders knowledge limited, fallible, and fleeting: "The world is but a small portion of the universe," he writes, "which is limited by the frailty of our senses, since the universe is unlimited."¹³ His *Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature* (1751) observes that the difficulty of tracing causality in an infinitely complex universe is

Rationalism in Politics," *The Review of Politics* 73 (2011): 77-104.

¹¹ See Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994): chap. 4.

¹² Diderot was profoundly influenced by Epicurus's most famous apologist, Lucretius, whose one extant work, *De Rerum Natura*, portrays a chaotic material universe that is only imperfectly knowable. For more on the Lucretian influence on Diderot, see Johan Werner Schmidt, "Diderot and Lucretius: the *De rerum natura* and Lucretius's legacy in Diderot's scientific, aesthetic, and ethical thought," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 208 (1982): 183-294, and Moïshe Black, "Lucretius Tells Diderot: Here's the Plan," *Diderot Studies* 28 (2000): 39-58.

¹³ "Le monde n'est qu'une petite portion de l'Univers, dont la foiblesse de nos sens a fixé les limites; car l'Univers est illimité." Denis Diderot, "Epicurisme," *Oeuvres complètes*, eds. Dieckmann, Proust, and Varloot (Paris: Hermann, 1975-2004), vol. 7, p. 273; hereafter abbreviated DPV.

compounded by the limitations of our faculties of perception: “When we compare the infinite number of phenomena in nature with the limitations of our own intelligence and the frailty of our senses, how could we ever expect to discover...anything but a few broken, isolated parts of the great chain which links everything together?”¹⁴ And his entry “Skepticism, or Pyrrhonism,” explicitly links skeptical outcomes to the Epicurean view of nature: “On our part, we conclude that everything in nature is interconnected, and that properly speaking there is nothing of which man has perfect, absolute, complete knowledge.”¹⁵ Moreover, each person’s sense experience differs—whether because one occupies a different physical space and thus has a different perspective, or because our biological capacities for empirical experience vary. Diderot was often fascinated by how people with different faculties of perception might arrive at different theological and moral insights as a result of their different empirical experience, as his *Letter on the Blind* (1749) attests. As Loy notes, the divergence of sense perceptions and associations means that the basis for moral action will never be the same for any two humans.¹⁶ Thus even though causality does adhere to natural, knowable laws, our empirical experience is limited both by the range of our senses and by our inability to perceive more than a small

¹⁴ Denis Diderot, *Pensées sur l’interprétation de la nature*, in DPV, vol. 9., p. 32; cited from Denis Diderot, *Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature and Other Philosophical Works*, ed. David Adams (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 1999) pp. 37-8.

¹⁵ Denis Diderot, “Scepticisme, ou Pyrrhonisme,” in DPV vol. 8, 159; cited from Denis Diderot, “Pyrrhonian or Skeptic,” in *Skepticism: An Anthology*, eds. Richard Popkin and Jose R. Maia Neto (New York: Prometheus Books, 2007) p. 257.

¹⁶ Loy (1950), p. 178.

part of nature at a time. While it is often assumed that Diderot's skepticism operates as a check on his materialism, it is in fact a logical outcome.

Diderot was uneasy with the moral and political implications of his materialism, however: determinism deprives humans of freedom, and without free will, there can be neither moral nor political agency. His entry "Droit Naturel," (1755) states that if decisions spring from a material source, then they cannot have been made freely and can be neither good nor evil. In his *Letter to Landois* (1756), Diderot expresses the depths of his preoccupation about the disastrous moral consequences of materialism: "But if there is no liberty, there is no action that merits praise or blame; there is neither vice nor virtue, nothing which must be rewarded or punished."¹⁷ Nor did his discomfort with the contradiction between determinism and morality ease over time, as his *Letter to Mme. de Maux* (1769?), suggests: "I am enraged to be so tormented by a devil of a philosophy that my spirit cannot help but approve, and my heart deny."¹⁸ Nature itself offers no guiding teleology, no innate morality, only raw material that is just as likely to yield monsters as beauty.¹⁹ "Man is merely a common phenomenon while a monster is only a rare

¹⁷ "Mais s'il n'y a point de liberteé, il n'y a point d'action qui merite la louange ou le blame; il n'y a ni vice ni virtue, rien dont il faille recompense ou chatier." Denis Diderot, "Lettre à Landois," *Correspondance littéraire*, eds. Varloot et al. (Paris: Hermann, 1976 [29 June 1756]), vol. 9, p. 257.

¹⁸ "J'enrage d'etre empêtre d'une diable de philosophie que mon esprit ne peut s'empêcher d'approuver, et mon coeur de dementir." Denis Diderot, *Correspondance*, "Lettre à Mme. Maux," ed. Roth (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1955 [1769?]) vol. 9, p. 154.

