

‘THE MUTE WHO SPEAKS’:  
WOMEN’S VOICES ON ART IN PREREVOLUTIONARY FRANCE

by

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## Abstract

Although only a handful of Salon reviews by women survive from the Old Regime, the pamphlets of the 1770s and 1780s present us with wild fantasies of femininity as critic after critic chose to ventriloquise the voices of female Salon-goers: fictional noblewomen, ingénues, brash *bourgeoises*, simple flower sellers, frivolous coquettes, goddesses, and mythological figures. They took their place in a parade of virtues and vices, acting out a constant interrogation of women's participation in the public sphere of the Salon. At the same time, female viewers continued to comment on the arts in other contexts, leaving traces of alternative forms of viewership that have gone largely unnoticed because they fall outside the accepted bounds of art criticism. This thesis examines how the prerevolutionary Salon literature used female voices to define and limit the terms of women's participation in artistic discourse, making a case for the centrality of the enforcement of sexual difference to the development of art criticism as a genre. What was at stake in writing art criticism 'as a man' or 'as a woman'? How did women, under such scrutiny, forge a place for their own discourse on art? And how might our view of the Old Regime art public change when we consider the extent to which it was in fact constituted through and in reaction to the voices of real and imagined women?

Part I of my thesis focuses on men writing women, surveying the use of female characters in the art-critical pamphlet literature of the Old Regime. For art critics, working in an upstart genre that remained profoundly ambivalent about its own legitimacy, these fictional women served as mouthpieces and as scapegoats—vehicles for the criticism of art and women alike. Supplementing the survey is a case study of a particularly interesting critic, Robert-Martin Lesuire (1737-1815), whose female protagonists include a fourteen-year-old Creole girl, a mute young woman, and Dibutades, the mythical Greek maiden who invented the art of painting.

Part II looks at women's own commentary on art. Sophie Arnould, a star of the Paris Opéra, left behind no writing about art, but her many quips on the subject were eagerly reported by the press. I posit Arnould's numerous *bon mots* as a marginal art-critical oeuvre, one that—despite its unverifiable authenticity—circulated widely in her name both orally and in the press. These anecdotes are a complex study in authorship, ventriloquism, and the reception of art by an educated denizen of the Old Regime demi-monde. Finally, I turn to Henriette-Louise Dionis, who in 1777 published a collection of pastoral and erotic works including a short fable inspired by Jean-Baptiste Greuze's famous allegory of lost virginity, *The broken pitcher*. Dionis's text—an interesting counterpoint to Diderot's conversation with Greuze's *Girl with a dead canary* at the Salon of 1767—provides us with a female viewer's response to a painting best known as an invitation to heterosexual male voyeurism.

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## Table of contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of contents.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Chapter one: Writing women at the Salon.....	30
<i>Coup d'œil of the Salon crowd</i> .....	34
<i>Gender and art-critical authority</i> .....	43
<i>Women of taste</i> .....	61
<i>Tasteless women</i> .....	73
<i>Women's voices</i> .....	94
Chapter two: Robert-Martin Lesuire (1736-1815): the great ventriloquist.....	101
<i>Robert-Martin Lesuire</i> .....	103
<i>Salon of 1775: the blind man</i> .....	108
<i>Salon of 1777: Aglantine, or the ingénue</i> .....	116
<i>Salon of 1779: François Lemoyne, the painter's ghost</i> .....	121
<i>Salon of 1781: The mute who speaks</i> .....	123
<i>Salon of 1783: Dibutades</i> .....	132
Chapter three: Souvenirs of Sophie Arnould (1740-1802): anecdote as art history.....	144
<i>Conversation with the Saint-Aubins</i> .....	148
<i>At the Salon</i> .....	155
<i>In the boudoir</i> .....	158
<i>The bust of Clairon</i> .....	160
<i>Arnould the collector</i> .....	164
<i>Marat / Sophie</i> .....	169
<i>From anecdote to history</i> .....	173
Chapter four: Henriette-Louise Dionis (1751-1835): in conversation with the Greuze girl..	175
<i>The broken pitcher</i> .....	182
<i>'À Monsieur Cochin'</i> .....	193
Conclusion.....	197
Appendix one: Arnould on art in <i>Arnoldiana</i> .....	202
Appendix two: Dionis on art in <i>Origine des Grâces</i> .....	211
Bibliography.....	216
Illustrations.....	228

## Introduction

To Women. Mesdames,

In this pleasant century, shining with the successes and the glory of my Sex, why would I condemn myself to the shameful silence of false timidity, or to ignorance? I am a Frenchwoman and a Painter; I have a right to your confidence, your acceptance, and that of the Public; but I will accept neither yours, nor its: I want to earn it. And if this frivolous Work does not obtain these things for me, then my redoubled efforts, the vivacity, the indefatigability of my ardour, will wrest it from you and from all my Contemporaries. I will truly convince this haughty sex, which still doubts the moral powers of Women, that we have been, are, and always will be able to march proudly as its equals in the career of the Arts and Sciences. My ambition is not mad...

—‘Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S.’, *Avis important d’une femme sur le Sallon de 1785*<sup>1</sup>

If a Painter wishes to instruct his daughter in his Art, he will never plan to make her a History Painter; he will be sure to tell her she may only pretend to the genre of portraiture, miniature or flowers. Thus he discourages her, and extinguishes the spark of her imagination. She will paint only roses; she was perhaps born to paint Heroes! Likewise, if a man of Letters has a daughter who shows a mind and a taste for poetry, he will cultivate these happy dispositions; but his first care will be to efface from his Pupil the confidence that sustains courage, and the ambition that surmounts difficulties. One prescribes the genre she must practise. [...] [T]he Teacher traces a tight circle around his young Pupil that he forbids her to dare move beyond. Had she the genius of Corneille or Racine, one would repeat to her constantly: Write only *Novels*, *Idylls*, and *Madrigals*.

—Félicité de Genlis, *Les Veillées du château*<sup>2</sup>

Nowadays, Women write Journals: nobody reads them, and they do well not to. [...] Women are becoming the judges of everything that has to do with genius, and the Observer laughs about this.

—Joly de Saint-Just, *Promenades d’un Observateur au Salon de l’année 1787*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Avis important d’une femme sur le Sallon de 1785*, par Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S., 1785, 3–4. ‘Dans ce siècle aimable, brillant des succès & de la gloire de mon Sexe, pourquoi me condamnerois-je au silence honteux d’une fausse timidité ou de l’ignorance? Je suis Femme Française & Peintre ; j’ai droit à votre confiance, à votre accueil, & à celui du Public ; mais je n’accepte ni le vôtre, ni le sien : je veux le mériter. Et si ce frivole Ouvrage ne me les obtient pas, mes essais, mes efforts multipliés, la vivacité, l’infatigabilité de mon ardeur, les arracheront à vous & à tous mes Contemporains. Je convaincrâi décidément ce sexe hautain, qui doute encore des puissance morales des Femmes, que nous avons pu, que nous pouvons, que nous pourrons toujours, dans la carrière des Arts & des Sciences, marcher fièrement ces [sic] égales. Mon ambition n’est pas folle [...].’

<sup>2</sup> Félicité de Genlis, *Les veillées du château, ou cours de morale, à l’usage des enfans. Par l’auteur d’Adèle et Théodore* (London: G.G. & J. Robinson, 1796), iii: 205-206. First published 1782-1784. ‘Un Peintre veut-il instruire sa fille dans son Art, il n’aura jamais le projet d’en faire un Peintre d’Histoire: il lui répétera bien qu’elle ne doit prétendre qu’au genre du portrait, de la miniature ou des fleurs. C’est ainsi qu’il la décourage, et qu’il éteint en elle le feu de l’imagination. Elle ne peindra que des roses: elle était née peut-être pour peindre les héros! De même un homme de Lettres a-t-il une fille qui annonce de l’esprit et du goût pour les vers, il cultivera ces dispositions heureuses: mais son premier soin sera de ravir à son Elève la confiance qui soutient le courage, et l’ambition qui fait surmonter des difficultés. On lui prescrit le genre dans lequel elle doit s’exercer. [...] [L]’Instituteur trace autour de sa jeune Elève un cercle étroit qu’il lui défend d’oser franchir. Eût-elle le génie de Corneille ou de Racine, on lui répétera constamment: Ne faites que des *Romans*, des *Idylles*, des *Madrigaux*.’

<sup>3</sup> Louis-Antoine-Léon Joly de Saint-Just, *Promenades d’un observateur au Salon de l’année 1787* (London & Paris, 1787), 6, 7. ‘Aujourd’hui les Dames font des Journaux: personne ne les lit, & on fait fort bien.’ ‘Les Dames deviennent les arbitres de tout ce qui a quelque rapport au génie, & l’Observateur en rit.’

Prerevolutionary French art criticism was a masculine affair if we consider its writers alone. But although only a handful of Salon reviews by women survive from this period, the question of women's participation lay at the heart of eighteenth-century debates about the place of the still-emerging genre. The pamphlets of the 1770s and 1780s present us with a phantasmagoria of femininity as critic after critic chose to ventriloquise the voices of female Salon-goers: fictional noblewomen, ingénues, brash *bourgeoises*, simple flower sellers, frivolous coquettes, goddesses, and mythological figures. Far from being a mere stylistic flourish, art critics' use of female characters played a defining role in shaping the limits of acceptable public expression. The Académie Royale's biennial Salon, instituted to showcase the achievements of French artistic production under the king's patronage, found itself at the centre of a debate about the state of French culture and the French nation. Art criticism, by its very nature, pushed at the limits of polite expression by voicing public critique of an exhibition that demanded public admiration. For critics, unable to publish under their own names in an upstart genre that remained profoundly ambivalent about its own legitimacy, fictional characters served as mouthpieces and as scapegoats. In this context, fictional women took their place in a parade of virtues and vices, acting out a constant interrogation of women's participation in the public sphere of the Salon. What was at stake in writing art criticism 'as a man' or 'as a woman'? And under such scrutiny, how did women forge a place for their own discourse on art?

Only a very small number of women are known to have been active in the male-dominated genre of journalistic art criticism during the Old Regime. All addressed a specifically female readership. Three were editors of the *Journal des dames*, a monthly periodical aimed at women of the court. From the early 1760s to the mid-1770s, the journal's editors included three women: Madame de Beaumer (1720?-1766; editor from 1761-1763), Catherine de Maisonneuve (1710?-1774; editor from 1763-1764), and Marie de Montanclos

(1736-1812; editor from 1774-1775).<sup>4</sup> A successful publication, the *Journal des dames* was feminist—sometimes radically—in its outlook, promoting the intellectual and educational equality of women as well as their professional independence. The journal’s art coverage took different forms under each different editor, incorporating reader submissions, excerpts from other publications, and original criticism: exhibition reviews, descriptions of important new works of art, collectors’ guides to new prints, and notes on women artists active in Paris. It also contains one of the eighteenth century’s most extraordinary feats of art-critical self-censorship. The journal’s review of the Salon of 1763, published under Maisonneuve’s editorship, announces that it will ‘speak only of the works most interesting to ladies’, later clarifying: ‘It is for connoisseurs to praise or to censure all these works [...]. The limits that I have prescribed for myself do not permit me to discuss their works.’<sup>5</sup> The reviewer is true to their word: two paragraphs describing the paintings of Madame Vien (Marie-Thérèse Reboul) are followed by an almost entirely uncommented list of works exhibited at the Salon. The reason for this extreme hesitancy lies largely, as this thesis will show, in the art-critical literature’s construction of authority and connoisseurship as not only elite but masculine traits.

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<sup>4</sup> For extracts of the art criticism published in the *Journal des dames*, as well as critical introductions on each of these three editors, see Anne Lafont et al., eds., *Plumes et pinceaux: discours de femmes sur l’art en Europe (1750-1850) — anthologie* (Paris: Publications de l’INHA, 2012), <http://books.openedition.org/inha/2907>. On the *Journal* and its editors, see Nina Rattner Gelbart, *Feminine and opposition journalism in old regime France: the “Journal des dames”* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1987); “The Journal des dames and its female editors: politics, censorship, feminism in the Old Regime press,” in *Press and politics in pre-Revolutionary France*, ed. Jack Censer and Jeremy D. Popkin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 24–74; “Les femmes journalistes et la presse (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle),” in *Histoire des femmes en Occident*, by Michèle Perrot and Georges Duby, vol. 3. XVIe-XVIIIe siècle, ed. Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge (Paris: Plon, 1991), 491–512; Evelyne Sullerot, *Histoire de la presse féminine en France des origines à 1848* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966); Caroline Rimbault, *La Presse féminine française au XVIIIe siècle* (Amsterdam & Maarssen: APA-Holland University Press, 1988); Suzanna van Dijk, *Traces de femmes: présence féminine dans le journalisme français du XVIIIe siècle* (Amsterdam & Maarssen: Holland University Press, 1988); Suzanna van Dijk and Patricia A. Clancy, “Journal des dames,” in *Dictionnaire des journaux (1600-1789)*, ed. Jean Sgard, accessed February 4, 2021, <http://dictionnaire-journaux.gazettes18e.fr/journal/0697-journal-des-dames>.

<sup>5</sup> Lafont et al., *Plumes et pinceaux — anthologie*, “Mme de Maisonneuve, Journal des dames, 1763-1767 [extraits choisis]: ‘Salon de peinture’ (août-octobre 1763)”, 2, 28.



The fourth ostensibly female art critic of the Old Regime published only one work: the *Avis important d'une femme sur le Sallon* ('Important opinion of a woman on the Salon'), published in 1785 by the pseudonymous 'Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S', and quoted in the epigraph to this thesis.<sup>6</sup> In all the pamphlet art criticism of the Old Regime, this work alone presents itself as the work of a female author and narrator, addressing herself to female readers: 'Dedicated to women', reads the title page. Though the author's identity remains unknown, with nothing but the text to judge by, I see no reason why it should not be treated as a female-authored text.<sup>7</sup> More detailed and more polemical than the art criticism published in the *Journal des dames*, the *Avis important* inscribes itself in the feminist tradition of the journal's most radical editors, Beaumer and Montanclos, while also inscribing itself more directly in the developing art-critical genre. At least one reader, the engraver Johann Georg Wille, held the pamphlet in high esteem: he sent a copy to a correspondent at the Spanish court, calling it one of the 'most well-reasoned' critiques of 1785.<sup>8</sup> Yet it left barely a ripple in the surrounding literature, '[i]n spite of the presence, at the time, of political radicals who wrote art criticism and argued for the equality and fraternity of all men (but not women)'.<sup>9</sup>

Outside the genre of art criticism, the question of women's education in the arts was addressed by Madame de Genlis, whose wildly popular works of educational fiction posited a central role for the arts in children's development. Unlike Rousseau, who had prioritised the

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<sup>6</sup> *Avis important d'une femme*.

<sup>7</sup> Some have questioned the pamphlet's attribution to a woman, while others have simply assumed that it was written by a man. In the former category, see Mary D. Sheriff, *The exceptional woman: Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the cultural politics of art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 187–89; in the latter, see Sylvain Bédard, "Le nu s'expose: les académies peintes et la critique au Salon de 1785," in *Le Salon de l'Académie royale de peinture et sculpture: archéologie d'une institution*, ed. Isabelle Pichet (Paris: Hermann, 2014), 144, who refers to the writer in the masculine as "le salonnier." Vivian Cameron—unfortunately without mentioning her sources—has raised a tantalising possibility regarding the author's identity, writing: 'Speculation has it that she was a pupil of Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, perhaps a countess, and that the initials are an anagram.' Vivian P. Cameron, "Two 18th-century French art critics," *Woman's Art Journal* 5, no. 1 (1984): 11, note 2. For a discussion of Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S., see also Heather Belnap Jensen, "Portraitistes à la plume: women art critics in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France" (Ph.D., Lawrence, Kansas, University of Kansas, 2007), 47–49.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Richard Wrigley, *The origins of French art criticism from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 159.

<sup>9</sup> Cameron, "Two 18th-century French art critics," 9.

education of boys and the maintenance of sexual difference in *Émile*, Genlis—addressing herself to mothers in *Adèle et Théodore* (1782) and *Les Veillées du château* (1782-1784)—promoted the coeducation of girls and boys.<sup>10</sup> Her writing lays out the precepts of a private education taking place both within the home and outside it, emphasising the cultivation of morality, taste, and imagination through practical instruction in drawing, looking, and role-play. In the final volume of *Les Veillées du château*, the fictional Madame de Clémire visits the Salon of 1783 with her daughters, Caroline and Pulchérie (named after Genlis’s daughters). Madame de Clémire, in response to her daughters’ praise of the painter Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, censures those who had opposed her admission to the Académie Royale that year.<sup>11</sup> Their discussion lingers on the unfair treatment of women artists by male colleagues, critics, and historians, culminating in the passage that forms the second epigraph to this thesis, and—in the notes—in the formulation of an alternative art-historical canon centring women artists.<sup>12</sup> But except for the *Avis important d’une femme*, published the following year, Genlis’s arguments for the equal treatment of women artists found no echo in prerevolutionary art criticism.

It is remarkable that, despite the circulation of feminist ideas in female-authored texts, no trace of them is to be found in the rest of the art-critical pamphlet literature. Critics returned again and again to the subject of women, with roughly one fifth of all

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<sup>10</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, ou de l’éducation* (The Hague: Jean Néaulme, 1762); Félicité de Genlis, *Adèle et Théodore, ou lettres sur l’éducation*, 3 vols. (Paris: M. Lambert & F.J. Baudouin, 1782); Genlis, *Les veillées du château*. On the role of art in Genlis’s pedagogy, see Anne L. Schroder, “‘Elle était née pour peindre les héros!’: l’éducation artistique des filles et les femmes peintres vues par Mme de Genlis,” in *Plumes et pinceaux — essais*, ed. Mechthild Fend, Melissa Hyde, and Anne Lafont (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2012); Jensen, “Portraitistes à la plume,” 151–80; for a more general view of Genlis’s pedagogy for girls, see Isabelle Brouard-Arends, “Adèle et Théodore ou Lettres sur l’éducation de Mme de Genlis, une proposition au féminin pour le modèle éducatif des Lumières?,” in *Genre & éducation: former, se former, être formée au féminin*, ed. Bernard Bodinier et al. (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Presses universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2018), 299–306, <http://books.openedition.org/purh/1762>.

<sup>11</sup> For the biographical context of this passage—the contested, and ultimately failed, attempt to have Genlis admitted to the Académie Française, see Anne L. Schroder, “Going public against the Academy in 1784: Mme de Genlis speaks out on gender bias,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, no. 3 (1999): 376–82.

<sup>12</sup> Genlis, *Les veillées du château* vol. 3, pp. 200-207 (Salon), 302-305 (notes).

prerevolutionary Salon pamphlets featuring female characters (a figure that does not include the many additional texts that discuss women without affording them a speaking part). The proliferation of fictional women manifested deep-seated anxieties about women's place in the cultural life of France, at exactly the time when women artists and writers were beginning to assert a visible presence at the Salon. In the pamphlet literature, quite unlike the feminist art criticism of the *Journal des dames*, 'Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S', and Genlis, the inclusion of fictional female voices served not to question sexual difference but to reaffirm it.

Responding to a budding female presence and seeking reflexively to contain it, art critics began the work of codifying the feminine art-critical voice in earnest just a few decades before a significant number of women writers entered the genre. By ventriloquising female voices, they created the illusion that art criticism was a genre saturated by women, emphasising the 'threat' of feminine influence to justify their restriction of the terms of women's participation. Ranging from the satirical to the ideal, the female characters of Old Regime art criticism served as a counterbalance to the explicitly feminist output of the small number of women art critics who did, inevitably, take up their pens.

Feminist scholarship on late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France has undergone a major shift in direction in recent years. The pioneering works of the 1980s and 1990s posited the Old Regime as a time of qualified freedom for elite women, emphasising the porous quality of patriarchy under the system of absolute monarchy, where distinctions between private and public, personal and political were of necessity blurred by the merging of the body politic with the physical body of the king. Writers such as Joan Landes have mapped the rigidifying of gender roles following the Revolution, the terms of women's relegation to the home, and the constitutive role of misogyny in shaping the modern French public

sphere.<sup>13</sup> Having begun with great promise, the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary period failed women in many ways, silencing them and systematically expelling them from power and public life—from the dissolution of women’s political clubs in 1793 to the institution of the restrictive Napoleonic *Code civil* of 1804. Yet against this backdrop of women’s legal and political subordination, a picture has begun to emerge of a substantial increase in women’s access to the post-Revolutionary cultural sphere.

The sociologist-art historian Séverine Sofio has identified this period as the beginning of an ‘enchanted parenthesis’ for women artists in France. From the 1780s (witness the defining year of 1783, when two women painters, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, were controversially admitted to the Académie Royale on the same day), and beginning in earnest after the Revolution, the ‘enchanted parenthesis’ lasted until the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> During this time, Sofio argues, a ‘space of possibilities’ opened up, characterised by a relative lowering of barriers which enabled more women artists than ever to move towards professionalism.<sup>15</sup> Unlike those whose careers began under the Old Regime, most of whom were the daughters and wives of artists, women artists after the Revolution were increasingly likely to come from bourgeois and elite families outside the art world, in a sign of the newfound accessibility and respectability of art as a career. Between 1783 and 1791, the number of women artists exhibiting at the Exposition de la Jeunesse tripled.<sup>16</sup> And following the suppression of the Académie and the opening of the Salon to all artists during the Revolution, the number of female exhibitors leapt from three in the years prior to the Revolution (Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Adélaïde Labille-Guiard and Anne Vallayer-Coster) to

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<sup>13</sup> Joan B. Landes, *Women and the public sphere in the age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY & London: Cornell University Press, 1988); for a critique of too-rigid distinctions between the public and private spheres, see Dena Goodman, “Public sphere and private life: toward a synthesis of current historiographical approaches to the Old Regime,” *History and Theory* 31, no. 1 (1992): 1–20.

<sup>14</sup> Séverine Sofio, *Artistes femmes: la parenthèse enchantée, XVIIIe - XIXe siècles* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Sofio, *Artistes femmes*, 14: ‘l’espace des possibles’.

<sup>16</sup> Margaret A. Oppenheimer, “Women artists in Paris, 1791-1814” (Ph.D., New York, New York University, 1996), 9.

more than fifty in 1806.<sup>17</sup> Even when women artists were not seen as the equals of their male colleagues, their general acceptance shows the establishment of painting as a suitable pastime, and even profession, for women.<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, women's participation in published discourse soared during the 1790s and 1800s. In *The other Enlightenment: how French women became modern*, Carla Hesse reveals that between 1789 and 1800, the number of published works by women more than tripled, having remained stagnant during the last decades of the Old Regime.<sup>19</sup> The general pattern observed by Hesse also holds true for art criticism, as reflected in the makeup of the two major works on women and art criticism during this period. Of the dozen women art critics listed in Heather Belnap Jensen's doctoral thesis, 'Portraitistes à la plume: women art critics in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France', just three were active before the turn of the century, while the two volumes of *Plumes et pinceaux: discours de femmes sur l'art en Europe (1750-1850)*, despite the broad date range indicated in the title, are largely devoted to women active in the early nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> In other words, both women artists and

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<sup>17</sup> Oppenheimer, "Women artists in Paris," 2.

<sup>18</sup> Sofio, in the cover text of *Artistes femmes*, refers to this as 'the banalisation of a positive image of the woman artist' ('la banalisation d'un image positif de la dame artiste'). See also Paris Amanda Spies-Gans, "Exceptional, but not exceptions: public exhibitions and the rise of the woman artist in London and Paris, 1760–1830," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 51, no. 4 (July 28, 2018): 393–416; Vivian P. Cameron, "Woman as image and image-maker in Paris during the French Revolution" (Ph.D., New Haven, Yale University, 1983); Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Revolution, representation, equality: gender, genre, and emulation in the Académie Royale de Peinture et Sculpture, 1785-93," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31, no. 2 (1997): 153–74; Gen Doy, *Women and visual culture in nineteenth-century France, 1800-1852* (New York: Leicester University Press, 1998); Gen Doy, "Women and the bourgeois Revolution of 1789: artists, mothers and makers of (art) history," in *Femininity and masculinity in eighteenth-century art and culture*, ed. Gill Perry and Michael Rossington (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 184–203; Margaret Fields Denton, "A woman's place: the gendering of genres in post-revolutionary French painting," *Art History* 21, no. 2 (1998): 219–46.

See also Jules Guiffrey, "Écoles de demoiselles dans les ateliers de David et de Suvée au Louvre," in *Nouvelles archives de l'art français* (Paris, 1874), 395-?; Mary Vidal, "The 'other' atelier: Jacques-Louis David's female students," in *Women, art and the politics of identity in eighteenth-century Europe*, ed. Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 236–62; Mary D. Sheriff, "Jacques-Louis David and the ladies," in *Jacques-Louis David: new perspectives*, ed. Dorothy Johnson (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Carla Hesse, *The other Enlightenment: how French women became modern* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 37.

<sup>20</sup> Art criticism by women before 1800: Jensen, in "Portraitistes à la plume", lists the pseudonymous 'Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S.' in 1785 (pp. 47-49, 60-61), Marie-Madeleine Jodin (1741-1790) in 1790 (pp. 50-51), and Caroline Wuiet (1766-1835) from 1798 (pp. 53-56). On Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S. and Jodin, see also Cameron, "Two 18th-century French art critics." On Wuiet, see Calvert Johnson, "Caroline Wuiet: eighteenth-century French composer, journalist and novelist," *Woman of Note Quarterly* 2 (1994): 20–27; Heather Belnap

women writers—including art critics—exhibited and published at strikingly higher rates after the Revolution, raising interesting questions about the Old Regime’s reputation as the most ‘feminine’ of epochs.<sup>21</sup>

As Mary Sheriff describes in her essay on ‘rococo queens’, rococo art has been defined since the eighteenth century in ‘feminine’ terms, with its ‘charm, curvaceousness, delicacy, grace, and sensuality, but also excess, artifice and caprice.’<sup>22</sup> French moral, political and aesthetic debate in the decades before and after the French Revolution was rooted in deep-seated convictions about sexual difference.<sup>23</sup> Femininity/masculinity, privilege/egalitarianism, private/public, artifice/nature, corruption/morality, luxury/modesty, frivolity/seriousness, Boucher/David: the very familiarity of these sets of opposing terms sketches out the extent to which female and aristocratic influence were elided and jointly condemned. The backlash against the rococo style—a dominant theme of art criticism from

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Jensen, “‘C.W....académicienne’: Caroline Wuiet and the emergence of the woman art critic in postrevolutionary France,” in *Women art critics in nineteenth-century France: vanishing acts*, ed. Wendelin Ann Guentner (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013), 57–74. Lafont et al., *Plumes et pinceaux — anthologie* includes excerpts from Madame de Beaumer, Catherine de Maisonneuve and Marie de Montanclos, discussed above; Mechthild Fend et al., eds., *Plumes et pinceaux: discours de femmes sur l’art en Europe (1750-1850) — essais*, trans. Anne Lafont (Paris: Publications de l’INHA, 2012) for the period of the Old Regime, profiles the pedagogical works of Félicité de Genlis in the 1780s, and the archives of the art restorer Marie-Jacob Godefroid (c. 1705-1775).

<sup>21</sup> A view already prevalent during the eighteenth century, and later cemented by the Goncourt brothers’ biographies of women like Sophie Arnould and Madame de Pompadour, as in their famous statement that Pompadour was the ‘queen and patron and queen of the rococo’ (‘la marraine et la reine du Rococo’), Edmond de Goncourt and Jules de Goncourt, *Madame de Pompadour*, nouvelle édition, revue et augmentée (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1888), 327. See also Edmond de Goncourt and Jules de Goncourt, *Sophie Arnould d’après sa correspondance et ses mémoires inédits* (Paris: Poulet-Malassis and de Broise, 1857).

<sup>22</sup> Mary D. Sheriff, “Disciplinary problems in the history of art, or what to do with rococo queens,” in *The interdisciplinary century*, ed. Julia V. Douthwaite and Mary Vidal (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2005), 79.

<sup>23</sup> On the gendering of Revolutionary discourse, see notably Landes, *Women and the public sphere in the age of the French Revolution*; Geneviève Fraisse, *Reason’s muse: sexual difference and the birth of democracy*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago & London: Chicago University Press, 1994); Madelyn Gutwirth, *The twilight of the goddesses: women and representation in the French revolutionary era* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992); see also Dena Goodman, “Difference: an Enlightenment concept,” in *What’s left of Enlightenment?: a postmodern question*, ed. Keith Michael Baker and Peter Hanns Reill (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), 129–47, 182–88; Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger, *Luxury in the eighteenth century: debates, desires and delectable goods* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

Among the most influential studies of sexual difference in post-Revolutionary France are Doris Y. Kadish, *Politicizing gender: narrative strategies in the aftermath of the French Revolution* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991); Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Male trouble: a crisis in representation* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997); Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines: the art of Jacques-Louis David after the Terror* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), which includes extensive discussions of the influence of David’s female patrons.

the 1740s onwards—was in large part a backlash against aristocratic influence on the arts, against systems of privilege and patronage, and against an art world that was seen to have grown feminine, feminised, and effeminate.

In recent decades, feminist scholars have made the gendered discourse surrounding the rococo a subject of inquiry in its own right. Melissa Hyde's 2006 monograph, *Making up the rococo: François Boucher and his critics*, examines the reception of François Boucher—Madame de Pompadour's favourite and the rococo painter *par excellence*—by both his contemporaries and later historians.<sup>24</sup> This volume and its companion, *Rethinking Boucher*, co-edited the same year with Mark Ledbury, call into question the customary dismissal of Boucher and his female patrons as pretty, playful, and degenerate denizens of the boudoir.<sup>25</sup> Instead, they make a powerful case for the modernity of Boucher's rococo painting, locating much of its historically perturbing femininity in its minimisation of sexual difference.<sup>26</sup> Other important analyses of gender in the art criticism of this period examine the critical fortunes of women artists. Mary Sheriff's monograph on Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun looks in detail at how art critics responded to her as a woman artist.<sup>27</sup> Writers including Bernadette Fort, Angela Rosenthal and Perrine Vigroux have written about representations of women painters and the

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<sup>24</sup> Melissa Hyde, *Making up the rococo: François Boucher and his critics* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Melissa Hyde and Mark Ledbury, eds., *Rethinking Boucher* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2006).

<sup>26</sup> Of particular interest in the latter volume is Ewa Lajer-Burcharth's contribution, 'Pompadour's dream: Boucher, Diderot, and modernity', in Hyde and Ledbury, *Rethinking Boucher*, 229–51. See also Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "Pompadour's touch: difference in representation," *Representations* 73, no. 1 (2001): 54–88, which expands on the collaboration between Boucher and his most famous patron; and Eunice Lipton, "Women, pleasure, and painting (e.g., Boucher)," *Genders* 7 (1990): 69–86 which explores the rather fraught appeal of Boucher's nudes for female viewers today.

<sup>27</sup> Mary D. Sheriff, "Portrait de l'artiste en historienne de l'art: à propos des Souvenirs de Mme Vigée-Lebrun," in *Plumes et pinceaux — essais*, ed. Mechthild Fend, Melissa Hyde, and Anne Lafont (Paris: Publications de l'INHA, 2012).

dangers of the female gaze.<sup>28</sup> And Séverine Sofio has charted the increasing normalisation of women artists working professionally.<sup>29</sup>

The art-critical pamphlets that provide the source material for the first part of this thesis form a significant portion of the historical literature that gave the rococo its tainted and feminine reputation.<sup>30</sup> Unlike Boucher's paintings, which minimised the appearance of sexual difference, and women art critics who asserted the equality of the sexes, these texts seek to establish firm boundaries for male and female art audiences; to distinguish clear-cut lines between the preferences, behaviours, and the very natures of men and women. For many, the public space of the Salon was no place for women at all. As Jill Casid shows in her 2003 essay, 'Commerce in the *boudoir*', Old Regime art criticism conceived of the private, feminine *boudoir* as a space existing in direct opposition to the civic, masculine Salon. *Petites maîtresses* and the emasculated *petits maîtres* in their orbit figured as trespassers, obtruding the concerns of the *boudoir*, *toilette*, and theatre upon the Salon. In Casid's words,

this spatial trope worked to construct the public exhibition space of the Salon as an essential site for the regeneration of 'la nation' by a virile and autonomous culture. The joke played on the techniques of enlightenment to expose to public judgment the improperly private, perverse space in which patriarchal, heterosexual power relationships were supposedly overturned. In doing so, it endeavored to displace the feminized commerce of women's patronage into a locus that promised the possibility of containment.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Angela Rosenthal, "She's got the look! Eighteenth-century female portrait painters and the psychology of a potentially 'dangerous employment,'" in *Portraiture: facing the subject*, ed. Joanna Woodall (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 147–66; Bernadette Fort, "Indicting the woman artist: Diderot, Le Libertin, and Anna Dorothea Therbusch," *Lumen* 23 (2004): 1–37; Bernadette Fort, "Esthétique et imaginaire sexuel: la femme peintre dans les 'Salons,'" in *Le règne de la critique: l'imaginaire culturel des "Mémoires secrets*," ed. Christophe Cave (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2010), 269–93; Perrine Vigroux, "Femme peintre et fiction dans 'Histoire d'Ernestine' de Mme Riccoboni," in *Femmes artistes à l'âge classique*, ed. Élise Pavy-Guilbert, Stéphane Pujol, and Patrick Wald Lasowski (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021), 267–80; see also Paula Rea Radisich, "Deconstructing dissipation," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29, no. 2 (1995): 222–25, a discussion of Diderot's overwhelmingly negative framing of artists' wives.

<sup>29</sup> Séverine Sofio, "La vocation comme subversion: artistes femmes et anti-académisme dans la France révolutionnaire," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 3, no. 168 (2007): 34–49; Sofio, *Artistes femmes*.

<sup>30</sup> For an invaluable overview of this literature during Boucher's lifetime (1703–1770), ending at the point where this thesis picks up, see Melissa Hyde, "Boucher, *boudoir*, Salon: cherchez la femme," in *Making up the rococo: François Boucher and his critics* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2006), 45–81.

<sup>31</sup> Jill H. Casid, "Commerce in the *boudoir*," in *Women, art and the politics of identity in eighteenth-century Europe*, ed. Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 98. On the significance of the *boudoir*, see also Elena Russo, *Styles of Enlightenment: taste, politics and authorship in eighteenth-century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), "Prologue: *boudoir* and *tribune*", 16–44.



These tropes set a precedent that prospective female art critics had to reckon with when putting their work before an audience. When ‘Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S.’ insisted on women’s capacity to equal men, she made a point of distancing herself from women who had not renounced the boudoir before participating in the Salon; her pamphlet was ultimately banned for its libellous suggestion that Vigée-Lebrun was nowhere more ‘mistress of her subject’ than in her portrait of the finance minister Calonne.<sup>32</sup>

Drawing on the rich feminist vein of eighteenth-century studies, I examine some of the many women—both real and fictional—who moved from boudoir to Salon and back again, demonstrating the limitations of attempts to contain them. This thesis describes the pre-emptive demarcation by art critics of their own ‘space of possibilities’ for women viewers and would-be critics, who increasingly seemed to make up a viable public of their own. On the cusp of an ‘enchanted parenthesis’, the ventriloquism of women’s voices in the art criticism of the 1770s and 1780s marks a fascinating and unexplored episode in the erratic journey toward women’s equal participation in the arts.