¹⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1981) p. 46; Erita Hill, "Materialism and Monsters in 'Le Reve de D'Alembert'." *Diderot Studies* 10 (1968): 67-93.

phenomenon,” Diderot writes in *D'Alembert's Dream* (1769), “but both are equally natural.”²⁰

Yet a moral life might still be possible in this determined universe. In his *Réfutation d'Hévetius*, Diderot argues that morality and judgment do not proceed directly from sense perception, but rather that this process is mediated by consciousness.²¹ By appealing to consciousness, Diderot's intention is not to introduce an immaterial element to his thought; he remains committed to a materialist monism. Rather, consciousness is an emergent property of the material mind reflecting back on its material existence, whereby it might intervene in the chain of its own causality. *This* is the “real miracle of life,” and the way in which, “All beings participate in the existence of all other beings.”²² As Loy (p. 131) observes, “the individual collection of matter called mind or will power has become a determining part of the determinant.” The consciousness of our own determined material existence means we can become active co-determiners of our existence, creating the freedom by which we might have genuine moral and political agency. This was Diderot's reasoning for his controversial choice to commission a statue of Voltaire represented by a naked Seneca on the verge of suicide: by portraying the subject at the point of his conscious overcoming of material circumstance, the statue

²⁰ Denis Diderot, *Le Rêve de D'Alembert*, in DPV vol. 17, p. 138; cited from Diderot, *D'Alembert's Dream in Rameau's Nephew and Other Works*, trans. Barzun and Bowen (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1956) p. 68.

²¹ DPV, vol. 24, pp. 479-761.

²² DPV vol. 17, p. 138; cited from *D'Alembert's Dream*, p. 124.

communicates that free will is the crux of morality.²³ *Jacques le fataliste* is, above all, concerned with bringing about that moment of consciousness for the reader. In *Jacques*, Diderot confronts the reader with her own determined existence, but his style provokes the reader into a free, co-determining act of creation. By doing so, it holds out the prospect of freedom and moral agency in an otherwise determined world.

From determinism to morality in Jacques

Jacques begins with an interruption. The fictional reader demands information from the narrator in a blunt exchange characterized by what seems like mutual annoyance:

"How had they met? By chance, like everybody else... What were their names? What's it to you? Where were they coming from? From the nearest place? Where were they going? Does anyone really know where they're going?" (p. 3).

We have stumbled upon the narrator already in the middle of relating the story of Jacques, a servant accompanying his master on a trip. To pass the time, Jacques begins to tell his master the story of how he fell in love. If the reader thinks this promises to be a romantic and engrossing narrative, she is quickly disabused of the notion: Jacques is more loquacious than captivating, and more interested in relating his determinist philosophy than his love story.

²³ Tim Hochstrasser, "More long-lasting than Bronze? Statues, Public Commemoration and Representations of Monarchy in Diderot's Political Thought," *Monarchism and Absolutism in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Cesare Cuttica and Glenn Burgess (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012) p. 213.

Jacques tells his master that the universe is determined by "the great ledger"—a scroll where everything that will ever happen is written down, and which is slowly unrolling to reveal the course of their lives. While the reader might think there are a great many possibilities for Jacques's life, "Jacques did not think so: the only possibility was what was written up there, on high" (p.21). Moreover, Jacques knows that this determined situation is incompatible with freedom, and hence there can be no moral or political agency:

"Jacques did not acknowledge the world 'vice' nor the word 'virtue'. He claimed that people are born lucky or unlucky...In his view, rewards are meant as an incentive for good people, and punishments are intended to frighten bad people. 'What else can they be for,' he would say, 'if we are not free to choose and our destiny is written up there, on high?' ...It was his view that if we had a clear sight of the chain of causes and effects which shape a man's life from the moment he is born until his dying day, we would be convinced that everything he had done was what he had no choice but to do" (p. 150).

If anything, Jacques says, so-called "morality" is a ruse by the powerful to secure power, a view that Diderot explicitly lays out in his contributions to the *Histoire des Deux Indes* (1783).²⁴

Of course, the irony is that the characters in *Jacques* really do inhabit a totally determined universe—their existence hinges precariously on the whims of the author's pen. Jacques is quite right to think that his life is determined by what is written "là-haut"—the "great ledger" could be literally interpreted as the book itself. The narrator is no less determined than Jacques or his master, making his boasts to the contrary seem a

²⁴ Denis Diderot, *Political Writings*, eds. John Hope Mason and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 210.

little pathetic. We can see the irony in the narrator's objection, "Reader, you treat me as if I were a machine, which is not very polite" (p. 57).

Determinism originates in more places than just the author's pen, however. The reader, too, being habituated by previous novels to the ebb and flow of dramatic plots, frequently pressures the narrator to conform the erratic story to his trite expectations. The narrator usually meets the reader's hackneyed suggestions with a variation on this vexed refrain:

"But Reader, why must there always be love stories? Nearly all your poems, elegies, eclogues, idylls, lyrical ballads, epistles, comedies, tragedies and operas are love stories...All you've ever wanted since the day you were born was to gobble up love stories and you never get tired of them. You've been fed a diet of them and you'll be kept on it for a long time" (p. 151).

The narrator is annoyed not because he has been interrupted (for the narrator himself is an inveterate interrupter). Rather, the narrator seems annoyed because the reader's thematic expectations merely conform to trifling mainstream opinions.²⁵ These are not the thoughts or interpretations of a free individual, but of a person who has been conditioned to think always and only the same things. Tradition and custom inhibit our reflection by predetermining it for us, just as the reader is intervening with his trite expectations for the novel's course. Diderot is writing in order to break the spell of our socialized conformity. Shaken by the style of *Jacques*, we can no longer easily depend on our preconceived notions; we have to think anew.

²⁵ This parallels Diderot literary strategy in *Ceci n'est pas un conte* (1772). William F. Edmiston, "The Role of the Listener: Narrative Technique in Diderot's 'Ceci n'est pas un conte,'" *Diderot Studies* 20 (1981): 61-75.

Thwarting our expectations, then, is a device for jolting us out of our determined existences, creating the potential for reason and freedom. Yet because most novel-reading will have conditioned readers to expect a romantic entanglement or a wacky adventure to an exotic locale, Diderot must instead subvert the reader's expectations by invoking the ordinary. Just as all valuable inquiry must accept the premises of the existence of the external world and of sense experience, so Diderot's literary experiments seek to root our reflection in empirical reality. This is a view he explicitly endorses in the chapter "A Conversation about Literature," in his otherwise erotic novel *The Indiscreet Jewels* (1748).²⁶ Indeed, the entire novel is an endorsement of empirical inquiry generally: when a sultan is given a ring with the power to cause women's "jewels" to spill the secrets of their sexual (mis)adventures, the vaginal interrogations proceed with a rigor reminiscent of experimental method. Even in this bawdy early work, Diderot communicates the need to couch ideas in practical situations, and fiction more successfully bases our reflection in the imperfect, ordinary world.

In *Jacques*, the upmost concern of the narrator is to ground his story in unadorned truth, far from the fanciful and idealized realities that mainstream novels construct. The narrator anticipates the reader's objection: "But truth, you'll say, is usually cold, ordinary, and flat. For example, the account you've just given of the way Jacques's knee was bandaged may be true but is it interesting? It's not" (p. 31). While a novelist might take every opportunity to entertain readers, the narrator of *Jacques* subordinates entertainment to truth: "I'm writing a chronicle here. This story will either be interesting or it won't,

²⁶ DPV, vol. 3, p. 163.

though that's neither here nor there. My intention was to be true and in this I have succeeded" (p. 199). The quality of being *uninteresting* is a triumph for truth. Everyone knows that we are so inured to reading about ideally-shaped women's noses that they fail to move us; the earthy reality of a warty nose might yet surprise us into reflection. In *The Two Friends From Bourbonne* (1770) Diderot instructs those authors who fancy themselves purveyors of realistic fiction: "Your figures are handsome, if you like that sort of thing, but they lack the mole on the temple, the cut on the lip, the pockmark beside the nose."²⁷ Reading about idealized realities turns us into comfortable yet oblivious mechanical thinkers; ordinary reality turns out to be the most effective challenge to our prejudices and the best provocation to think for oneself. Grounding reflection in empirical reality is not then a manner of limiting skepticism, but of promoting it. Warts, moles, cuts, and pockmarks shake us out of our abstract certainty and into questioning.

The unpredictability of the ordinary also manifests in the meandering quality of Jacques's stories, where otherwise interesting events are explained as the determined effects of unnecessarily complex chains of causality. How did Jacques come to be shot in the knee?

"Because while I'm drinking [the innkeeper's] rotgut wine, I forget to water the horses. My father notices. He gets angry. I shrug my shoulders at him. He picks up a stick and lays it across my shoulders a touch hard. A regiment was passing on its way to Camp Fontenoy. I enlist out of pique. We reach our destination and the battle commences" (p. 3).

Jacques's stories have a complicated causality, but they also demonstrate its artificiality: what we choose to include in our causal stories is a matter of convenience, predetermined

²⁷ *D'Alembert's Dream in Rameau's Nephew and Other Works*, p. 244.

expectations, and the limitations of our own perception. In a universe where everything is interrelated, effects reverberate infinitely far and wide. If we are not to talk quite literally forever, we must abridge this chain of events. Hence causal chains are really a matter of interpretation: we could describe ostensibly proximate events as containing hundreds of intermediate causes, or distal events as linked by one step. While a tawdry novel would elaborate the juiciest causal chains, Diderot often prefers a deflating and circuitous route. How did Jacques lose his virginity, you ask? To explain that, Jacques must begin with the story of his baptism ("And I had a godfather and a godmother..." (p. 167)) causing us to despair of ever hearing the end. Nevertheless, it is as logical for Jacques to begin the account with his baptism as it is from his first meeting his beloved Denise. Sixty-seven pages later, when we are sure the climax could not be far off ("When a man gets to the knee, he's not got much further to go") we are disappointed yet again ("Sir, Denise's thighs were a lot longer than a normal girl's thighs" (p. 234)). In a universe where causality is amenable to infinite elaboration, even seemingly imminent events can be delayed indefinitely.