*The fictional Salon viewer: who gets to be an art critic?*

Prerevolutionary France, especially during the two decades from 1769 to 1789, is of particular interest for a number of reasons. Although the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture held its first official Salon in 1667, the exhibition did not become a regular fixture until 1737. The genre of art criticism gradually grew in size and scope from that point on, reaching a peak of creativity in the 1770s and 1780s. At a time when egalitarian ideas about

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<sup>32</sup> See *Avis important d'une femme*, 28; Sheriff, *The exceptional woman*, 187–89. For the banning of the pamphlet, see Wrigley, *The origins of French art criticism*, 148–49. For more on the rumours about Vigée-Lebrun’s portrait, as circulated by another female viewer, see chapter three of this thesis.

public opinion were at least nominally gaining ground, art critics became, if anything, more insistent than ever that public taste needed to be defended against the influence of its own less qualified members. In the decades before the Revolution, they populated their criticism with as wide a variety of characters as possible: commoners, bourgeois, *nouveaux riches*, aristocrats, adolescents, mythological figures, foreigners, blind, deaf and mute people, and in each of these groups a mix of men and women. Often, they did so while protesting that such characters had no rightful place in shaping or representing French taste, paradoxically giving them a place and denying it in the same motion. Taking women as our focal point allows us to home in on the specifically misogynistic character of their representation, while also providing a cross-section of the literature as a whole, since female characters embody so many of the other overlapping categories—of age, class, expertise—which also preoccupied critics. This is not, however, a comprehensive study of the broader phenomenon of fictional characters in art criticism, although it necessarily seeks to give a general sense of this understudied aspect of the genre, placing its use of female voices in context.<sup>33</sup>

While the conception of history as narrative has become commonplace across historical disciplines, the explicitly narrative form of much early art criticism remains underexplored in most major surveys of the history of the genre.<sup>34</sup> Fictional characters make up the narrative frame, so to speak, and not the art-critical substance, of a genre which is generally mined for its aesthetic commentary. But in many, if not most, of the pamphlets under discussion, attempts to look past the fiction at the ‘real’ criticism leave one with very little

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<sup>33</sup> For an invaluable survey of ‘outsider’ characters in art criticism of this period, see Bernadette Fort, “Voice of the public: the carnivalization of Salon art in prerevolutionary pamphlets,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22, no. 3 (1989): 368–94. On the one fifth of critiques that feature foreigners or religious ‘others’, see Anne Lafont, “Comment peut-on être critique? Jugement de goût et relativisme culturel,” in *Penser l’art dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Christian Michel and Carl Magnusson (Rome: Académie de France - Villa Médicis, 2013), 143–55.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Else Marie Bukdahl, *Diderot, critique d’art*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde et Bagger, 1980), vol. 2, “Diderot, les salonniers et les esthéticiens de son temps”; Annie Becq, *Genèse de l’esthétique moderne: de la raison classique à l’imagination créatrice 1680-1814* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994); Thomas E. Crow, *Painters and public life in eighteenth-century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Wrigley, *The origins of French art criticism*.

indeed. Have these texts failed as art criticism? Or have we simply been looking for the wrong things?

Underlying the neglect of the fiction of art criticism is an assumption of literary naïveté: an assumption that its fictional devices are no more than rhetorical flourishes used by hack writers to entice less serious readers and disguise a lack of substance. Many art critics shared this belief about their own work, expressing in dozens of prefaces their sense that they were stooping—of necessity—to a form that was beneath them. Yet fictionalisation lay at the heart of how art critics sought to appeal to their readers, to make their pamphlets saleable and their ideas accessible. As such, the fiction in which they couched their Salon criticism is uniquely illuminating about how art critics viewed the reading and viewing public. Their Salon reviews, in the form of stories, dialogues, and plays, complete with casts of characters and musical numbers, are entertaining, inventive, and wildly revealing. I make no claims for the establishment of literary reputations: there are no forgotten Diderots among the pamphleteers examined in this thesis, but literary analysis of their work is no less fruitful. As eighteenth-century critics tested the boundaries of a still-emerging genre, they exploited different literary forms and voices, deflecting questions about the legitimacy of the critic's role through an insistent, dizzying multivocality and a sort of self-avowed insignificance. In my study of the ventriloquism of women's voices, I argue for a different way of reading art criticism: one that views the incorporation of fiction and the voices of 'others' as integral, not incidental, to the development of the genre.

The question of who had the right to critique art in print (and how critical they had a right to be) was one that consumed artists and critics alike during the second half of the eighteenth century. Unlike literary critics, who worked in the same medium as the writers whose work they critiqued, most art critics were not trained artists. What right did writers have to pass judgement on works of art that they themselves could never have accomplished?

Did artists' years of training, their reputations painstakingly built, mean less than the whims of any old hack? The notion that artists should be accountable to a public beyond the elites who were their intended patrons was a contested and relatively new one.<sup>35</sup> In the early days of the Salon, it was assumed that the public would simply admire, marvel at, and praise the skill of the artists exhibiting their work. This state of affairs continued, uncontested, for quite some time. The exhibition remained sporadic and did not generate much written comment during the early decades of the eighteenth century, but from 1737 the Académie regularised its Salons, making them an annual, then biennial, feature of the Parisian cultural landscape. It was ten years after this, in 1747 (eighty years after the first Salon), that Étienne La Font de Saint-Yenne published his *Réflexions sur quelques causes de l'état présent de la peinture en France* ('Reflections on some causes of the present state of painting in France')—a damning anti-rococo tract which decried the works exhibited at the Salon as evidence of the decline of history painting and the corruption of French taste caused largely by the influence of women.<sup>36</sup> This pamphlet, perhaps the most widely cited anti-rococo tract of the eighteenth century, has come to be known as the first example of oppositional art criticism.

La Font's pamphlet broke with the expectation that the public's role was purely appreciative, instead positioning the educated viewer as a corrective against what he described as the decadence of the French school. Artists' anxiety in the face of this unprecedented criticism was such that, in 1749, they refused to exhibit at all before what they now saw as a hostile public, and that year's Salon was cancelled. From this point on, many artists and their supporters branded critics as leeches who lived off the damage they inflicted

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<sup>35</sup> See Crow, *Painters and public life*, in particular the introduction, "The Salon exhibition in the eighteenth century and the problem of its public," 1-22.

<sup>36</sup> Étienne La Font de Saint-Yenne, *Réflexions sur quelques causes de l'état présent de la peinture en France avec un examen des principaux ouvrages exposés au Louvre le mois d'août 1746* (The Hague: Jean Néaulme, 1747).

on the reputations of respectable academicians.<sup>37</sup> Faced with the reality of criticism by a public whose priorities did not always coincide with those of artists, Charles Coypel, First Painter to the king, published a rebuttal in which he argued that art criticism was the prerogative only of artists themselves (or perhaps, as a concession, to ‘a small number of perfect connoisseurs’, whom he estimated as numbering ‘no more than five or six’ in all of France).<sup>38</sup> Unsurprisingly, this was felt to be unreasonably restrictive. Critics exaggerated *ad absurdum* the official denial of their right, as members of the public, to pass judgement on what was publicly exhibited, populating their writings with non-expert stand-ins (the less suitable the better) ostensibly plucked from the Salon crowd. Women, foreigners, members of the lower classes and the bourgeoisie, the blind, deaf and mute—in one case even a member of the public who had arrived too late to see the Salon at all—were variously enlisted to perform or parody the role of public opinion in matters of taste.

The nature and identity of the art public became intimately connected with the way art criticism defined itself. Using fictional ‘others’ as their mouthpieces allowed critics not just to theorise difference but to perform it, turning it into the mode as well as the subject of art criticism. This is a crucial distinction. As a literary conceit, it allowed the writer to consider the Salon from a perspective of cultural, gender, or class difference, at a time when a relativist approach was a popular way of seeking to apprehend contemporary cultural practices.<sup>39</sup> It also enacts a subtle shift of focus, changing the nature of difference from an argument (which can be agreed or disagreed with) into an unstated assumption, operating not

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<sup>37</sup> See Richard Wrigley, “Censorship and anonymity in eighteenth-century French art criticism,” *Oxford Art Journal* 6, no. 2 (1983): 17–28; Bernadette Fort, “An academician in the underground: Charles-Nicolas Cochin and art criticism in eighteenth-century France,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 23 (1994): 3–27; Susanna Caviglia, “Les écrits sur l’art et l’opinion publique au XVIIIe siècle: l’année 1747,” in *Temporalités: les usages publics de l’écriture (Antiquité - XXe siècle)*, ed. Michel Cassan et al. (Limoges: Presses universitaires de Limoges, 2006), 129–44.

<sup>38</sup> Charles Coypel, *Dialogue de M. Coypel, Premier Peintre du Roi: sur l’exposition des tableaux dans le Sallon du Louvre, en 1747*, 1751. The dialogue was read at the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture on 5 August 1747.

<sup>39</sup> See Lafont, “Comment peut-on être critique?”

at the level of reason but at the more subliminal level of narrative. Just as importantly, it turned the spotlight onto the audience as much as on the art. Some critics maintained the fiction that their pamphlets were a form of reportage, presenting authentic transcripts of the speech of real women. Though they can hardly have expected readers to take these exhortations seriously, given the satirical nature of the texts and characters alike, the women they ventriloquise are clearly supposed to be read as true in spirit if not in specifics—in much the same way that the female figure in a history painting is supposed to represent not an individual but an aggregate of the features of many women, thereby attaining a greater, general truth.

Thomas Crow, in *Painters and public life in eighteenth-century Paris*, provides a masterful analysis of the Salon ‘and the problem of its public’.<sup>40</sup> Crow is interested in the Salon as a locus for the development of pre- or proto-Revolutionary public opinion; however, the ‘problem’ of the public as he formulates it is almost wholly restricted to issues of class. He describes the struggle between artists, critics, and monarchical institutions as they strove to establish competing definitions of valid and invalid criticism, each distinguishing in their own way between the salutary expression of enlightened *public* opinion and the potentially subversive expression of *popular* opinion. Although it was by claiming to give voice to the public that most critics sought to legitimate their function, even the most radical critics prior to the Revolution remained deeply ambivalent towards the idea of this public being a truly inclusive one, insisting on some distinction between the physical Salon crowd and the discursive Salon public. In other words, the terms in which the genre of art criticism came to define itself and its public were ‘bound up with a struggle over representation, over language

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<sup>40</sup> Crow, *Painters and public life*, 1.

and symbols and who had the right to use them’, over ‘who could be legitimately included in it’ (the public) and ‘who spoke for its interests’.<sup>41</sup>

But what about the problem of the *female* public? Richard Wrigley’s history, *The origins of French art criticism from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration*, quotes extensively from a variety of texts with female protagonists, but nevertheless reiterates Crow’s essentially class-based characterisation of representations of the public without considering the additional complexity invoked by gendered voice. Despite an expressed interest in ‘the perverse and colourful personas adopted in pamphlets’ as exemplifying ‘the idea of criticism as a form of mask’, Wrigley does not fully engage with the role played by character and narrative.<sup>42</sup> He addresses the subject of women in art criticism only to say that there weren’t many of them, writing that ‘It was in the role of passive addressees that women figured most familiarly in criticism cast in epistolary form. Women authors are rare’.<sup>43</sup> For Wrigley, the use of fictional protagonists and the quotation of members of the crowd are little more than a form of ‘contrived mimicry’, serving to evoke the heterogeneous social mix of the Salon and to demonstrate the capacity or incapacity of the crowd to speak meaningfully about art.<sup>44</sup> It is to the question of lay judgement—and, during and after the Revolutionary period, crowd control—that he addresses his commentary, discussing the presence of pick-pockets and potential politically subversive elements in the crowd, but failing to note any of the other ways (sexual, racial) in which difference was figured.<sup>45</sup> Wrigley’s book is invaluable in taking a significantly broader view of art criticism than most general texts, drawing heavily on anonymous and satirical texts that otherwise tend to be rejected in favour of more

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<sup>41</sup> Crow, *Painters and public life*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> Wrigley, *The origins of French art criticism*, 10.

<sup>43</sup> Wrigley, *The origins of French art criticism*, 171. In a footnote on the same page, he lists two pamphlets with female protagonists: the aforementioned *Avis important d’une femme*, ‘which adopts a positive attitude to women and art’, and *La bourgeoise au Sallon de 1787*, ‘which satirises bourgeois philistinism as expressed most ingenuously by a female representative of her class’.

<sup>44</sup> Wrigley, *The origins of French art criticism*, 87..

<sup>45</sup> Wrigley, *The origins of French art criticism*, 90-92.

‘serious’ works. However, in weaving his text together from quotations with little in the way of feminist analysis, he often reproduces their gendered terms without unpacking them. This is one of the gaps that I address in part one of this thesis, establishing the role of art criticism’s sizeable, fictional, female population in the emergence of the discursive art public.

### *Voice and ventriloquism*

The concepts of narrative voice and authorial voice distinguish between the gender of a text and the gender of its author, between ideas about how women *should* write and the variety of ways in which writers (male, female and anonymous) engaged with those ideas.<sup>46</sup> Any anonymously published art-critical text would have been (and often still is) read by default as male-authored. For the many texts considered in part one of this thesis that remain anonymous, I make no attempt to determine authorial gender. What interests me in these cases is the way the texts present gender, negotiating patriarchal codes of femininity and masculinity. As Elizabeth Goldsmith has written, on the subject of eighteenth-century epistolary literature (another genre in which large numbers of men wrote ‘as women’): ‘Any study of the female voice [...] must examine male ideas of what it means to write as a woman, along with the writings of real women [...] How has the female epistolary voice been defined by those who write it and those who read it? Has it been an ideological as much as an aesthetic construct? What have been the prescribed parameters for feminine self-expression in letters?’<sup>47</sup> These same questions inform my study of eighteenth-century art criticism,

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<sup>46</sup> Some key texts in the extensive literature on voice: Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, ed., *Writing the female voice: essays on epistolary literature* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989); Elizabeth D. Harvey, *Ventriloquized voices: feminist theory and English Renaissance texts* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992); see also Kate Chedgzoy, Melanie Hansen, and Suzanne Trill, eds., *Voicing women: gender and sexuality in early modern writing* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1997); Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Dena Goodman, eds., *Going public: women and publishing in early modern France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995). On voice in art history, see Fort, “Voice of the public”; Meaghan Clarke, *Critical voices: women and art criticism in Britain 1880-1905* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>47</sup> From Goldsmith’s introduction to *Writing the female voice*, vii.



which focuses on different aspects of voice and art in late eighteenth-century France, in contexts ranging from the strictly to the marginally art-critical.

At its most basic level, voice is a metaphor for expression: to speak, to have a voice, to be heard, is to express oneself, to be present, or to be represented. Voice can be spoken, written, or indeed sung; it can be private, public, individual, collective, scripted, unscripted... It can also be ventriloquised. The ventriloquist, who appears to make a dummy speak, is an apt metaphor for the writer who gives voice to characters other than themselves. It is not the only applicable metaphor: Richard Wrigley describes the adoption of narrative voice as a type of mask, while others—referring to novelists working across gendered lines—refer to ‘narrative cross-dressing’.<sup>48</sup> All these terms centre on the idea of performance—of a role, of an identity, of a gender. The eighteenth century’s fascination for masquerade, *travestissement*, and portraits in foreign and theatrical garb, does seem to suggest masking or cross-dressing as the obvious image to reach for.<sup>49</sup> However, when reading eighteenth-century art criticism, it is ventriloquism that emerges as the clearest way of framing the particular dynamic that emerges between writers and their characters.

In eighteenth-century art writing, voice features commonly as a figure of speech. In analyses of painting and sculpture, an expressive figure could be described as *parlant* (a ‘speaking likeness’), an inexpressive one as *muet* (mute); a work of art could leave you speechless; conversely, it could spur you into raptures and even into conversation with itself. When Diderot famously conversed at length with Greuze’s *Young girl crying over her dead bird* in his *Salon* of 1765, he was far from alone in desiring to make an artwork speak.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See James Carson, “Narrative cross-dressing and the critique of authorship in the novels of Richardson”, 95-113, and Julia Epstein, *Fanny’s fanny: epistolarity, eroticism, and the transsexual text*, 135-153, both in Goldsmith, ed., *Writing the female voice*.

<sup>49</sup> For an interesting art-historical consideration of these themes, see Melissa Percival, *Fragonard and the fantasy figure: painting the imagination* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), especially chapter five, ‘Fictional identities’, 159-193.

<sup>50</sup> Denis Diderot, *Salons*, ed. Jean Seznec and Jean Adhémar (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), vol. 2.

Eighteenth-century art critics, poets, and playwrights exploited the dramatic potential of the artwork as interlocutor or silent listener, blurring the boundaries between word and image, and also between genres—as when a 1769 play about a talking painting was rewritten as a review of the Salon of 1781.<sup>51</sup> The new forms of art criticism that appeared during the 1770s and 1780s—dialogues, plays, and narratives—were linked by the prominence in them of the ‘spoken’ word, and particularly of the speech of ‘outsider’ characters such as women, commoners, and foreigners. ‘Conversational’ art criticism blurred the boundaries between what could be said in private and what could be said in public—a convenient device that allowed writers to retain the appearance of *honnêteté* while publishing criticisms that contravened its limits. This device was not the sole domain of oppositional art critics: Charles Coypel, the academic luminary, used it to justify his character Dorsicour’s denunciation of critical prejudice in his *Dialogue* of 1747:

Perhaps I am speaking a bit too openly with you, but pardon my familiarity. Besides, we are alone—I am not one of those who, under the pretext of serving the people, charitably print Critiques that a modest and zealous man must only venture in private.<sup>52</sup>

These new ‘conversational’ forms were much better suited to eighteenth-century conceptions of female authorial voice, which was consistently portrayed as private, social, and oral or epistolary rather than public and literary in nature. Carla Hesse has attributed the seemingly paradoxical coincidence of women’s diminished legal status and increased literary production

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<sup>51</sup> Louis Anseaume and André Ernest Modeste Grétry, *Le tableau parlant, comédie-parade, en un acte & en vers, mêlée d’ariettes* (Paris: Veuve Duchesne, 1769); rewritten as a Salon review in *La peinturomanie, ou Cassandre au Sallon; comédie-parade, en vaudevilles* (Paris: Le Jay, 1781). For other examples of talking paintings, see *Le Songe, ou la conversation à laquelle on ne s’attend pas, scène critique: la scène est au Sallon de 1783* (Rome, 1783); Antoine-Joseph Gorsas, *Promenades de Critès au Sallon de l’année 1785* (London & Paris: Hardouin & Gattey, 1785); Antoine-Joseph Gorsas, *La Plume du coq de Micille, ou aventures de Critès au Sallon, pour servir de suite aux Promenades de 1785. Première journée* (London & Paris: Hardouin & Gattey, 1787); “Paul,” *Les images parlantes, ou dialogue des tapisseries exposées dans la cour du Palais national des Sciences et des Arts, pendant les six jours complémentaires de l’an VII, 1799*.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Je vous parle peut être avec un peu trop de franchise, mais pardonnez à l’amitié. D’ailleurs nous sommes seuls, je ne suis pas de ceux, qui sous le beau prétexte de rendre service aux gens, font charitablement imprimer des Critiques, qu’un homme modeste & vraiment zélé ne doit hasarder qu’en particulier.’ Coypel, *Dialogue de M. Coypel, Premier Peintre du Roi: sur l’exposition des tableaux dans le Sallon du Louvre, en 1747*, 4–5.

after the Revolution, in part, to the eclipse of Old Regime oral culture—epitomised by the salons and the *salonnières* who ran them—by modern written culture.<sup>53</sup> I will consider the primacy of the spoken (or pseudo-spoken) word in Old Regime models of women’s participation in artistic discourse, arguing that the proliferation of fictive women’s voices in art criticism was enabled in part by the shift from a non-fiction to a narrative genre of art criticism, and from a monological to a dialogical or polylogical style of writing.<sup>54</sup>

Of particular interest are the pamphlets in which voice is explicitly thematised: notably, those pamphlets whose protagonists are blind, deaf, and/or mute.<sup>55</sup> During the mid-eighteenth century, the character of the blind man became a common parody of the critic who felt entitled to criticise works he could not understand—as when La Font de Saint-Yenne was caricatured as a blind man (fig. 1).<sup>56</sup> By the 1770s and 1780s, however, the blind man, in two separate pamphlets, must listen to the crowd to gain an idea of what is on display: he goes to the Salon ‘not to see, as you may well surmise, reader, but to listen’.<sup>57</sup> In these instances, voice readily appears as an alternative framework to the gaze for understanding eighteenth-

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<sup>53</sup> See Hesse, *The other Enlightenment*, especially chapter one, “The perils of eloquence”, 3-30. On the role of the *salonnières*, see notably Dena Goodman, *The republic of letters: a cultural history of the French enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), especially chapter three, “Governing the Republic of Letters: salonnières and the rule(s) of polite conversation,” 90-135.

<sup>54</sup> Two German scholars, Fritz Nies and Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, have developed the concept of ‘semi-orality’ in reference to eighteenth-century texts that blur the boundary between the written and spoken word. Fritz Nies, “Zeit-Zeichen: Gattungsbildung in der Revolutionsperiode und ihre Konsequenzen für die Literatur- und Geschichtswissenschaft,” *Francia* 8 (1980): 257–75; Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, “Semi-Oralität: zur literaturwissenschaftlichen Tragweite einer provokativen Kategorie,” in *Offene Gefüge: Literatursystem und Lebenswirklichkeit: Festschrift für Fritz Nies zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Henning Krauss (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1994), 151–64; Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, “L’espace public semi-oral dans les Mémoires secrets,” in *The Mémoires secrets and the culture of publicity in eighteenth-century France*, ed. Jeremy D. Popkin and Bernadette Fort (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998), 81–92.

<sup>55</sup> On the motif of the blind man, see Fort, “Voice of the public,” 376–77; Ewa Lajer-Burchard, *The painter’s touch: Boucher, Chardin, Fragonard* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 91–93.

<sup>56</sup> La Font himself was not above referring to the general public as ‘a flock of blind people’ (‘un troupeau d’aveugles’) in *L’ombre du grand Colbert, le Louvre et la ville de Paris, dialogue. Réflexions sur quelques causes de l’état présent de la peinture en France. Avec quelques lettres de l’auteur à ce sujet. Nouvelle édition corrigée & augmentée*, 1752, xxxviii.

<sup>57</sup> *Pique-nique convenable à ceux qui fréquentent le Sallon, préparé par un aveugle* (Paris, 1781), 5. Translation from Fort, “Voice of the public,” 377. See also *Réponse d’un aveugle à messieurs les critiques*, 1755; Robert-Martin Lesuire, *Coup d’œil sur le Sallon de 1775, par un aveugle* (Paris: Quillau l’aîné & Ruault, 1775).

century artistic discourse. I intend to show how the two can work productively alongside one another.

The concept of voice has been evoked, as a figure of speech rather than as a theoretical framework, by numerous historians of art criticism and women art critics. Note, for example, the title of Bernadette Fort's 'Voice of the public: the carnivalization of Salon art in prerevolutionary pamphlets', an essay that remains one of the most significant analyses of satirical Salon criticism. Importantly, she argues

that in Salon criticism, politically sensitive and subject to censorship and government retaliation as this genre was, the oppositional charge was displaced by critics from the verdicts *per se*, and was inscribed in less obvious but crucial signifiers such as authorial voice, generic mode (dialogue, theater), or linguistic and cultural register.<sup>58</sup>

The 'oppositional charge' Fort identifies here targeted not only the authority of the Académie, but also that of the traditional, connoisseurial art critic. The mid-to-late eighteenth century saw the emergence of 'a new poetics of Salon criticism, one which effaced authorial voice or parodied it by vesting it in dubious pretended "authorities," or by dialogizing it, thereby consummating its divorce from its elite, monological ancestor.'<sup>59</sup>

These are the contexts in which women and other 'others' came to feature so heavily, as fictional characters from the ideal and allegorical to the fictional and ridiculous. Since the publication of Fort's article, scholars have begun to show more interest in the fictional 'margins' of art criticism, but none have systematically examined its use of female voices. Florence Ferran has authored several excellent analyses of art criticism and its representations of the public. She paints a picture of a satirical literature that, from the early 1770s, gives 'the impression of being no longer sure who or what it is really making fun

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<sup>58</sup> Fort, "Voice of the public," 374.

<sup>59</sup> Fort, "Voice of the public," 376. This process, as it played out in art criticism, was a microcosm of much broader changes, as described in Elena Russo's exceptional study on the *goût moderne*: Russo, *Styles of Enlightenment*.

of—the Académie or the critic? the paintings or the public?<sup>60</sup> Ferran ascribes this state of interpretive confusion or ‘permissiveness’ to a ‘crisis of systems of representation’: a time when the decline of history painting and the rise of bourgeois portraiture led critics to proclaim the decadence of French art, and when the institution of the Salon was caught between its duty to the absolutist state and its newly alleged duties to the French public—a public which itself remained a suspect and poorly defined entity.<sup>61</sup> Ferran asks us to appreciate ‘the full ambivalence of a so-called “popular” literature which is about the people without being of it’.<sup>62</sup>

The same ambivalence permeates art critics’ representations of their female protagonists. These fictive women represent a range of art-critical positions, from ignorant or naïve to learned, from vicious to virtuous. They became some of the most prominent mouthpieces of a new style of art criticism, in a largely underground profusion of parodic and self-parodic pamphlets written in a narrative and often highly theatrical mode. It was in the fictional margins of this marginal literature, straddling the boundaries between criticism and narrative, journalism and fiction, that female spectators first became a regular feature of art criticism. Women’s voices are portrayed, not as written by them, but as transcribed by a male writer or narrator—in other words, as spoken rather than written in nature, in a form of

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<sup>60</sup> Florence Ferran, “Mettre les rieurs de son côté: un enjeu des salons de peinture dans la seconde moitié du siècle,” *Dix-huitième Siècle* 32, no. 1 (2000): 193: ‘l’impression qu’on ne sait plus très bien, à partir du début des années 70 de qui ou de quoi on se moque vraiment.’ See also René Démoris and Florence Ferran, eds., *La Peinture en procès: l’invention de la critique d’art au siècle des Lumières* (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2001); Florence Ferran, “Les Mémoires secrets critiques des portraits d’anonymes exposés au Salon: espace culturel et imaginaire social,” in *Le règne de la critique: l’imaginaire culturel des Mémoires secrets*, ed. Christophe Cave (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2010), 295–310; Florence Ferran, “Les décisions de l’ignorant en débat dans la critique d’art au XVIIIe siècle,” in *Penser l’art dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle: théorie, critique, philosophie, histoire*, ed. Christian Michel and Carl Magnusson (Rome: Académie de France - Villa Médicis, 2013).

<sup>61</sup> Ferran, “Mettre les rieurs de son côté,” 193.

<sup>62</sup> Ferran, “Mettre les rieurs de son côté,” 191: ‘toute l’ambivalence d’une littérature dite “populaire” qui met en scène le peuple sans pour autant en émaner.’

representation that works to deny the possibility of authorship that is not mediated by someone else.<sup>63</sup>

In order to do justice to the distinct questions and literatures being addressed, this thesis is divided into two parts, each containing two chapters. Part one examines the representation of fictional women in the art-critical literature. Part two considers two examples of historical women whose contributions to the artistic discourse, though outside the realm of art criticism, cannot be ignored. Chapter one surveys the thirty-odd Salon pamphlets that ventriloquised female voices, presenting a loose typology of female characters in Old Regime art criticism. Chapter two explores these themes in further detail through a close study of an art critic whose name peppers the footnotes of studies of art criticism, but whose entertaining and cohesive body of work has yet to attract sustained attention: Robert-Martin Lesuire (1737-1815). Lesuire published reviews of all five Salons held between 1775 and 1783, each one featuring ‘singular characters’ (‘des personnages singuliers’).<sup>64</sup> In 1775, he reviewed the Salon as a blind man with a deaf companion. In 1777, his narrator is accompanied by a fourteen-year-old ‘Creole’ orphan girl, an *ingénue* called Aglantine. In 1779, his companion is the dead painter, François Lemoyne, who had famously committed suicide forty-two years previously, in 1737. Two years later, in 1781, he goes to the Salon with a miraculous young lady, a mute by the rather unflattering name of Mutine, who can speak only when there is something worth saying (‘Incomparable girl! Why are you so rare?’). Finally, in 1783, his protagonist is none other than Dibutades, the mythical Greek maiden who invented the art of

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<sup>63</sup> By contrast, a blind man and a deaf-mute man are both allowed to narrate the pamphlets in which they appear: Lesuire, *Coup d’œil sur le Sallon de 1775*; M. des Labbes, *Le Miracle de nos jours; conversation écrite et recueillie par un sourd et muet; et la bonne lunette, dans lesquels on trouvera non seulement la critique des ouvrages exposés au Sallon; mais la critique de nos peintres & sculpteurs les plus connus*, 1779.

<sup>64</sup> Robert-Martin Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans, au Salon de 1783* (Paris & Amsterdam: Quillau l’aîné, 1783), 3.

painting.<sup>65</sup> This group of texts provides a fascinating window into the use of women's voices in art criticism. Stylistically, thematically, and temporally cohesive, and linked by a single known author (a rarity), these five pamphlets with their 'singular characters' (three male and three female) form an unparalleled oeuvre for comparative study.

Part two leaves the pamphlet literature behind to search the margins of the Old Regime art world for other traces of women's engagement with art. Where the first part of this thesis surveys prerevolutionary art-critical writings *about* women, the second part asks how we might consider the surviving artistic statements *by* women, found in places that have been overlooked because they do not conform to expectations of what art criticism is. Writing women into the history of French art criticism has often required looking beyond the boundaries of art criticism 'proper'. The Salon literature at large was certainly unwelcoming to women writers, keeping out all but the most assured feminists. But although female-authored art criticism remained a rarity during the Old Regime, women actively attended the Salon, made, looked at, and cultivated art, and—naturally—commented on what they saw. Feminist scholars have expanded our understanding of the genre to include passages on art contained within a variety of broader fictional, political, pedagogical, and autobiographical works by women.<sup>66</sup> For the period of the Old Regime, the lion's share of art-historical attention has fallen thus far to famous patrons of the arts, from members of the court like Madame de Pompadour, Madame Du Barry, and Marie-Antoinette to *salonnières* like Madame Geoffrin, none of whom published writings on art, but who, through their status and cultivation of the arts, left behind other traces of their interest.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> In chronological order: Lesuire, *Coup d'œil sur le Sallon de 1775; Jugement d'une demoiselle de quatorze ans, sur le Sallon de 1777* (Paris: Quillau l'aîné, 1777); *Le Mort vivant au Sallon de 1779* (Paris & Amsterdam: Quillau l'aîné, 1779); *La Muette qui parle au Sallon de 1781* (Amsterdam & Paris: Quillau l'aîné, 1781); *La Morte de trois mille ans*.

<sup>66</sup> Notably Jensen, "Portraitistes à la plume"; Fend et al., *Plumes et pinceaux — essais*.

<sup>67</sup> On Pompadour, see notably Elise Goodman, *The portraits of Madame de Pompadour: celebrating the femme savante* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2000); Hyde, *Making up the rococo*, chapter three, "The makeup of the marquise", 107-144; Lajer-Burcharth, "Pompadour's touch"; Lajer-Burcharth, "Pompadour's Dream: Boucher, Diderot, and Modernity", in *Rethinking Boucher*, 229–51; on Pompadour and

This thesis seeks to expand our perception of the range of ways in which Old Regime women engaged with the art world, with case studies rooted in two very different genres. Chapter three is devoted to the actress Sophie Arnould (1740-1802), a star of the Paris Opéra who left behind no writing about art, but whose many quips on the subject were eagerly reported by the press. I posit the anecdotes about Sophie Arnould as a particularly interesting form of ventriloquism and as a marginal form of artistic commentary. Arnould was in her element in prerevolutionary oral culture. In 1773, with a single pun about a major series of religious paintings exhibited at that year's Salon, she was said to have 'desolate[d] the painters more than all the brochures'.<sup>68</sup> *Bons mots* such as hers circulated widely, orally and in the press, before being gathered into popular anthologies, from general works such as Nougaret's *Anecdotes des beaux-arts* ('Anecdotes of the fine arts'), published between 1776 and 1780, to personalised compilations like *Arnoldiana*, published in 1813.<sup>69</sup> These are not art-critical texts. They do not aim at a specialist audience, nor do they emphasise aesthetics so much as they do wit and human interaction. But by looking only at specialist texts, we limit ourselves to a narrow understanding of the eighteenth-century artistic discourse, ignoring the

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Du Barry, see Melissa Hyde, "Troubling identities and the agreeable game of art: from Madame de Pompadour's theatrical 'breeches' of decorum to Drouais's portrait of Madame Du Barry en homme," in *Women and portraits in early modern Europe*, ed. Andrea G. Pearson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); on Du Barry, see *Madame Du Barry: de Versailles à Louveciennes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992); on Geoffrin, see Barbara Scott, "Madame Geoffrin: a patron and friend of artists," *Apollo* 60 (1967): 98–103; Paula Rea Radisich, "Making conversation: Hubert Robert in the salon of Madame Geoffrin," in *Hubert Robert and painted spaces of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 15–53; Mary D. Sheriff, *Moved by love: inspired artists and deviant women in eighteenth-century France* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 104–12; Emma Barker, "Mme Geoffrin, painting and galanterie: Carle Van Loo's 'Conversation espagnole' and 'Lecture espagnole,'" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40, no. 4 (2007): 587–614.

<sup>68</sup> *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la République des lettres en France depuis 1762 jusqu'à nos jours*, 36 vols. (London: John Adamson, 1777), vol. 7, 56–57 (21 September 1773): "le quolibet de Mlle. Arnoux désole plus les peintres que toutes les brochures." Quoted in Wrigley, *The origins of French art criticism*, 78.

<sup>69</sup> Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Nougaret, *Anecdotes des beaux-arts, contenant tout ce que la peinture, la sculpture, la gravure, l'architecture, la littérature, la musique, &c. & la vie des artistes, offrent de plus curieux & de plus piquant, chez tous les peuples du monde, depuis l'origine de ces différens arts, jusqu'à nos jours*, 3 vols. (Paris: Jean-François Bastien, 1776); Albéric Deville, *Arnoldiana, ou Sophie Arnould et ses contemporaines: recueil choisi d'anecdotes piquantes, de réparties et de bons mots de Mlle. Arnould* (Paris: Gerard, 1813). There also exists an anecdotal history of the Salon written in the later nineteenth century by Théodore Gosselin, great grand-nephew of André Le Nôtre: Théodore Gosselin, *Histoire anecdotique des Salons de peinture depuis 1673* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1881). Gosselin draws on much of the same pamphlet literature discussed in this thesis



much broader context in which art was viewed, interpreted, and commented upon.<sup>70</sup> Anecdotes, set in auction houses and boudoirs as much as at the Salon, and featuring actresses and courtesans as much as artists, frame art as part of a network of commodities, exchanges, and interpersonal relationships. And whereas art critics ventriloquised fictional characters, anecdotes attribute words to real and identifiable people, blurring the lines between the original utterance (if indeed there was one) and the anecdote presented in print. They therefore present a particularly interesting instance of ventriloquism, as well as a window onto the Académie, the Salon, and the social networks of artists that remains unexplored in any systematic way.

Finally, chapter four centres Henriette-Louise Dionis (1731-1835), a little-known writer who in 1777 published a collection of prose poems titled *Origine des Grâces*. The collection contained, among other things, responses to two works of art: Jean-Baptiste Greuze's famous allegory of lost virginity, *The broken pitcher*, and Charles-Nicolas Cochin's frontispiece for Dionis's book.<sup>71</sup> Her response to Cochin implicates both his frontispiece and her text in a network of artistic reciprocity and mutual promotion. Meanwhile, Dionis's response to *The broken pitcher* is a singular and as yet unstudied contribution to the history of the reception of the Greuze girl. Dionis's fable about the Greuze girl resonates in many ways with Diderot's conversation with Greuze's *Girl with a dead canary* at the Salon of 1767: both texts are literary, dialogistic, and centre on the theme of lost virginity. Yet the texts take diverging approaches to the questions of female agency, sexual difference, and voyeurism. Dionis's text, embedded in a collection of pastoral and erotic poetry, forces us to expand

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<sup>70</sup> See Mélinda Caron, "L'anecdote et l'actrice dans l'imaginaire périodique des Lumières," in *L'anecdote entre littérature et histoire: à l'époque moderne*, ed. Gaël Rideau et al. (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2019), 77–91; Pierre Réat, "L'anecdote dans les Mémoires secrets: type d'information et mode d'écrire," in *The Mémoires secrets and the culture of publicity in eighteenth-century France*, ed. Jeremy D. Popkin and Bernadette Fort (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998), 61–72; Mark Ledbury, "Anecdotes and the life of art history," in *Fictions of art history*, ed. Mark Ledbury (Yale University Press, 2013), 173–86. See also Colin Jones, "French crossings IV: vagaries of passion and power in Enlightenment Paris," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 23 (2013): 3–35.

<sup>71</sup> Henriette-Louise Dionis, *Origine des Grâces* (Paris, 1777).

readings of the Greuze girl in terms of the heterosexual male gaze to account for women's modes of viewership.