Because these narratives of causation are not inherent teleologies found in nature itself, two contradictory interpretations of the same event might be equally valid. Fighting to demonstrate a surgical technique on Jacques's knee, a surgeon knocks a lady from a horse; "See where demonstrating gets you!" Jacques's master remarks. "See what happens when you don't let people demonstrate!" replies the surgeon (p. 5). The only chains of causality that can be indisputably traced are empty tautologies: "In fact I was lying under her and, consequently, she was lying on top of me" (p. 180). Causally

convoluted episodes (such as that of the jilted, plotting Madame de Pommeraye) are not demonstrations of pedestrian moral lessons such as "crime does not pay," as Lom asserts.²⁸ Rather, they illustrate the artificiality of our causal interpretations as well as the ultimate impotence of our predictions, since outcomes can defy even our most calibrated expectations. In keeping with the character of his materialist skepticism, *Jacques's* plot is constantly thwarting our expectations—not because it departs from truth, but because it adheres so faithfully to it.

Unfortunately for the reader, the unpredictability of reality does not thereby make it interesting. Whenever the reader is tempted to think that something exciting is finally about to happen (as meretricious novels have conditioned him to expect), the narrator takes a different course. Life is not, after all, thematically appropriate. Diderot is so gleefully anticlimactic that he seems intent on *disappointing* us into becoming free thinkers. When Jacques and his master see a group of men pursuing them, the conditioned reader might expect them to be the vengeful ruffians from the inn whom Jacques had threatened at gunpoint only the night before. But no, the reader is told, "Our two travelers were not pursued. I've no idea what happened at the inn after they left" (p. 12). The narrator repeats this anticlimactic tactic again and again: first tempting the reader with several exciting options for the story's plot—Dump them in a ditch?! Get in a fight?! Fall in love with the same woman?!—but no, the narrator reports again and again,

²⁸ Petr Lom, *The Limits of Doubt: The Moral and Political Implications of Skepticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001) p. 26.

"nothing like that actually happened" (p. 212). When we think Jacques might have found his long-lost horse, Destiny, we are deflated to hear:

“Now Reader, if you’re thinking that this horse is the horse that was stolen from Jacques’s Master you’d be wrong. That’s how it would happen in a novel sooner or later, in this way or in another. But this isn’t a novel, as I think I’ve already told you and now repeat.” (p. 34).

This may be anticlimactic, but Diderot would not deign to make *Jacques* more conventionally entertaining; to confirm our expectations would leave us just as woefully determined as before.

Another way Diderot prevents the text from determining the reader is by conscientiously employing *uncatchy* language. When a character in *Jacques* calls out, "But what the devil was she doing standing on the doorstep?" the narrator proudly observes that this sentence is too inelegant to become anyone’s catchphrase, as was the case with Molière’s memorable remark, "What the devil was she doing on the ship?" (p. 14). Characters in novels always seem to come up with just the right phrases, but Diderot’s prose is as clunky as our everyday speech. By refusing to stamp us with his own turns of phrases, Diderot avoids the subtle systemization of popular language. If it has a nice ring to it, it rings false.

Diderot also seems purposely ambiguous so as to oblige the reader to be creative. The details of Jacques’s and his master’s trip are left deliberately—even defiantly—obscure, and when the reader asks the narrator to fill in the details, she is met with an attitude of philosophical nonchalance: "Where were they going? Does anyone really know where they’re going?" (p. 5). The lack of physical direction for the characters

results in an epistemological disorientation for the reader, who has come to expect certain information in her novels, information which she can use to infer intentions and predict future events. Such ambiguity is a reflection of the skepticism consequent to Diderot's materialism. Just as dynamic matter and limited faculties of perception yield only imperfect knowledge of the world, his literary style leaves information intentionally vague. Yet skepticism and ambiguity are not shortcomings. Quite the opposite: they are the prerequisites for freedom. Where we do not *know*, we can create. Bourdin (1999) argues that Diderot employs skeptical literary devices so that readers might remain slightly detached from his theses. This prevents his work from being another determining system for readers and leaves them freedom to embark on imaginative and positively conjectural activities. Skeptical literary devices introduce ambiguity that distances us from more strictly logical, scientific modes of thought in order to nourish our philosophical imaginations. In this way, ambiguity actually has a positive, creative philosophical function.²⁹ Lacking clear interpretive signposts, the reader is compelled to a creative effort of her own.