Following the cue of such texts as these, I bring to the fore historical and fictional women who, until now, have fallen squarely into the footnotes of art history. In this manner, I hope to write them back into the history of a genre which has been acknowledged as one of the formative discourses of the public sphere—and which has historically been understood as *classed* far more than it has been as *gendered*. Both Arnould's anecdotes and Dionis's ekphrastic fables are important examples of women responding to art outside the bounds of art criticism, in genres where women's presence was more easily taken for granted. They demonstrate that it was possible for women's musings on art to be published and even widely circulated in other formats, regardless of whether they conformed to art-critical ideas about what a female art critic should (and should not) be. How might our view of the Old Régime art public change when we consider the extent to which it was, in fact, constituted through and in reaction to the voices of real and imagined women?

The female protagonists of the pamphlet literature served to demonstrate the limits of feminine participation in artistic discourse. But did critics not also contribute to the normalisation of women's presence in the art world by acknowledging that there were acceptable ways (however limited) for women to participate, and by proliferating women's voices (however imaginary) in their writings? I will consider the ways in which art critics in fact wrote women *into* this discourse almost from its very conception. Similarly, women's engagement in anecdotal and poetic forms of commentary demonstrates the persistence of 'feminine' modes of discourse even in the face of universal condemnation by art critics. Like the persistence of the often-ephemeral sources from which they are drawn, these female-authored texts demonstrate the flexibility and resilience of women's ability to create a niche for themselves under patriarchy.

Chapter one:  
Writing women at the Salon

There were many Salons in prerevolutionary Paris. One was the Salon that opened every second year on the twenty-fifth of August, the king's name day, a royal art exhibition attended by swaths of the Parisian population. Another was its fairground mirror image in the art-critical pamphlet literature.<sup>1</sup> In this parallel, carnivalesque Salon, both art and its public were reflected back in outlandish forms, and women in particular loomed large. As pamphleteers debated women's place in the arts, they populated their pamphlets with fictional women until the women in the Salon audience were surrounded by representations of themselves, not only on the walls, but also in the Salon literature. In pamphlets that were as much reviews of the public as they were of art, art critics discussed 'the feminine' as a collective force as well as embodying it in individual characters. Women who made, collected, wrote, and spoke about art did so within the context of a flood of writing *about* women; their individual voices mingled with the ventriloquised voices of female characters who served as idealised or cautionary guideposts marking the bounds of acceptable feminine expression. In this way, the critics' fantasy public in turn formed part of the real environment that women artists, art critics, and exhibition-goers learnt to navigate.

Since the publication of Thomas Crow's *Painters and public life* in 1985, the public sphere of the Salon has been the subject of continuous interest. The feminine component of this public sphere, however, has tended to be overlooked. This is understandable given the very small number of women known to have published art criticism, yet becomes remarkable upon reading the copious pamphlets which present an art public defined largely through and

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<sup>1</sup> This is what Wrigley has termed the *exposition imaginaire* and Bernadette Fort the 'carnavalesque': Fort, "Voice of the public"; Richard Wrigley, "Sense of place in eighteenth-century Salon criticism," in *Critical exchange: art criticism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Russia and Western Europe* (New York: P. Lang, 2008), 83.

in opposition to femininity. Female characters are key players from the very earliest days of the genre of art criticism. The 1741 *Lettre à Monsieur de Poiresson-Chamarande*, singled out by Crow as ‘the earliest sustained commentary on the Salon that we possess’, is not only strongly anti-Rococo and anti-aristocratic, but also anti-women—an aspect that goes unmentioned in Crow’s superb reading of the text, despite bubbling under the surface throughout.<sup>2</sup> The *Lettre* opens in the courtyard of the Louvre, where the bourgeois narrator witnesses the arrival of a nightmarishly fashionable trio: a feminised young man ‘made more out of costume than he was out of flesh’, a large middle-aged woman ‘more painted than any mask’, and a young woman who, although pleasing at first glance, can be seen upon closer examination ‘to have just been patched up with white plaster.’<sup>3</sup> Propelled forth by pride and vanity, the trio attempt to gain preferential entry before the Salon has opened to the public, only to be met by the ‘incorruptible integrity’ of a steadfastly closed door.<sup>4</sup> Humiliated before the waiting crowd, the group retreat into their carriage and make themselves scarce. The scene presents the Salon as a bastion of egalitarianism against the corrupting forces of wealth, privilege, and femininity. Crow teases out the text’s conjunctions between luxury, death, sexuality, makeup, and artifice, but makes no reference to the centrality of gender in the *Lettre*’s depiction of class identity, writing only that ‘In this morality play before the standing crowd, the deadly sins are given a firm class identity.’<sup>5</sup>

Melissa Hyde has described the convergence of art-critical attacks on women and on the aristocracy in *Making up the rococo*. With reference to a cross-section of mid-eighteenth-century art criticism, including the *Lettre* of 1741, she shows ‘how gender and cosmetics

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<sup>2</sup> Crow, *Painters and public life*, 88; the relevant section of the pamphlet is translated in full on pp. 89-90. For the original, see *Lettre à Monsieur de Poiresson-Chamarande, Lieutenant-Général au baillage et siège présidial de Chaumont en Bassigny, au sujet des tableaux exposés au Salon du Louvre* (Paris, 1741), 4–9.

<sup>3</sup> As translated in Crow, *Painters and public life*, 89–90.

<sup>4</sup> As translated in Crow, *Painters and public life*, 90.

<sup>5</sup> Crow, *Painters and public life*, 91.

factored into codes of class difference and the critique of the rococo.’<sup>6</sup> The letter’s narrator describes himself as ‘an ordinary individual’, ‘a man without ostentation or display’, while the aristocrats are more woman than man, both in number (two to one) and in the share of the text given over to describing the two women in the group. The older of the two women is the dominant force in the party, standing out by virtue of her seniority and sheer physical life-force (‘although already obese, she seemed to gorge herself further on the glory she extracted from the carriage and retinue’).<sup>7</sup> Their escort, the young man, is portrayed in feminine terms of costume and cosmetics. He is subordinate to the women in every way—indeed, he is hardly a man but a ‘phantom’, ‘a skeleton’, clinging to life only ‘by an artifice of vanity’.<sup>8</sup> Though taking the initial active role in demanding to be let into the Salon (while the ladies, for their part, complain ‘bitterly’), he does so in order to please the ladies, in a way that further unmans him as he stoops ‘to the point of pleading, of begging’.<sup>9</sup> He is scolded for his failure on the way home. In this ‘play of elemental, almost mythical oppositions’, the oppositions between the nobility and the middle class, virtue and vice, and femininity and masculinity are inextricably linked. The threat of aristocratic influence—or in Crow’s words, of ‘a bankrupt structure of privilege’—is one of male impotence and female dominance.<sup>10</sup> The *Lettre*’s clear prescription is that the public sphere of the Salon must be protected by excluding the aristocratic, the feminine, and the feminised.

However, unlike the impenetrable Salon doors in this bourgeois masculine ‘fantasy of debasement and revenge’, the Salon was in reality open to all, and women of all classes freely crossed the threshold into this public space.<sup>11</sup> Once there, they looked with their own eyes and spoke according to their own judgement, exposing the Salon to influences perceived by

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<sup>6</sup> Hyde, *Making up the rococo*, 85.

<sup>7</sup> Translated in Crow, *Painters and public life*, 89.

<sup>8</sup> Translated in Crow, *Painters and public life*, 89.

<sup>9</sup> Translated in Crow, *Painters and public life*, 90.

<sup>10</sup> Crow, *Painters and public life*, 91.

<sup>11</sup> Crow, *Painters and public life*, 91.

many as inimical to rational public discourse. Disciplining these irruptions of otherness became one of the key functions of art criticism, reaching fever pitch in the decades leading up to the Revolution, when dozens of Salon pamphlets invented and ventriloquised female characters. These fictional women were not only aristocrats but also *bourgeoises* and working-class women; for although femininity was among the defining features of anti-aristocratic rhetoric, its imagined pleasures and dangers extended far beyond the confines of a single social class. Many pamphlets present ‘fantas[ies] of debasement’ (as in the *Lettre à Monsieur de Poiresson-Chamarande*), satires in which women are ridiculed before the reading public. Others are fantasies of a different kind, providing male narrators with ideal women as objects and companions. Though penned with less bile than their satirical counterparts, these idealised women are often no more emancipated: gallantry rather than enlightenment is the reason for their inclusion.

Some of the best explorations of the importance of gender in the art criticism of this period can be found in the monographs by Melissa Hyde on François Boucher, by Mary Sheriff on Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, and by Anne-Marie Passez and Laura Auricchio on Adélaïde Labille-Guiard.<sup>12</sup> These works establish gender as a central component of Old Regime critical reception, pointing out the way Boucher and his enthusiasts were classed by his contemporaries as feminine and effeminate, while Vigée-Lebrun and Labille-Guiard were classed alternately as ideally feminine and as dangerously masculine. Sheriff’s monograph also considers Vigée-Lebrun as an art writer through her *Souvenirs*, which, published in 1835, fall outside the scope of this thesis.<sup>13</sup> Extending these approaches, this chapter examines how the gendered nature of art-critical discourse manifested in its constructions of

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<sup>12</sup> Hyde, *Making up the rococo*; Sheriff, *The exceptional woman*; Anne Marie Passez, *Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, 1749-1803: biographie et catalogue raisonné de son œuvre* (Paris: Arts et Métiers Graphiques, 1973); Laura Auricchio, *Adélaïde Labille-Guiard: artist in the age of revolution* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *The memoirs of Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun*, trans. Siân Evans (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989).

the female art viewer, through whom the reception of women artists was mediated, and onto whom critics projected the attentions and criticisms that could not decently be addressed to named women artists. Surveying the full range of female characters presented in pre-Revolutionary art criticism, from the most generic to the most eccentric—from allegorical embodiments of Painting and Criticism to satirical representatives of entire classes of women; from the common *Bourgeoise* and coquette to the rare woman of taste—this chapter draws attention to the ways that critics sought to regulate, through fiction, the subversive potential of women’s viewership and women’s speech in the public sphere of the Salon.

### *Coup d’œil of the Salon crowd*

To situate the characters who follow in their wider context, it seems apt to begin in the same way so many art-critical pamphlets did: with a general *coup d’œil* of the Salon. The *coup d’œil*, literally the ‘glance’, described the viewer’s initial impression of the vast quantity of artworks on display and the vast crowds who came to see them.<sup>14</sup> The anonymous *Lettre sur le Salon de 1755, adressée à ceux qui la liront* (‘Letter on the Salon of 1755, addressed to those who will read it’) clearly envisioned its reading art public as masculine: in the first word of the pamphlet, ‘those who will read it’ are respectfully addressed as ‘Messieurs’. However, the narrator’s first sight of the Salon public encompasses more or less equal parts men and women:

I arrived at the Salon. I saw women seeking to recognise Monsieur and Madame \*\*\*, who have judged it à propos to amuse the Public by representing their persons, which in the original have the power to bore those who know them. I heard a crowd of people amassed in front of some flowers, grapes, and a horse cry out in ecstasy: ‘This is remarkable.’ Someone next to me found Van Loo’s Paintings rather funny; I say Van Loo, because the moment one becomes a great man in this country one loses honorific titles. A *petite femme*, dragged along by a man who appeared happy enough with his burden, since he had only been carrying it a very little while, was rewarded for her curiosity; for the glass on

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<sup>14</sup> For more on the *coup d’œil*, see Wrigley, *The origins of French art criticism*, 64–69.

the Pastels showed her that she had placed her rouge too high, and she adjusted her beauty spots in front of a Portrait by Monsieur De La Tour.<sup>15</sup>

Readers are presented with a caricatured vision of a thoroughly irrational Salon public, prioritising still lifes and portraits of nobodies over the works of a ‘great man’ like Van Loo. The *petite femme*, touching up her makeup in front of La Tour’s portrait of Madame de Pompadour, is quite at home in the kind of public that marks its disrespect for greatness by its neglect of honorifics.<sup>16</sup> Full of empty praise, presumption, and vanity, it is in this irrational public that women take their place alongside men. They are explicitly not included in the rational reading public composed of ‘Messieurs’.

In addition to complaining of its lack of good judgement, many pamphlets stress the physical inconvenience of the Salon public, describing the unbearable heat generated by pressing crowds in an unventilated gallery. In most cases these complaints are a matter of sheer number; in some, they are directed specifically at lower-class members of the audience; and in one pamphlet published in 1779, they are directed exclusively at women:

We barely managed to climb the grand staircase, and the old man and I pierced, not without difficulty, into a brilliant crowd where our ladies take up a lot of space with the size of their hoops and the false parts that surround them, fairly well resembling, if the comparison is permitted, pretty water-carriers hiding their pails under their skirts in order to be received into the palace of Kings. He raised his eyes and saw, as well as he could through the pyramidal coiffures of our *Élégentes*, the history paintings...<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Lettre sur le Salon de 1755* (Amsterdam: Arkstée & Merkus, 1755), 7–8. ‘Pour entrer donc en matière, j’arrive du [sic] Salon. J’ai vu des femmes chercher à reconnoître monsieur & madame \*\*\*, qui one jugé à propos d’amuser le Public par la représentation de leurs personnes, dont les originaux sont en possession d’ennuyer les particuliers. J’ai entendu une foule de gens amassés devant des fleurs, des raisins, & un cheval, s’écrier dans leur extase : *Cela est parlant*. Quelqu’un à côté de moi a trouvé les Tableaux de Vanloo assez droles; je dis Vanloo, car du moment qu’on est grand homme, on perd dans ce pays les titres honorifiques. Une petite femme qui se faisoit traîner par un homme assez content en apparence de son fardeau, parce qu’il le portoit depuis fort peu de tems, a retiré quelque fruit de sa curiosité ; car les glaces des Pastels ont servi à lui faire apercevoir que son rouge étoit mis trop haut, & elle a rajusté ses mouches devant un Portrait de M. Delatour.’ English translation based on Hyde, *Making up the rococo*, 69.

<sup>16</sup> The portrait in question is Maurice-Quentin de La Tour’s *Marquise de Pompadour* (1748-1755, Paris: Louvre). This was the only portrait La Tour exhibited that year; see Hyde, *Making up the rococo*, 70.

<sup>17</sup> Lesuire, *Le Mort vivant au Sallon de 1779*, 7–8. ‘Nous montâmes avec peine le grand escalier, & je perçai avec mon vieillard, non sans difficulté, une foule brillante, où nos dames occupent beaucoup de place par l’ampleur de leurs cerceaux & des pieces postiches qui les entourent, représentant assez bien, si la comparaison est permise, de jolies porteuses d’eau qui cacheroient leurs seaux sous leurs jupons, pour être reçues dans le



The problem of the pressing crowd is here construed not as an excess of people, nor as an excess of ‘the people’, but as an excess specifically of ‘ladies’ (*dames*). Overdressed, overwhelming, even blinding, the *Élégantes* with their padding and their hairpieces are as out of place in the royal exhibition space of the Louvre as an under-dressed water-carrier would be. These women retain an ornamental function (they are ‘brilliant’ and ‘pretty’). However, they are also an obstacle, even a threat: they take up *too much* room, eclipsing the men in the audience until they seem not to exist, turning the Salon into a space so suffocatingly feminine that our two male protagonists must push and ‘pierce’ to even enter.

Just under a decade later, in 1787, the same conspicuous crowd of ‘ladies’ was lampooned by a pair of working-class characters in the extravagantly titled *Ah! Ah! ou Relation véritable, intéressante, curieuse & remarquable de la conversation de Marie-Jeanne la Bouquetière, & de Jérôme le Passeux, au Sallon du Louvre, en examinant les Tableaux qui y sont exposés* (‘Ah! Ah! Or a true, interesting, curious and remarkable relation of the conversation of Marie-Jeanne the Flower-Seller, and Jérôme the Ferryman...’). The two speak in the theatrical version of working-class speech known as *poissard* (which I will not attempt to replicate in English):

MARIE-JEANNE

Was it to have themselves varnished [like the figures in the paintings]  
That all these women have come here?’

JÉRÔME

‘*Pargué!* Mam’zell, you’re very droll!  
Doesn’t everybody play their role?  
Firstly, they wouldn’t be fashionable  
If they hadn’t seen the Salon:  
What matter if they know their stuff?  
Their carriage awaits them at the door;  
Hand in hand with a handsome *chevalier*,  
They go *frou-frou* upon the stair;  
They take a turn through the crowd;

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palais des Rois. Il éleva les yeux, & vit, comme il put, à travers les coëffures pyramidales de nos Elégantes, les tableaux d’histoire...’.

And since, to pass for somebody,  
 One must be seeing things,  
 They promenade with magnifying glasses;  
 They say: *How troublesome these people are!*  
 They ogle, they push; they thrash about,  
 Looking much less at the paintings  
 Than at the battalion of originals  
 Brought here by the same design.<sup>18</sup>

The feminine ‘battalion’ of originals are anything but original: all are here to be fashionable, ‘to pass for somebody’, to see and be seen by the others in the crowd. They do not look, but ‘ogle’ (*on lorgne*) and are ‘seeing things’, flaunting themselves and their magnifying glasses to appear in the know despite being presumed ignorant; they ‘push’ and ‘thrash about’, all while bemoaning the comportment of ‘these people’ (*c’peuple*). They are brought to the Salon not by a love of art but by a frivolous sense of entitlement, fashionability, and social rivalry.

What the crowds of women in all these pamphlets have in common is their class. With their rouge, beauty spots, panniers, towering coiffures, carriages, and attendant *chevaliers*, they belong explicitly to the moneyed classes. This conflation of women and aristocrats is hinted at again when Jérôme transitions seamlessly from criticising one to the other, in a passage that follows immediately from the one quoted above:

JÉRÔME  
 Then there’s the protégés!  
 There’s no baron, count or marquise  
 Who isn’t courted by a regiment of *painters*  
 To be praised, pushed, *extolled*.  
 Money! That lasts; but words,  
 They cost nothing.

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<sup>18</sup> Ah! Ah! ou Relation véritable, intéressante, curieuse & remarquable de la conversation de Marie-Jeanne la Bouquetière, & de Jérôme le Passeux, au Sallon du Louvre, en examinant les Tableaux qui y sont exposés (Paris, 1787), 6. ‘MARIE-JEANNE: C’était donc pour se fair’ vernir / Que j’voyois tout’ ces dam’ venir? JEROME: Pargué! mam’zell’, vous êt’ ben drôle! / Chacun ne fait-il pas son rôle? / D’abord, on n’s’rait pas du bon ton, / Si l’on n’avait pas vu l’Sallon: / Qu’on s’y connaisse, ou non, qu’importe? / On z’a son carrosse à la porte; / La main dans cell’ d’un beau ch’valier. / On fait *frou-frou* dans l’escalier: / On fait cercle dans la cohue; / Et comm’ faut avoir la b’erlue / Quand on veut passer pour queuq’z’un, / La loup’ sur l’œil on se promene; / On dit: *Que c’peuple est importun!* / On lorgne, on pousse; on se démene, / En r’gardant ben moins les tableaux, / Que l’bataillon d’originaux / Que le même desseïn amene.’

MARIE-JEANNE  
Bah! They're only lies:  
Nothing but hot air.<sup>19</sup>

The titled patrons are responsible for perverting the course of the arts with empty words that appeal to artists' vanity, rendering them more courtier than painter. The terms of these criticisms so resemble those of women as to be virtually indistinguishable. Wealthy women are targeted because they are a threat: they have the means to influence the arts, to commission artworks and to set the taste, perverting artistic discourse with cheap and empty words.

Pictorial depictions of women in the Salon public present a strikingly different perspective to the written ones, devoid of the satirical charge to be found in the pamphlet literature. Gabriel de Saint-Aubin's *Vue du Salon du Louvre en l'année 1753* ('View of the Louvre Salon in 1753') (fig. 2) is little interested in the paintings on the walls, showing us their number but barely sketching in their subjects.<sup>20</sup> We see instead shafts of light from high windows, the grand sweep of the staircase, the spiral movement of the audience coming and going. Almost all heads are turned upwards in marvel at the exhibition; even a small dog points its nose up to the vaulted ceiling. Men and women climb the stairs, pause in awe on the landing, or bend forward to look more closely at the artworks or at the elegant new arrivals on the stairs; Saint-Aubin's etching needle lingers on the sculptural drape of the men's suit jackets and the women's *robes à la française*. This is the *coup d'oeil* incarnate, an impression of scale and grandeur that leaves the beauty of the individual paintings to be inferred from the surrounding beauty of the room and the crowd. Energetic cross-hatching and a play of light

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<sup>19</sup> Ah! Ah! ou relation véritable, 6–7. 'JEROME: Et puis les protégés! / G'nia pas d'baron, d'comte, d'marquise, / Qu'un régiment d'peigneux n'courtise, / Pour êt' vantés, pouffés, prônés. / D'l'argent! ça tient; mais des paroles, / Ça n'coûte rien. MARIE-JEANNE: Bah! c'est q'des colles: Autant en emporte le vent.'

<sup>20</sup> Kim de Beaumont, "Les Salons de Gabriel de Saint-Aubin (1724-1780)," in *Le Salon de l'Académie royale de peinture et sculpture: archéologie d'une institution*, by Isabelle Pichet (Paris: Hermann, 2014), 9–32. Colin B. Bailey et al., eds., *Gabriel de Saint-Aubin (1724-1780)* (New York: Frick Collection, in association with Musée du Louvre Éditions and Somogy Art Publishers, 2007), no. 69.

and dark add to the image's dynamism, echoing the crossing of glances as the figures look about themselves. Even by mid-eighteenth-century standards, there is a distinctly old-world feel to this elegant and reverent crowd. They recall the tone of Salon *livrets* from early in the century, according to which the role of the public was not to pass judgement on the exhibition but simply to admire it, and by extension, to admire the king in whose name the exhibition was held.<sup>21</sup> The beautiful people in Saint-Aubin's print (men and women alike) are not only art viewers but loyal subjects, raising their eyes to the glory of France.

Pietro Antonio Martini's approach to depicting the Salons of 1785 and 1787 was strikingly different (figs. 3-5). His engravings, the most famous visual documents of the Salon, painstakingly detail the appearance and arrangement of the paintings on display.<sup>22</sup> The title of the first print—*Coup d'œil exact de l'arrangement des Peintures au Salon du Louvre, en 1785* ('Exact view of the arrangement of the Paintings at the Louvre Salon, in 1785')—stipulates that this is no general *coup d'oeil* but an *exact* one. The image is a visual exhibition catalogue, paying minute attention to each of the paintings in view and even including some of the numbered labels attached to the paintings to indicate their location in the *livret*. Martini's prints have gone down in history for their faithful representation of the arrangement of the Salon, but this is not all that they depict. We also see the public, not as it was, but as was thought proper for the ornamental and anecdotal purposes of the print. In the 1785 print, men and women traverse the Salon in groups and pairs, looking, gesturing and conversing. A Swiss guard lounges nonchalantly by the entrance; a woman enters on the arm of her male companion, her mouth a little 'o' of wonder, gesturing with her fan at the scene before them. In the corner nearest the door, a small cluster of men and women stand close to see the details of two large landscape paintings; nearer to us, along the wall, two men pull their female

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<sup>21</sup> See Wrigley, *The origins of French art criticism*, 97–119 ('Chapter three: in search of an art public').

<sup>22</sup> On these prints and others by Martini depicting exhibitions of the British Royal Academy, see Vicenç Furió, "Seeing art history: Pietro Antonio Martini's engravings on the exhibitions of Paris and London in 1787," *Locus Amoenus* 7 (2004): 255–70.

companion in opposite directions, each wishing to show her a different painting. In the right foreground, a woman in a stylish *redingote*, arm in arm with a man, reads him the *livret*; in the centre, a woman lifts the wide brim of her hat with an elegant gesture to gain a better view of the paintings hung high on the far wall (we find her double in the back right corner of the 1787 print). Further to the left, a woman stands with her two daughters peacefully at her side, their hair loose and neatly brushed, the younger holding a *livret*. On either side of this grouping, two other women have brought their young sons. One boy, slightly older, stands in *contrapposto* to gesture at the room with a grace learned from the dancing-master, while the other, slumped with boredom, holds himself up by a fistful of his mother's skirts.

Nearly every group of figures in Martini's engraving includes women. They are carefully varied in their *robes à l'anglaise*, *robes à la polonaise* and *robes retroussées dans les poches*, with ruffled shawls and wrappers. Attention has been lavished on the variety of their hats and bonnets—ribbons, feathers, flowers, fans, lappets, lace. None of the women here would be out of place in a fashion plate. Yet despite the variety of their costume, they possess a striking homogeneity. This is firstly to do with class: there is no sign here of the poor or the working classes. Secondly, without exception, they maintain an elegant composure: they follow where men lead, standing or calmly strolling while the men around them energetically point, stride and lean towards the paintings that interest them; they gesture where some of the men gesticulate; they are polite and thoughtful in conversation, listening more often than speaking, whereas some of the men grow heated (like the old man and the aristocrat pointing admonishing fingers at each other in the foreground).

It is among the men that we see not only fashionable but professional and physiognomic distinctions, and some nods in the direction of caricature. We can distinguish differences in class and profession: a pair of men, neither dressed in the height of fashion, both without canes and one without a wig, point and converse in the middle of the room;

aristocrats are distinguished by the swords at their waists; *abbés* are conspicuous in their black suits and skullcaps, lawyers in their black robes, and in the foreground, looking out at us, stands a solitary white-robed Benedictine monk. While most faces conform to the delicate, oval eighteenth-century type, and most bodies exhibit elegant gestures and well-cut coats, some are less than elegant: we see here and there a double chin, a pot belly, a heavy jaw, a pair of spectacles, a receding hairline. No such departure from the realm of pure ornament is to be found among the female figures.

Evidently, the depiction of the crowd in the 1785 print went down well, for in 1787 it multiplied both in number and in anecdotal detail. Fashions have changed, and the women now wear their hair curled large *en hérisson*, topped with ever more voluminous hats and bonnets to match. Groups are larger; gestures are more exaggerated; some women are now accompanied by small dogs; children squabble and wave and drop things. This time, the Swiss guard stands upright, and the couple coming in through the door stands still, as if struck dumb by the spectacle of the Salon. A young, unwigged artist carries a portfolio; a lone connoisseur with his back to us stands in an inelegant half-squat to squint at a low-hanging painting on the back wall. In the foreground, a mother in a frilled bonnet benevolently instructs her son and daughter in the appreciation of the arts. In general, the women in this print appear to be taking a more active role in conversation, moving and gesturing more decisively—though none forget themselves so far as to argue or declaim as some of the men do.

Two further notable differences present themselves between Martini's men and women. Firstly, while the *livret*—the guide to unlocking the identities of the paintings—is clutched by men and women in roughly equal proportions, visual aids—spectacles, lorgnettes, magnifying glasses and pocket telescopes—are exclusively in the possession of men, and men alone are shown to stoop or lean in to see closer. Secondly, while some men

walk unaccompanied, no women have this luxury, with only one possible exception: in the foreground of the 1787 print, an elegantly dressed woman stands facing us, not interacting with the group behind her, looking at a picture we cannot see. Her shoulders slouched, her head inclined to one side, and the *livret* hanging negligently open in her left hand, she gazes abstractedly out of the picture, lost in thought. Women, though quite capable of navigating the exhibition for themselves with the help of the *livret*, do not come alone: they come with friends, whether to socialise, to learn from them or to impress them, or with their children, for their edification and enjoyment. There are no solitary female strollers; no women so engrossed in the details of a painting as to peer or stoop. Their lack of visual aids tells us that they are not here in any capacity as connoisseurs: they are passive rather than active viewers, soaking up what surrounds them without seeking to subject it to any more particular scrutiny. They are here to admire, to converse, and to be admired, not to examine. Martini's prints show women as an integral, respectable, and attractive part of the Salon audience, while also differentiating modes of art viewership along distinct gendered lines. This difference, in the prints, is shown as neutral and natural. Indeed, the only humorous charge in the prints is directed at certain masculine modes of art viewership in the figures of pedants, pompous declaimers, and the two overly ardent admirers tugging the object of their affections every which way. While these traits are portrayed as exclusively masculine, they are not portrayed as *typically* masculine: they are the outliers in a room filled with seemingly interesting and thoughtful discussions.

In the visual medium of a print, the depiction of the crowd serves a very different purpose than it does in art-critical pamphlets. In both Saint-Aubin's and Martini's prints, published to commemorate a public event for posterity, the crowd serves to lend interest and dignity to the occasion—hence the inclusion of middle- and upper-class men and women alike, to the exclusion of any members of the lower classes. The presence of women in this

context is entirely unobjectionable: in the pictorial crowd, they are indispensable for the purpose of ornament and variety. Both Saint-Aubin and Martini show fashionable women in perfect harmony with their environment, making up no more and no less than their fair share of the elegant crowd. In the verbal medium of the pamphlets, however, women's role is not merely to look lovely while having unspecified, pleasant conversations: we see the content of their conversations, turning them into active viewers and judges of the Salon. In the discursive space of the Salon, women's participation was constantly interrogated. In addition, unlike the commemorative pictorial world of the prints, pamphlets often explicitly framed themselves as ephemeral. Works of the moment, written in haste in the hope of appearing before the end of the Salon made them yesterday's news, they had more to gain from shock and novelty than from maintaining the appearance of a dignified and attractive Salon crowd. Women, along with other 'outsider' characters, served as novelties—markers of difference—and the inclusion of prominent female characters was often advertised in the titles of pamphlets that sought to differentiate themselves from the rest: *Jugement d'une demoiselle de quatorze ans, sur le Sallon de 1777* ('Judgement of a fourteen-year-old girl on the Salon of 1777'), *La Prêtresse, ou Nouvelle manière de prédire ce qui est arrive* ('The Priestess, or new way of predicting what has happened'), *La Bourgeoise au Sallon* ('The Bourgeoise at the Salon'). Satire was the order of the day, and when directed at women, the behaviour being satirised was portrayed as typically feminine, while sensibility (in either sense of the word) was portrayed as exceptional.

### *Gender and art-critical authority*

Over the course of the century, the portrayal of female art viewers in visual and written media changed in ways that were inextricably connected with the evolving forms of art criticism. Bernadette Fort has divided the art-critical pamphlet literature of the Old Regime into two



strands, which she terms ‘Heraclitian’, after Heraclitus, the so-called ‘weeping philosopher’, and ‘Democritian’, after Democritus, the ‘laughing philosopher’. Heraclitian criticism refers to connoisseurial texts usually written in the first person or in epistolary form, and connoting ‘the display of expert, refined, superior judgment’.<sup>23</sup> Exemplified by writers such as La Font, this remains the canonical image of art criticism today.<sup>24</sup> Democritian criticism, by contrast, displayed a marked ambivalence toward the authority of the connoisseur, variously satirising the Salon, the Salon public, and the figure of the connoisseur himself. Though both modes of art criticism occupied themselves extensively with the role of the female viewer, they characterised her relationship to art-critical authority in different ways.

La Font published his explosive anti-rococo treatise in 1747, condemning what he saw as the decadence of French painting, and cementing the negative association between women and the rococo in the public eye.<sup>25</sup> In the following years, he continued to advocate for a return to the masculine greatness of Louis XIV, writing in 1754: ‘It is principally the Ladies one must blame, if our productions so often descend to the level of trifles and trinkets.’<sup>26</sup> Not all critics shared this view, however. The Abbé Le Blanc, in his rebuttal to La Font’s *Réflexions* of 1747, expressed his wish that modern women would involve themselves *more* as art viewers:

Women, the very same ones who continually read Books of Poetry or Novels, seem to have an indifference to painting that I can scarcely understand. [La Font] accuses them of having substituted mirrors for Paintings in their apartments, attributing to their vanity what is perhaps only the effect of the decadent luxury that is so widespread today. It is a shame, actually, that women, who have so much more vivacity of imagination and refinement of

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<sup>23</sup> Fort, “Voice of the public,” 375.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Thomas E. Crow, “The Oath of the Horatii in 1785: painting and pre-Revolutionary radicalism in France,” *Art History* 1, no. 4 (December 1978); Crow, *Painters and public life*, especially chapter seven, “David and the Salon,” 211-254; Caviglia, “Les écrits sur l’art et l’opinion publique au XVIIIe siècle: l’année 1747.”

<sup>25</sup> La Font de Saint-Yenne, *Réflexions sur quelques causes de l’état présent de la peinture en France avec un examen des principaux ouvrages exposés au Louvre le mois d’août 1746*.

<sup>26</sup> Étienne La Font de Saint-Yenne, *Sentimens sur quelques ouvrages de peinture, sculpture et gravure, écrits à un particulier en province*, 1754, 33. ‘C’est principalement aux Dames qu’il faut s’en prendre, si nos productions tombent souvent dans le petit & le colifichet.’ Translation based on Hyde, *Making up the rococo*, 63.

feeling than men, do not believe themselves designed to judge the beauties of painting. Nothing which belongs to the province of pleasure and grace should be foreign to them. [...] Many great Painters painted only for them. The subjects they took the most pleasure in depicting are those in which their Sex triumphs over ours. What could be more capable of flattering their vanity than to see Hercules spinning at Omphale's feet! Their principal object is to please, and Poetry, Painting, Music, all the arts in the world compete to give them new means to do so. They would be well advised not to neglect a single one. At least one will easily grant me that the Cherubs of [Francesco] Albani are better suited to a Lady's toilette, than the Telescopes of Newton. If I can be permitted to say so in passing, the Sciences to which they devote themselves nowadays certainly do not render them more amiable.<sup>27</sup>

In Le Blanc's telling, the arts are women's natural domain because women and the arts share the same fundamental purpose: 'to please' (and specifically, he adds later, 'to please men').<sup>28</sup>

Women's appreciation of the arts ought to be cultivated to enhance their natural graces, and to provide a more appropriate channel than the sciences for their 'vivacity of imagination and refinement of feeling'. Of course, their appreciation need not extend further than what came to be known as the 'agreeable subjects'—paintings of cherubs and mythological love stories. Ultimately, women's interest in the arts was to be encouraged in a limited capacity that enhanced the expression of sexual difference, preserving their role as a source of pleasurable diversion while diverting them from their pursuit of more purely intellectual aims.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Jean-Bernard Le Blanc, *Lettre sur l'exposition des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, etc. de l'année 1747. En en général sur l'utilité de ces sortes d'expositions*, 1747, 136–38; translation based on Hyde, *Making up the rococo*, 65. 'Cependant les Femmes, je dis celles mêmes qui lisent continuellement des Livres de Poésie ou des Romans, semblent avoir pour la Peinture une espèce [sic] d'éloignement que j'ai peine à concevoir. On les accuse d'avoir fait substituer dans les appartemens les glaces aux Tableaux, & l'on met sur le compte de leur vanité, ce qui n'est peut-être que l'effet du luxe fastueux qui est aujourd'hui si général. C'est dommage, en effet, que les Femmes qui portent souvent plus loin que les Hommes la vivacité de l'imagination, & la finesse du sentiment, ne se croient pas faites pour juger des beautés de la Peinture. Rien de ce qui est du ressort de l'agrément & des graces ne leur devoit être étranger. [...] Beaucoup de grands Peintres n'ont peint que pour elles. Les sujets qu'ils ont pris le plus de Plaisir à traiter sont ceux où leur Sexe triomphe du nôtre. Quoi de plus capable de flatter leur vanité que de voir Hercule filer aux pieds d'Omphale! Leur principal objet est de plaire, & la Poésie, la Peinture, la Musique, tous les Arts à l'envi concourent à leur en fournir de nouveaux moyens. Elles ont intérêt à n'en négliger aucun. Du moins on m'accordera sans peine que les Amours de l'Albane conviennent mieux à la toilette d'une Femme, que les Télescopes de Newton. Qu'il me soit permis de le dire en passant, les Sciences auxquelles elles s'adonnent aujourd'hui ne les rendent pas assurément plus aimables.'

<sup>28</sup> Le Blanc, *Lettre sur l'exposition des ouvrages de peinture*, 139: "Celles qui par-là [by practising the sciences] comptent de plaire aux hommes, font précisément le contraire".

<sup>29</sup> For a consideration of a similar topic in eighteenth-century Britain, see Ann Bermingham, "The aesthetics of ignorance: the accomplished woman in the culture of connoisseurship," *Oxford Art Journal* 16, no. 2 (1993): 3–20.