Diderot is also purposely ambiguous regarding which character's perspective represents his own. They all seem to contain a piece of Diderot, but because their conflicting views make the author's perspective unclear, he can present his views without worrying that we will uncritically adopt them. If one's intention is for readers to think for themselves, being direct about one's perspective actually undermines that goal. And

²⁹ Jean-Claude Bourdin, "Matérialisme et scepticisme chez Diderot," *Recherches sur Diderot et sur L'Encyclopédie*, (1999): 91.

though it may be tempting to conflate the narrator with the author himself, Diderot makes the narrator conspicuously unreliable in order to undermine that potential equivalence. “I don’t like lying,” the narrator reassures us, “unless it’s useful or I have my back against a wall” (p. 52). The narrator also unfaithfully reports Jacques’s conversation, putting too-fancy words in his mouth (as if Jacques’s vocabulary would include “engastrimyth” and “hydrophobic”!) (p. 224). Having ensured that his own perspective remains ambiguous, we are prevented from simply adopting Diderot’s view and are compelled to use our reason to construct our own perspectives.³⁰

In addition to eliciting conscious reflection, Duflo (2008) argues that the partitioning of Diderot’s self into different characters is a logical literary consequence of his materialism: the self, after all, is only apparently a material unity, but the multiplicity of perspectives betrays the manifold nature of the biological self.³¹ The readers, too, are made to undergo this rupture of self, as the perspective of the fictional reader embedded in the narrative contrasts with their own.

Another literary result of Diderot’s skeptical materialist commitment is his dialogic form, which realistically emulates the ebb and flow of thought. This is, incidentally, one reason for his admiration of Montaigne, whose loose style faithfully represents the connections of the mind. Though Montaigne’s thoughts seem to begin and end without cause, Diderot argues in his entry “Scepticisme, ou Pyrrhonisme” that in fact

³⁰ This argument echoes Alexander Nehamas’s point about Nietzsche: his variation in style allowed him to communicate his ideas while also implying their contingent nature, thus leaving room for the reader’s own use of reason. Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

³¹ Colas Duflo, “Le moi-multiple,” *Archives de philosophie* 1 (2008): 95-110.

a necessary connection exists between even the most disparate thoughts. “This liaison is either in sensation, in words, in memory, either within or outside a man,” he writes (p. 252). However much consciousness may follow from causes, this does not thereby make it more orderly or traceable. Emile Faguet’s 1892 critique was one of the earliest to connect the disorderly style of *Jacques* to the true representation of consciousness, and Mayoux (1936), Loy (1950), and Sherman (1976) have subsequently noted it.³²

Diderot’s dialogic form is not only more realistic, but more importantly, it provides the *aporia* wherein the reader can reflect for herself. Diderot’s stories require an actively participating listener, so providing interludes in narration allow for the reader’s moral reflection; each temporary suppression of the narrative consciousness allows the reader the critical distance necessary for moral reflection grounded in real life (Edmiston 1981). The dialogic style inherently refrains from stating conclusions or providing answers, so that the reader’s own consciousness might integrate the world into a coherent whole. Dialogue connects the reader to facts, but it also invites the reflection that Diderot believes endows the facts with meaning and utility—a process that yields moral and political reform.³³

³² Émile Faguet, *Dix-huitième siècle: études littéraires* (Paris: Lecène, Oudin et Cie, 1892), pp. 310-11; J-J. Mayoux, "Diderot and the technique of modern literature," *The Modern Language Review* (1936): 518-531; Carol Sherman, *Diderot and the art of the dialogue*, (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1976): vol. 156.

³³ For more on the connection between dialogue and political reform, see Dena Goodman, "The Structure of Political Argument in Diderot's *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*" *Diderot Studies*, 21 (1983): 123-37.

Conclusion

The idiom that Diderot develops in *Jacques* is new because it is intended to communicate a new basis for philosophical knowledge. The predictable idiom of the novel could not communicate the chaotic quality of the material universe.³⁴ Diderot's disruptive literary style follows logically from the dynamic Epicurean materialist view. In order to create space for freedom and thus moral and political agency, Diderot's style and form causes us to recognize our own determined situation so that we might reflect on and intervene in the chain of our own causality, thereby becoming co-determiners of our own universe. Disrupting our expectations, then, makes room for the work of reason, self-determination, and freedom.³⁵ In Diderot's view, being less constrained to a strict linear logic makes the work more realistic, not less. The ambiguity in *Jacques* leaves room for the reader's creative effort. It does not give philosophical arguments in the form of proofs, but it is nevertheless a compelling philosophical medium because it furnishes lacuna that allow for skepticism and conscious reflection, whereas other styles of writing may determine the reader's conscious reflection and fail to encourage the reader to make a conscious intervention in her own causality.