The epistolary form common to so much Heraclitian art criticism was closely associated with women's writing. The letter, with its 'artless' style and inherently social function, was said to be a literary form ideally suited to the feminine mind.<sup>30</sup> However, art critics rarely granted female characters the 'authorship' of epistolary art criticism, preferring to grant them the role of addressees. As early as 1738, Neufville de Brunaubois-Montador published the *Description raisonnée des tableaux exposés au Louvre. Lettre à Madame la Marquise de S.P.R.* ('Reasoned description of the paintings exhibited at the Louvre. Letter to Madame the Marquise de S.P.R.'), providing his out-of-town correspondent with a glowing summary of that year's Salon. His review covers all the major painters who exhibited—not only those working in genres considered 'feminine'—but he invokes the Marquise's voice only once, on the typically feminine subject of fashion. Describing the portrait of Mademoiselle de La Boissière by Maurice-Quentin de La Tour's, he notes the sitter's 'hands placed in one of those little muffs that you have become displeased with, but to which you would reconcile yourself in this one's favour.'<sup>31</sup> Neufville closes his review with the observation that the Marquise must come to the next one, for 'without mentioning the injustice you do to yourself in depriving yourself of this spectacle, you are also robbing us by depriving us of the pleasure we would have in admiring you at the Salon.'<sup>32</sup> Epistolary criticism thus invited women to share in—and form part of—the spectacle of the Salon, without having to stage their opinions.

In 1747, Lieudé de Sepmanville published his *Réflexions nouvelles d'un amateur des beaux-arts* ('New reflections of an amateur of the fine arts'), a rebuttal of Le Blanc in

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<sup>30</sup> Goldsmith, *Writing the female voice*. Susan S. Lanser, *Fictions of authority* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992). See especially the chapters on epistolarity in Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni's *Abeille* (45-60) and Isabelle de la Charrière's *Mistriss Henley* (141-154).

<sup>31</sup> Jean-Florent-Joseph de Neufville de Brunaubois-Montador, *Description raisonnée des tableaux exposés au Louvre. Lettre à Madame la marquise de S.P.R.*, 1738, 7: 'les mains passées dans un de ces petits manchons, que vous avez pris en déplaisance, mais avec lesquels vous vous réconciliez en faveur de celui-ci.'

<sup>32</sup> Neufville de Brunaubois-Montador, *Description raisonnée des tableaux*, 9: 'sans parler du tort que vous vous faites en vous privant de ce spectacle, vous nous faites aussi un vol en nous privant du plaisir qu'on auroit à vous admirer au Salon.'

epistolary form, addressed to Madame \*\*\*, who is both addressed and occasionally ventriloquised.<sup>33</sup> The anonymous *Lettre sur la cessation du Sallon de peinture* of 1749, addressed to ‘Madame de R\*\*\*’, recounts a lively debate about the arts in which the recipient’s sister is an articulate participant. The epistolary tradition continued off and on in the ensuing decades, with works such as Mathon de La Cour’s *Lettres à Madame \*\** (1763), the anonymous *Lettre d’Artiomphile à Mme Mérard de S.-Just* (1781), and the *Lettre à Émilie, sur quelques tableaux du Sallon* (1785).<sup>34</sup> Also worth mentioning in this context is the architect Jacques-François Blondel’s epistolary novel, *L’homme du monde éclairé par les arts* (‘The man of the world enlightened by the arts’), published in two volumes in 1774. The novel—which deserves more critical attention than I can give it here—tells the love story of the Comte de Saleran and the Comtesse de Vaujeu, providing its commentary on art and architecture by way of romance. These epistolary works largely depict women as active participants in the art public and in art-critical discourse. If they are not equals (for their commentaries usually remain limited to the ‘agreeable subjects’ and enclosed within the letters of their male correspondents), they are still more than the ‘passive addressees’ described by Wrigley.<sup>35</sup>

As the century progressed and the notion of oppositional art criticism ceased to be quite as shocking as it once had, art critics flexed their creative muscle and began to seek new ways to attract attention and sell pamphlets. This is where we find carnivalesque art criticism. Carnavalesque Salon reviews moved freely between high and low literary forms, integrating classical references into satirical letters, plays, narratives, dialogues, *comédies-parades*, verse and vaudeville (sometimes all the above squeezed into one pamphlet). But not all

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<sup>33</sup> Though not without some limitations; see Hyde, *Making up the rococo*, 66–67.

<sup>34</sup> Charles-Joseph Mathon de La Cour, *Lettres à Madame \*\* sur les peintures, les sculptures et les gravures, exposés dans le Sallon du Louvre en 1763* (Paris: Guillaume Desprez & Duschesne, 1763); *Lettre d’Artiomphile à Madame Mérard de S.-Just, sur l’exposition au Louvre, en 1781, des tableaux, sculptures, gravures & desseins des artistes de l’Académie royale*, 1781; *Lettre à Émilie, sur quelques tableaux du Sallon*, 1785.

<sup>35</sup> Wrigley, *The origins of French art criticism*, 171.

carnavalesque criticism was the product of the later eighteenth century. The opening of the *Lettre à Monsieur de Poiresson-Chamarande*, a pamphlet published before the Salon was fully regularised and before Salon criticism had established its place in the Parisian cultural landscape, predicts many of the preoccupations of later criticism of this kind. Its lengthy burlesque seamlessly maps class and gender onto each other, merging femininity and aristocracy into a grotesque threat to the free, equal, and rational public space of the Salon. What began as a single pamphlet in 1741 became a trickle in the middle decades of the century and a flood in the 1770s and 1780s.

In her choice of the word ‘carnavalesque’ to describe the satirical strain of art criticism, Fort invokes Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on the Renaissance celebration of Carnival, when laws and hierarchies were temporarily suspended and upended.<sup>36</sup> She proposes a reading of the *Salon carré* (the ‘square room’) as a modern incarnation of the carnival square: like Carnival, the Salon was a periodic, free spectacle open to all citizens, with all the social incongruities that this entailed.<sup>37</sup> Writers of oppositional art criticism exploited these parallels, drawing on the carnivalesque literary tradition to hold authority up to ridicule. This applied not only to the institutional authority of the monarchy, the nobility, and the Académie, but also to the more loosely defined authority of the public. In Fort’s words, even ‘[t]he liberal and radical wings of Salon criticism were hardly more tolerant of popular opinion in esthetic matters.’<sup>38</sup> Although critics, by the very act of publishing, asserted their own prerogative to judge what was good and bad against the forces of censorship and connoisseurial gatekeeping, few (if any) went so far as to express any sense of a common cause with freedom of expression for the general public. Just as the Renaissance Carnival served largely as a pressure valve—a release of tension—rather than a true disruption of

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<sup>36</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

<sup>37</sup> Fort, “Voice of the public,” 381.

<sup>38</sup> Fort, “Voice of the public,” 390.

existing hierarchies, carnivalesque art criticism went only so far in its challenge to authority. As Mark Ledbury has noted, its apparent polyphony often disguised a pedantic and indeed reactionary streak: ‘One finds in abundance pedantry, pseudo-dialogue in which one voice is resolutely dominant’.<sup>39</sup> Even critics who openly railed against censorship and privilege maintained the need for a line to be drawn somewhere: some people, they argued, simply were not suited to express opinions on artistic matters. Different critics drew this line in different places, requiring differing levels of knowledgeableability, respectability, disinterestedness... However, one hierarchy remained constant: the hierarchy of gender. In the varied landscape of prerevolutionary art criticism, the belief in the fundamentality of gender difference is as close as we come to a unifying ideology.

The connection between masculinity and art-critical authority was so powerful that, for one art critic, the exercise of his art-critical and sexual agency sometimes amounted to the same thing. Antoine-Joseph Gorsas (1752-1793), author of two consecutive Salon reviews in 1785 and 1787, is best known through Thomas Crow as a future Revolutionary and exemplar of the radical response to David.<sup>40</sup> Yet his reviews—particularly of the Salon of 1787—are also among Old Regime art criticism’s most extravagant odes to male libertinage. In the *Promenades de Critès au Sallon de l’année 1785* (‘Promenades of Critès at the Salon of 1785’), David’s *Oath of the Horatii* makes such an impression that Critès becomes fully immersed in the world of the painting, to the point where ‘I was beginning in effect to lose

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<sup>39</sup> Mark Ledbury, “Heroes and villains: history painting and the critical sphere,” in *Penser l’art dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle: théorie, critique, philosophie, histoire*, ed. Christian Michel and Carl Magnusson (Rome and Paris: Académie de France - Villa Médicis and Somogy, 2013), 26.

<sup>40</sup> Crow, *Painters and public life*, 184, 215–29. According to Crow, Gorsas, together with other future Revolutionaries like Marat, Bergasse, Brissot, and Carra, was one of a number of journalists who, ‘more than any other group, [...] defined the language and symbols of pre-Revolutionary radicalism’, 220. Gorsas’ political writings are undeniably pertinent to our reading of his art criticism, but it is important to stress the marked tonal differences between the two; as Fort puts it, ‘his Salon criticism [...], unlike his political pamphlets, falls resolutely in the comic category’. Fort, “Voice of the public,” 373–74, note 17. See also Septime Gorceix, “Antoine-Joseph Gorsas, journaliste et conventionnel (1753-1793),” *L’Information historique* 15, no. 5 (1953): 179–83, and Florence Ferran, “Le Salon en délire: Gorsas et la plume du coq de Micille,” in *La peinture en procès*, ed. René Démoris and Florence Ferran (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2001), 257–84.

my head [...]; after having pledged along with them to conquer or die, I had already seized a sword'.<sup>41</sup> Only two other paintings at this Salon had a comparable effect on him. A painting of a shipwreck by Vernet leaves him in a prolonged trance, convinced that he, too, has been shipwrecked and must aid his companions in misfortune; and a *Bacchante* by Vigée-Lebrun leaves him stricken, kissing her, returning to her again and again, spending a quarter of an hour arranging flowers from a nearby still life on her body until, as with the *Oath of the Horatii*, his companion must drag him away.<sup>42</sup> (He delays a closer examination of Vigée-Lebrun's portrait of the comtesse de Gramont dressed as a grape harvester for 'fear of being unfaithful to my dear Bacchante'—no mention of his wife.)<sup>43</sup> David, Vernet and Vigée-Lebrun—the queen's painter—might seem an unlikely trio to be singled out by a future Girondin. But the three artists are linked again later, mentioned in the same breath in an impassioned attack on another art critic who, according to Gorsas, has not afforded them the appropriate level of respect.<sup>44</sup> But it is clear that the respect he affords to the woman among their number is of quite a different kind. Vigée-Lebrun, he writes, 'deserves praise because she is a Painter, an amiable and pretty woman with talents that honour her sex'.<sup>45</sup> She makes a repeat appearance in Gorsas' subsequent Salon review, where Critès's amorous attentions direct themselves at her painting of her adolescent daughter, Julie.<sup>46</sup> For Critès, being an art critic means *desiring to be* the tragic and heroic figures of David and Vernet; it also means

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<sup>41</sup> Translation based on Crow, *Painters and public life*, 226–27. Gorsas, *Promenades de Critès*, troisième promenade, 34–35. 'Je commençois effectivement à perdre la tête [...]; après avoir juré comme eux, de mourir ou de vaincre, j'avois déjà saisi une épée'.

<sup>42</sup> Gorsas, *Promenades de Critès*, première promenade, 18–21 (Vernet); première promenade, 21–22, deuxième promenade, 14, and troisième promenade, 45–46 (Vigée-Lebrun).

<sup>43</sup> Gorsas, *Promenades de Critès*, deuxième promenade, 15–16. Vigée-Lebrun, *The comtesse de Gramont Caderousse gathering grapes* (1784, NY: Met).

<sup>44</sup> Gorsas, *Promenades de Critès*, deuxième promenade, 28.

<sup>45</sup> Gorsas, *Promenades de Critès*, deuxième promenade, 28. Vigée-Lebrun 'mérite des égards, parce qu'elle est Peintre, femme aimable & jolie, & qu'elle a des talens qui honorent son sexe'.

<sup>46</sup> Antoine-Joseph Gorsas, "La Plume du coq de Micille, ou aventures de Critès au Sallon, pour servir de suite aux Promenades de 1785," in *La peinture en procès*, ed. René Démoris and Florence Ferran (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2001), 331–32. Vigée-Lebrun, *Julie Lebrun looking in a mirror* (1787, NY: Met); see also Angela Rosenthal, "Infant academies and the childhood of art: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun's 'Julie with a mirror,'" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37, no. 4 (2004): 605–28.

*desiring* beautiful women—especially if they are the work of an equally beautiful woman painter who can be desired by proxy.

Evidently inspired by the success of Gorsas' previous pamphlet, *La Plume du coq de Micille, ou aventures de Critès au Sallon* ('The feather of Micyllus's cockerel, or adventures of Critès at the Salon'), published two years later, takes its narrative conceits and its libertine streak considerably further.<sup>47</sup> Critès is by now an embattled critic, barred from entering the Salon upon pain of mutilation after the stir caused two years previously by his *Promenades*.<sup>48</sup> The Swiss guards have their halberds at the ready, the concierge's dog has been trained to gnaw at his calves on sight, and a vengeful artist's students have pledged to cut off his ears. His wife is most concerned about the threat to his calves: 'We can do without your ears', she says (she gets her name, Xanthippe, from Socrates' wife, a historical byword for a shrew or scold).<sup>49</sup> Critès, however, is undeterred, for he has 'stolen from [the ancient satirist] Lucian a highly amusing way of entering the Salon *without being seen by anybody*': a magical feather that grants invisibility and opens all doors, as well as granting him the power to speak with and enter the artworks on display.<sup>50</sup>

Using this feather, Critès gains entry to the Salon where he lives out a fantasy of art-critical impunity, free from the threats of his enemies and the constraints of his wife, children, and servant Fanchette. Bearing in mind that the French *plume* means both a feather and a

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<sup>47</sup> Gorsas, *La Plume du coq de Micille*, 1787; *La Plume du coq de Micille, ou aventures de Critès au Sallon, pour servir de suite aux Promenades de 1785. Seconde journée* (London & Paris: Hardouin & Gattey, 1787); the third pamphlet is preserved in a manuscript transcription in the Deloynes collection: "Aventures de Critès au Salon. Seconde journée après-midi" (1787), Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Estampes et photographie, Reserve 8-YA3-27 (15, 404). All three parts are reproduced with notes and a critical introduction by Florence Ferran in Gorsas, "La Plume du coq de Micille," 2001. Subsequent references will be to this edition.

<sup>48</sup> Critès was also the protagonist of Gorsas' *L'Âne promeneur, ou Critès promené par son âne: chef-d'oeuvre pour servir d'apologie au Goût, aux Moeurs, à l'esprit, et aux Découvertes du siècle* (Paris, 1786).

<sup>49</sup> Gorsas, "La Plume du coq de Micille," 2001, 293. 'Pour tes oreilles passe, me disait en pleurant Mde. Critès; mais tes mollets! tes mollets!' Critès refers to her as 'mon démon' (327), and describes her in the 1785 pamphlet as a 'véritable firebrand from hell, meaner than Socrates' (a 'vrai tison d'enfer, plus méchante que celle de Socrate'); Gorsas, *Promenades de Critès*, troisième promenade, 50.

<sup>50</sup> Gorsas, "La Plume du coq de Micille," 2001, 294–95. '[J]'ai pillé dans Lucien un moyen fort plaisant, d'entrer au Sallon *sans être vu de personne que de ceux qu'il me plaira, & de rendre meme invisibles ceux que je jugerai à propos.*'



writer's quill, what follows is an exercise in pure, joyous, and decidedly *masculine* art-critical wish-fulfilment. The feather's powers grant Critès near-total impunity to do as he pleases. With its help, his interactions with the artworks at the Salon—previously presented as trances or entrancements—take on a more tangible aspect, further blurring the boundaries between art and reality. When Critès arrives at the Salon, his first action with his newfound powers is to defeat all his enemies: the dog Turcamort, 'attracted by the scent of [his] calves'; the Swiss guards; the angry art students; 'and all that *with strokes of the feather*.'<sup>51</sup> This is a cathartic moment for the art critic, who is for the first time no longer threatened with bodily harm by rival artists and art critics, or with the judgement of his fellow members of the public: 'there I was right in the middle of the Salon, overcomer of all obstacles, free to traverse all four of its corners [...]; to review people of all classes and all conditions without being exposed to anyone's examination unless I wished it; able to do anything without fear of censure'.<sup>52</sup> The feather grants him the realisation of his desire to see without being seen, to judge without being judged—to claim agency for himself alone. The people around him become the objects of his gaze: though they may think themselves active observers, they are in fact being observed. The pamphlet is remarkable in its frankness about being a power fantasy.

Free at last to enjoy the Salon at his leisure, Critès embarks on a discursive series of peregrinations. He gets staggeringly drunk with Bridan's statue of Bayard and settles a petty quarrel between the sculptures of Racine and Molière, critiquing other artworks and other critics' pamphlets along the way.<sup>53</sup> The high point of the Salon comes on his second day there. Critès, wandering among the sculptures, hears a woman's cries for help issuing from

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<sup>51</sup> Gorsas, "La Plume du coq de Micille," 2001, 296. All italics in excerpts from Gorsas are from the original. 'Le premier qui se présente fut l'alerte *Turcamort*, que l'odeur de mes mollets attiroit; je l'étends mort d'un coup de plume'; 'renverser des Suisses, assommer des chiens, mettre en fuite tout le monde; & tout cela *à coups de plume*.'

<sup>52</sup> Gorsas, "La Plume du coq de Micille," 2001, 297. 'Me voici donc au beau milieu du Salon, vainqueur de tous les obstacles, libre d'en parcourir les quatre coins [...]; de passer en revue les gens de toutes les classes, de toutes les conditions sans être, si je le voulais, exposé à l'examen de qui que ce soit; ayant la faculté de tout faire sans craindre la censure'.

<sup>53</sup> "La Plume du coq de Micille," 2001, 326-327 (Bayard), 333-337 (Molière and Racine).

Claude Dejoux's sculpture of the priestess Cassandra being abducted by a scandalously nude

Ajax (fig. 6):<sup>54</sup>

'Over here! Over here! Help! Murder! .... Vile ravisher! Odious Ajax!' cried the Priestess Cassandra from the Sanctuary of Minerva.

'Oh! oh!' I said to myself, 'here's something new.' [...]