³⁴ This runs counter to Strugnell's (1973) assertions that Diderot's attempts at fiction are meant as aesthetic attempts and have only limited philosophical value. This author can find no basis for such a view. Anthony Strugnell, *Diderot's Politics: A Study of the Evolution of Diderot's Political Thought After the Encyclopedie* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973).

³⁵ Loy (1950) argues that Diderot's idea of the free individual who manages to co-determine the universe is a critique of Spinoza, whom Diderot thought never understood the possibility for development in matter.

In this way, Diderot's literary experiment provokes us into overcoming the moral limitations of materialist determinism. If Diderot's goal were to communicate a message or to teach a lesson, a more straightforward form would suffice. But there is an inherent contradiction in an author ordering a reader to think for herself—*Sapere aude!*—or in explaining step-by-step how one might become a free thinker. Nor could a philosophy of freedom and individual reason employ a literary form that treated the reader as a passive receptacle to be filled. Directness and clarity are virtues in philosophical writing, but so are skepticism and ambiguity: where one does not have truth or clear meaning, one must question, explore, and create for oneself.

This view assumes a certain view of philosophy: that philosophy cannot be exhausted by our assumptions, premises, logical arguments, and conclusions; that it requires a living, thinking audience; that the purpose of philosophy is not to conform our understanding to that of another, but to develop understanding for ourselves. When philosophy is written down in static, unyielding text, philosophy's dynamic character is threatened. But philosophy is above all an engagement, not a report.³⁶ How to ensure, then, this engagement? I have suggested here that Diderot's disruptive writing style was intended to disrupt reader expectations and provoke the reader into confronting and reflecting on her own determined character. The point of *Jacques* is not to be found *in* the text, where all is determined, but rather in the reader's transformation occasioned by textual engagement, which is skeptical, indeterminate, and creative.

³⁶ For a similar view, see Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998).

Yet, unorthodox style is likely to be dismissed or misunderstood. Much more often than not, *Jacques*'s readers did not find Diderot's style and form to be acceptable, much less credible and authoritative. His innovative literary idiom was, in most of his contemporaries' views, an illegitimate contribution to the public sphere. Diderot wanted to forge an alternative basis for authority by provoking his readers to conscious reflection on empirical reality. He mostly failed, at least at first, because the social and intellectual institutions that would make such an idiom seem legitimate were not yet developed. Diderot's example should encourage us as readers to be open to granting legitimacy to unorthodox styles and forms of expression. After all, if his contemporaries had been less wedded to traditional idioms of literary authority, they may have found philosophical value in *Jacques*.

Conclusion: Openness to Style and Form

In highlighting the ways in which writing style and form may serve as proxies for authority, I do not mean to suggest that this is the only function of style and form, or that authority is only conveyed through style and form. I simply wanted to consider how the ways in which we use language can serve as a proxy for authority, and also how authors may use language strategically so as to convey authority. I would like to conclude, however, by considering the consequences of style, form, and authority for us as readers. In my view, reflecting on the effect of style and form for our understanding, and especially the ways in which style and form may cause us to cede more or less authority to a text, is an important component of doing philosophy. After all, when we dismiss a text because it fails to conform to our own perspective of what an authoritative text looks like, we forfeit the possibility of that text provoking us to further investigation. Moreover, when we cede too much authority to the text, we forfeit our own critical ability. Are there certain styles and forms that we dismiss as intrinsically irrational, superficial, or insufficiently unphilosophical? Are there certain styles and forms that we assume too readily to be authoritative? How might our prejudices regarding authoritative idioms limit the scope of our thinking or marginalize certain people or ideas?

Consider the way in which Rosemarie Colie's describes the effect of Locke's essay style on his readers: "Crisp and aphoristic or loose and ramblish, the essayist spoke directly and personally to his readers; in exchange for the frankness with which the essayist appeared to present his thinking self, he was allowed certain liberties from

logical rigour.”¹ The essayistic style, in Colie’s view, promotes the readers’ congeniality towards the text, and in doing so the essay causes readers to grant Locke’s imperfect logic an authority it would not otherwise have. In a similar vein, Davide Panagia argues that the popularity of the essay style in the eighteenth century signaled a less linear approach to political discourse, exposing ambiguities that orthodoxy would smooth over. The essay form’s transgressive logic “repudiates the hierarchical architectonic of power characteristic of the logic of sovereignty” and creates “the conditions of possibility for critical engagement and political action.”² In Panagia’s view, the relatively ambiguous essay form embodies the irresolvable difference inherent in democratic life and draws attention to the rational discourse that restricts democratic action by legitimizing only certain forms of discourse. If Locke’s readers had been unwilling to engage with his ideas because of a narrow, intransigent notion of what constitutes rational, authoritative style and form, they would have missed out on Locke’s ideas.

Ceding too much authority?

Perhaps Locke’s readers risked not giving enough authority to his essay. But what if readers give too much authority to a text? This idea animates much of the debate surrounding Nietzsche’s aphorisms. His aphorisms are short, often shocking and interrogative, always chthonic, and more or less independent of other aphorisms. What

¹ Rosalie Colie, "John Locke: The Essayist in his *Essay*," Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969, pp. 234-261; p. 238.

² Davide Panagia, *The Poetics of Political Thinking*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2006, p. 101.

are readers to make of this style? Commentators vary in their interpretations. Walter Kaufmann argues that the disjointed, independent nature of his aphorisms conveys Nietzsche's antagonism to systematic thinking, but is also grounded in a holistic experimental mode: the short stabs at wisdom mimic hypotheses to be tested, and their abrupt endings leave the reader to evaluate them.³ In Kaufmann's view, then, Nietzsche's aphorisms do not demand that readers cede their interpretive authority. Indeed, they put the authority in the reader's capacity for reflection. Aphorisms are form of writing that allow Nietzsche to relinquish his authority over the reader.

Similar to Kaufmann, Alexander Nehamas argues that Nietzsche's aphorisms have a hyperbolic quality that makes each aphorism both conspicuous and independent. Thus separated, aphorisms lack the ability to become a narrative or a premise in an argument.⁴ Nehamas also notes that Nietzsche employs myriad styles and forms of writing, and he argues that this proliferation of style and form is actually a method for resolving a central problem in his work: how to preach against dogmatism without being dogmatic himself. Nehamas writes:

“[H]e wants his readers to accept his views, his judgments and his values as much as he wants them to know that these are essentially *his* views, *his* judgments, and *his* values...[He desires] to have as readers only those who will always be aware of the nature of his views, and of all views in general.”⁵

³ Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Anti-Christ*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950. See especially chapter 2, “Nietzsche's Method.”

⁴ Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, Boston: Harvard University Press, 1985, p. 23.

⁵ Nehamas 1985, p. 35.

The salience of style in all of Nietzsche's works encourages the reader to view his works as interpretations. In this way, Nietzsche makes it so that his works cannot be viewed as final authorities or sacred texts. In Nehamas's view, style is an important way that Nietzsche manages to eschew authority and invite the reader to create her own interpretation.

But what if Nietzsche's style and form actively promote the suppression of the reader's interpretive ability? Cannot readers forfeit a critical opportunity by conforming themselves so completely to a style that it overcomes their own thought? Kathleen Merrow, for example, argues that Nietzsche's rhythmic style is calculated to overpower his audience's reason by imbuing his prose with a sense of an occult ritual: "Rhythm has a physiological basis as a pulse or beat that over time was transposed into more abstract forms. This is the source of its compelling power, first in ritual and dance, later in poetry and prose."⁶ In Merrow's view, Nietzsche's rhythmic style is a negation of freedom, a method of brainwashing by engendering, "an unconquerable urge to yield and join in; not only our feet...but the soul."⁷

If this occult compulsion is what we interpret the style and form of a text to be conveying, ought we to cede our interpretive authority to the text and allow ourselves to be swept along? I do not think so. Even if we agree with Merrow that Nietzsche's style evokes an "unconquerable urge to yield," this does not equate to an imperative to let

⁶ Kathleen Merrow, "'The Meaning of Every Style': Nietzsche, Demosthenes, Rhetoric," *Rhetorica* 21:4 (2003) pp. 285-307; p. 298.

⁷ Merrow, p. 299.

ourselves be hypnotized. Considering how style and form make a text seem more or less authoritative can help us approach a text as a more effective dialogic partner, but if certain styles and forms seek to deprive us as readers of any authority at all, we need not simply give in. Readers should reflect on the power dynamics that style and form may imply, not simply accept the power dynamics style and form imply.

I do not mean to suggest that there are “correct” interpretations of the authority that style and form implies. Whether or not certain styles and forms are perceived as authoritative may vary according to the individual, and it may change over time. Colie and Panagia suggest that Locke’s essay form was ambiguous for the time, but it is difficult today to think of a more canonical author. In the case of Diderot, *Jacques the Fatalist* was not perceived as a legitimate, authoritative style of literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but it found broad acceptance in the twentieth. As for Toland, biblical criticism and liturgy have found an accepting audience throughout much of history, but only with a segment of society.

Interpretations vary

Because the authority connected to certain idioms is variable, we need not be too attached to our own interpretations of the authority of a style and form. In an illuminating discussion between Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thebaud in *Just Gaming*, Thebaud remarks that the style of Lyotard's *L'Economie libidinale* allows very little negotiation with the reader, such that its take-it-or leave-it quality excludes the possibility

of dialogue.⁸ Lyotard concedes that, "insofar as it does not lend itself to dialogue, it perpetrates a kind of violence," but Lyotard defends his style, arguing that it was never intended to suppress dialogue. In fact, he had intended to disrupt the connection between Platonic dialogue and power. His own statements, "barely controlled in themselves," and "drawn up more in the spirit of the bottle tossed into the ocean," were intended to give authority to the reader.⁹ However, as much as Lyotard may have intended for his style to challenge what he considers the violent authority of a previous style, Thebaud remains unconvinced. To him, Lyotard's style is still difficult and imperious. Ultimately, their perspectives on authority, style, and form are incommensurable.

Thebaud's and Lyotard's exchange demonstrates that we need not arrive at a consensus for how to interpret style and form. Rather, debating the consequences of style and form for our thinking may disclose new and critical perspectives of a text. We may find that, by writing off a certain kind of style and form, we also close ourselves off to new perspectives. Thebaud has not *mis*interpreted Lyotard's style when he experiences it as violence, but, in light of their conversation, he might try to re-approach the text, this time trying to experience the style as a spur to interpretive freedom, as Lyotard indicates was his intention. Still, if Thebaud still experiences Lyotard's style as a kind of epistemological violence, he may put the book down and read another. I would recommend that he not put the book down too conclusively, however. The traditions of

⁸ Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thebaud. *Just Gaming: Theory and History of Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

⁹ Lyotard and Thebaud 1985, 4-5.

interpretations in which we live are not inert, and we are not bound inextricably to our previous stylistic prejudices.

There is no one superior style

Just as dismissing an idiom as unauthoritative can forfeit a potential critical engagement, so can insisting too much on the superior authority of a certain idiom. Nussbaum, for example, privileges thickly contextualized narratives so much that she fails to recognize how other styles and forms of writing may also lead to valid and valuable ethical insight. "Only the style of a certain sort of narrative artist" she writes, "can adequately state certain important truths about the world, embodying them in its shape and setting up in the reader the activities that are appropriate for grasping them."¹⁰ This unique cognitive exercise causes the thoughtful reader to perform an empathic transposition of self into the other, and the performance of this reflective exercise is critical—indeed, indispensable—to gaining the kind of ethical knowledge to which Nussbaum aspires. My own approach certainly agrees with Nussbaum in so far as the style and form of writing are assumed to be able to encourage certain reflective activities in a reader. However, Nussbaum errs in arguing that her own preferred style and form ought to be recognized as the most authoritative, at least for the purposes of ethical reflection, and this leaves her shortsighted with regard to style and form. For example, to Nussbaum, Samuel Beckett's austere plays are written in an ethically bankrupt idiom. The approach to style and form that I advocate here, however, suggests that a reader

¹⁰ Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, p. 6.

would benefit from reflecting on how unexpected, disturbing, or even unintelligible styles and forms might actually be spurs to reflection—disrupting ossified or hegemonic notions about what kinds of expression can be authoritative. In the case of Beckett, we might follow Stanley Cavell’s example and consider how his style and form fragment the coherence of our social and ethical visions, thereby affirming our ability to create meaning. Beckett, like the authors Nussbaum admires, encourages ethical reflection through his stylistic choices, but recognizing this means expanding our notions of what kinds of writing are legitimate and authoritative. Ultimately, Nussbaum is interested in the connection between literary form and style because of its potential to weave a specific narrative of the Good, whereas I am concerned with its ability to expand the scope of our thought, challenge the limits of our knowledge, and think creatively about ethical, social, and political life. The tendency to dismiss styles and forms of writing that we do not immediately understand or appreciate can cause us to forfeit a portion of a text’s ability to provoke us to further investigation.

A critical, inclusive, and pluralistic public sphere

I have argued that readers ought to reflect on how the style and form of a text causes them to perceive a text as authoritative or not. Toland, the *Journal des Dames*, and Diderot have illuminated how various style and form might be used to appropriate, alter, or challenge prevailing notions about the relationship between style and form and authority. In this conclusion, I have further suggested that readers ought to reflect on how

their own perceptions of style, form, and authority might cause them to miss out on engagements with knowledge.

This perspective implicitly assumes that there is a range of emotional, social, and reflective dispositions that can justly be considered philosophical. The scope of our thinking is limited when we insist that understanding must be accomplished within a narrowly prescribed range of styles and forms. Reading a broad range of texts and learning to see past our own linguistic prejudices can expose us to more creative philosophic enterprises and expand the scope of our own thought. If readers had been more willing to question their prejudices about style and authority and had been open to seeing authority in unexpected styles and forms, they might have found *Jacques the Fatalist* as fascinating as did later generations, the women of the *Journal des Dames* would not have had to restrict themselves to certain “feminine” kinds of discourse, and Toland would have been able to state his opinions plainly. Being open to seeing unorthodox styles and forms as legitimate and authoritative can lead us, ultimately, to a more critical, inclusive, and pluralistic public sphere.

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