'Minerva, I implore you', continued Priam's daughter [...]. 'I respect your mysterious silence, powerful daughter of the heavens; but at least summon an avenger, and denounce the *round rump* of this *immodest* Achaean, who, *in spite of Homer and against all the laws of decency and modesty*, has come to frighten me with his *limp and enervated figure study*.'

'Great Gods! will you be deaf to my prayers? ..... My forces are dwindling; sacrilege is carrying me away in its shameless arms.... Oh, my virginity, treasure which [...] I have been able to refuse to the most amiable of the Gods, will you be the Prey of a Greek whom I abhor? Alas! if only it were my liberator who would pluck this rose that I have kept so pure, in the midst of a Trojan Garrison and Grenadiers of Ilium.'

'Yes, beautiful Cassandra, it will be your Liberator and not a Renegade', I cried, knocking down the door of the temple with a *stroke of the feather*. [...]

'Ajax, stop! I order you to stop. I am your Rival and will soon be your Conqueror.'<sup>55</sup>

It seems only natural to Critès that he should not only rescue Cassandra from Ajax, but also claim her body in his stead. Invoking the French military heroes whose sculpted likenesses surround them, Critès engages Ajax in a drawn-out fight, pitting his own dexterity against Ajax's size and military training in a David-and-Goliath battle between the *plume* and the sword. After several pages of 'terrible combat', Critès emerges victorious when, with a stroke of the feather 'applied with a *vigorous hand* to the Ajacian behind', he robs Ajax 'forever of

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<sup>54</sup> The story of the rape of Cassandra comes from the *Iliad*, in which Ajax commits sacrilege by abducting Cassandra, daughter of the king of Troy, from the temple of Athena.

<sup>55</sup> Gorsas, "La Plume du coq de Micille," 2001, 337–40. "A moi! à moi! au secours! au meurtre .... Infâme ravisseur! odieux Ajax! s'écriait du Sanctuaire de Minerve la Prêtresse Cassandre...."

Oh! oh! me dis-je, voici du nouveau. [...]

"Minerve, je t'implore, continuait la fille de Priam [...]. Je respecte ton silence mystérieux, puissante fille du Ciel; mais fais au moins que ce vengeur paroisse, & donne sur la *croupe arrondie* de cet *immodeste* Achéen, qui, *en dépit d'Homère & contre toutes les loix de la bienséance & de la pudeur*, vient m'effrayer par son *Académie molle & énervée*. Grands Dieux! seriez-vous sourds à mes prières? .... Mes forces s'épuisent; le sacrilège m'enlève dans ses bras impudiques.... O ma virginité [...], seriez-vous la proie d'un Grec que j'abhorre? Hélas! si c'étoit du moins mon Libérateur qui dût accueillir [this is 'cueillir' in the 1787 pamphlet, p. 22] cette rose que j'ai conservée si pure, au milieu d'une Garnison Troyenne & des Grenadiers d'Ilium."

Oui, belle Cassandre, ce sera votre Libérateur & non un Renégat, m'écriai-je, en enfonçant la porte du Temple d'un *coup de plume*. [...] Ajax, arrête! je t'ordonne de t'arrêter. Je suis ton Rival & bientôt ton Vainqueur.'

the desire to present himself *in naturalibus* before honest people whom his *immodesty* has revolted and will revolt until Monsieur Dejoux, whose pardon I beg for all this, has given him a costume in a slightly more Attic taste.<sup>56</sup> Triumphant, Critès amuses himself by picturing Ajax being forced to share a hospital bed with his wounded foe, Aeneas, in a nearby painting.<sup>57</sup> In his humiliating defeat of an emasculated eighteenth-century rendering of Ajax's Grecian body, Critès scores a victory against the Old Regime's supposedly 'limp and enervated' masculinity. With his conspicuously Greek name (in full: Alexandre-Chrysostôme-Isidore Critès) and his feather inherited from the satires of the Roman-Assyrian Lucian, the underdog Critès re-establishes continuity between the masculine ideals of the ancients and of modern France, striking down a warped idol who has strayed too far from Homer's original. His victory is presented as a victory for decency over indecency, and the weapon of choice in this struggle is the *plume*: the magical feather and the art critic's pen.

But the supreme prize—the supreme assertion of art-critical masculinity—is the right to possess the beautiful, virginal Cassandra. Eager to consummate his triumph immediately, Critès searches the Salon with increasing desperation for a suitable grotto. At last, combing frantically through titles in the *livret*, he finds a promising painting by César Van Loo (son of Charles-André, one of the great painters of the rococo era): *Une Grotte où l'on voit des femmes et des enfants qui viennent de se baigner* ('A grotto with women and children who have been bathing'). Averting his eyes for fear of the terrible punishments meted out to voyeurs by the divine bathers of mythology, Critès leads Cassandra to Van Loo's grotto,

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<sup>56</sup> Gorsas, "La Plume du coq de Micille," 2001, 341 ('un combat terrible'), 343: '& d'un coup de *taille & de revers*, appliqué d'une *main vigoureuse* sur le fessier Ajacien, je lui ôte à jamais envie de s'offrir *in naturalibus* à la face des honnêtes gens que son *immodestie a révoltés & révoltera* jusqu'à ce que M. Dejoux, à qui je demande bien pardon de tout ceci, lui ait donné un habit dans un goût un peu plus attique.' Italics as printed in the original edition, Gorsas, *La Plume du coq de Micille*, 1787, 29–30.

<sup>57</sup> Gorsas, "La Plume du coq de Micille," 2001, 345. The painting (much better received than Dejoux's sculpture) is Jean-Charles Nicaise Perrin's *Esculape reçoit des mains de Vénus les herbes et simples nécessaires à la guérison d'Énée* (Paris: École des beaux-arts).

where at last he is at leisure to enjoy her ‘beautiful eyes and other charms, which Dejoux’s gauzes do not conceal from view.....’<sup>58</sup>

In a postcoital slumber, Critès prays to Dibutades, the ‘mother of Painting’, asking ‘to caress [her] charms’ and to torment those who dishonour her invention.<sup>59</sup> His dreams transport him to the island of Kos, homeland of Apelles: ‘There, I spoke with the great man, or rather, the goddess of the Arts spoke with me [...]. Far from the Academic Salons, I examined Nature, and I admired how eloquent nature is to those who examine her in good faith.’<sup>60</sup> Surrounded by nature and the ancients, he lays out his model for good-faith art criticism—a model grounded in the harmonious sexual difference of simpler times:

I love the Arts; I feel for them the same simple and innocent tenderness that one experiences for an adored woman, adored because she deserves to be. Illusion embellishes everything in a Mistress whom one adores; her most ordinary qualities become virtues, her beauty becomes an inexplicable allure, and her caprices—I was going to say her faults—become imperceptible half-tones that one glimpses without enjoyment and criticises with regret.<sup>61</sup>

Art becomes the critic’s mistress; the critic becomes art’s lover, whose role is not to criticise but to treat her with ‘simple and innocent tenderness’. It is notable that the adored woman in the passage above is explicitly a *mistress*, not a wife: she is no humdrum representative of domesticity, but Woman as pure pleasure. Likewise, a mistress—Cassandra—is Critès’ reward for being the right kind of art critic. Pointing out flaws in a work whose heart is in the

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<sup>58</sup> Gorsas, “La Plume du coq de Micille,” 2001, 348: ‘deux beaux yeux & d’autres appas que les gazes de M. de Joux n’empêchent pas de voir.....’

<sup>59</sup> Gorsas, “La Plume du coq de Micille,” 2001, 349. ‘O Mere de la Peinture, toi, qui la première, à la lueur d’un pâle flambeau, traças le portrait de ton Ami, daigne veiller sur Critès & sur son talisman; & quand le sommeil aura pendant quelques heures rafraîchi mes sens agités, viens avec ton blaireau chatouiller doucement ma paupière, & forcer mes yeux étonnés à se r’ouvrir, & ma main à caresser tes charmes, ou à piquer en riant défauts que s’efforcent de te donner ceux, qui, malgré Minerve, s’emparent de tes crayons, & finiroient par déshonorer tes pinceaux.’

<sup>60</sup> Gorsas, “La Plume du coq de Micille,” 2001, 349–50. ‘J’y causais avec ce grand homme, ou plutôt la deesse des Arts y causait avec moi. [...] Loin des Salons Académiques, enfin, j’interrogeais la Nature, & j’admirais combien la nature est éloquente pour ceux qui l’interrogent de bonne foi...’

<sup>61</sup> Gorsas, “La Plume du coq de Micille,” 2001, 350. ‘J’aime les Arts, j’ai pour eux cette tendresse simple et ingénue qu’on éprouve auprès d’une femme adorée, adorée parce qu’elle mérite de l’être. L’illusion embellit tout dans une Maîtresse qu’on adore; ses qualités les plus ordinaires deviennent des vertus, sa beauté des charmes inexprimables, ses caprices, j’allais dire ses défauts, des demi-teintes imperceptibles, qu’on entrevoit sans humeur, & qu’on critique avec regrets.’

right place becomes a sign of mean-spiritedness, a lack of imagination: ‘Prejudiced men that we are, let us never stop letting ourselves be blinded by the joy of an imagination that always paints things as they should be, and never as they are.’<sup>62</sup> The role of the critic is to be blinded—an extraordinary statement.

Critès is arguing for a radical rejection of the importance of *manner* of expression in favour of the importance of the *ideals* being conveyed. That is, if a work is good at heart, its painterly flaws cease to be of consequence. This is precisely the ‘anti-style’ that Crow discerned in Gorsas’ response to David’s *Oath of the Horatii*: the pointlessness of detailed criticism, the pettiness of those who would ‘calculate meanly’ in the face of an ‘enthusiasm so fitting for returning the grand genre to its true purpose in the French school of painting.’<sup>63</sup> For Gorsas and his fellow radicals, Crow argues, style was associated with aristocratic modes of consumption: a form of ‘dissembling correctness of manner’ that made it the mortal enemy of clarity, transparency, and truth.<sup>64</sup> *The Oath of the Horatii* is the ideal poster-child for this political anti-style, with ‘its emphatic plainness of expression, its renunciation of sensual appeal and emotional nuance, its refusal to display the full range of the painter’s craft’.<sup>65</sup> Gorsas’ pamphlet is, by contrast, an explosion of style, a writerly flourish from start to finish. Its critique of style is rooted not in the austerity of David, but in the headiness of Critès’ invincibility and the sensuality of sexual possession. The ideal work of art, like the ideal woman, is a mistress: an ‘other’ that can be lovingly possessed and reimagined by the masculine viewing subject. This runs counter to the usual image of prerevolutionary radicalism, associated with the virtuous patriarchal family with a husband at its head, and with the tighter regulation of relations between the sexes and the public and private spheres.

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<sup>62</sup> Gorsas, “La Plume du coq de Micille,” 2001, 349. ‘Hommes prévenus que nous sommes, ne cesserons-nous jamais de nous laisser aveugler par le délire d’une imagination qui nous peint les choses comme elles devraient être, et jamais comme elles sont.’

<sup>63</sup> Gorsas, quoted in Crow, *Painters and public life*, 216.

<sup>64</sup> Crow, *Painters and public life*, 227.

<sup>65</sup> Crow, *Painters and public life*, 227.

Gorsas' vision for the role of women at the Salon is comparatively libertine, though no more liberatory—except as regards a husband's freedom to escape the domestic sphere, which is portrayed throughout the pamphlet in a distinctly negative light.

While asserting his own absolute right to express himself as he pleases, Critès/Gorsas rejects any attempt, either by artists or by women, to assert their own subjectivity by openly attempting to influence his view of them. In a remarkable author's note, Gorsas rails against Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, whose portraits are praised in the text, but who had committed the cardinal sin of seeking to limit the expression of his critical subjectivity:

I had kissed the dress of Madame Adélaïde & the hand of Madame Guiard, whom I will praise, even though it annoys her, for having represented the daughter of our Kings with the modest and touching simplicity so suited to her age, character, and virtues; especially in a period of emotion, when one forgets grandeurs, birth, the throne, to remember that one is a man and recognise the rights of Nature.\*

\*Madame Guiard does not want people to praise her, she boasts that she will admonish those who praise her... And I intend to praise you, me, Madame! & it is my own will! Do I go to your studio to interfere with your crayons, to do your brushes? No! Well then, Madame, let me do what I want in my study, and do not erase anything from my papers; what kind of woman is this?<sup>66</sup>

Gorsas might be the only Old Regime art critic to have complained about not being allowed to *praise* an artist. This passage's tone of defiance is over the top even by comparison with the rest of Gorsas' art criticism, with its repeated, melodramatic staging of attempts to silence him. The *Promenades* of 1785 had seen Critès jumped and beaten in the Louvre's Apollo Gallery by the protagonists of that year's other Salon pamphlets, who forced him to retract

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<sup>66</sup> Gorsas, "La Plume du coq de Micille," 2001, 351. "[J]'avois baisé la robe de Madame Adélaïde & la main de Madame Guyard, que je louerai, malgré qu'elle en ait, d'avoir représenté la fille de nos Rois avec cette simplicité modeste & touchante qui convient si bien à son âge, à son caractère, à ses vertus; surtout dans un moment d'émotion, où l'on oublie les grandeurs, la naissance, le trône, pour se rappeler qu'on est homme et reconnaître les droits de la Nature.\*

\*Madame Guyard ne veut pas qu'on la loue, elle se vante qu'elle lave la tête à ceux qui la louent... Et je prétends vous louer, moi, Madame! & c'est mon vouloir à moi! Vais-je dans votre atelier déranger vos crayons, faire vos pinceaux? Non! Eh bien, Madame, laissez-moi faire ce que je veux dans mon cabinet, & n'effacez rien dans mes papiers; qu'est-ce donc que cette femme-là?

his contradictions of their judgement.<sup>67</sup> The *Plume du coq de Micille* opened, as we have seen, with Critès' planned assault by a cabal of angry guards and artists. Labille-Guiard's request is reasonable by comparison, yet Critès experiences it as something profoundly disturbing. Whereas the physical attacks of Critès's would-be censors take place out in the open at the Salon, he imagines the woman artist entering his study to quietly stifle his work. He is outraged by her intrusion not into the public space of the Salon, but into his private office and papers—the sanctum of his own subjectivity. What could have led him to react so strongly?

During the Salon of 1783, Labille-Guiard had successfully petitioned for the suppression of an etched sheet of libellous couplets insulting her, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Anne Vallayer-Coster, and the landscape painter Jean-François Hue. The couplets accused Labille-Guiard not only of having her paintings touched up by her teacher, André Vincent, but also of being his lover.<sup>68</sup> It is possible that Gorsas' complaint about not being allowed to 'praise' Labille-Guiard is a backhanded reference to the censorship of this allegation of Vincent's 'improvement' of her canvases. Indeed, when the art historian Roger Portalis scanned the ranks of 1780s art criticism for a writer scurrilous enough to have authored the banned couplets, his speculation began and ended with Gorsas.<sup>69</sup> Whether or not Gorsas was the culprit, the perpetually aggrieved art critic certainly would have been aware of the

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<sup>67</sup> Antoine-Joseph Gorsas, *Troisième promenade de Critès au Sallon* (London & Paris: Hardouin & Gattey, 1785), 7–21.

<sup>68</sup> The scandal is discussed in Roger Portalis, *Adélaïde Labille-Guiard (1749-1803)* (Paris: Georges Petit, 1902), 27–30. Pages 97–103 reproduce the offending couplets as well as Labille-Guiard's letter requesting the protection of the Comtesse D'Angiviller, subsequent official correspondence, and a police summary of the interrogation of the bookseller Pierre Cousin, who had been arrested selling the couplets. As Labille-Guiard wrote in her letter: 'One must expect to be torn apart on one's talent; scholars, authors are likewise exposed to satire; it is the fate of all those who expose themselves to public judgement, but their works, their paintings are there to justify themselves; if they are good, they plead their case. Who can plead that of women's morality?' ('On doit s'attendre à être déchiré sur son talent; les savants, les auteurs, sont exposés de même à la satire; c'est le sort de tous ceux qui s'exposent au jugement public, mais leurs ouvrages, leurs tableaux sont là pour se justifier; s'ils sont bons, ils plaident leur cause. Qui peut plaider celle des mœurs des femmes?'), Portalis, *Adélaïde Labille-Guiard*, 98–99.

<sup>69</sup> Portalis, *Adélaïde Labille-Guiard*, 30.

incident. What he *wants* is the right to praise the artist and her sitter in their capacity as artistic mistresses (like Le Brun's *Bacchante* and Dejoux's *Cassandra*); Labille-Guiard's refusal of this role elicits an emphatic refusal of her right to refuse, ultimately throwing Critès into confusion. His final question is not 'what does this woman think she is saying?' but simply: 'what kind of woman is this?' Her assertion of her subjectivity as an active reader who might judge his judgements in return destabilises the relations of sexual difference on which Critès' art criticism is built.

Labille-Guiard was not the only woman to refuse the role assigned to her by Critès. Unbeknownst to the blissful Critès, sleeping by *Cassandra*'s side in the grotto, marital life is about to obtrude itself upon his enjoyment of his Salon mistress. While he sleeps, the 'dark Goddess' Discord plots to thwart his good-humoured appraisal of the artworks around him. '[C]rouched by almost every painting, in the form of the artist to whom the neighbouring painting belonged'; 'her mouth distilling bile and poisons; her claw-like nails always ready to tear merit to shreds', she steals the magic feather while Critès sleeps and goes to visit his wife.<sup>70</sup> Madame Critès, hearing that her husband has 'taken his pleasure and slept his fill' with another woman, 'did not need to be told twice, and with a jump there she was, out of bed, ... in the street, ... at the Louvre, ... at the Salon, ... at n° 31, ... at my side'.<sup>71</sup> Armed with the magic feather, she finds Critès and *Cassandra* in a *Tempest* by Vernet, where she rains down invisible blows on her husband ('Ow! ow! ow! ow! I'm dead'), inflicting on him the same nameless fear that he had relished inflicting on the gatekeepers of the Salon.<sup>72</sup> When he eventually recognises the attacker as his wife, Critès grovels in a half-hearted attempt to

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<sup>70</sup> Gorsas, "La Plume du coq de Micille," 2001, 351. Discord had suffered in horror as Critès praised artwork after artwork, commending Vien and kissing the dress of Madame Adélaïde and the hand of her portraitist, Adélaïde Labille-Guiard.

<sup>71</sup> Gorsas, "La Plume du coq de Micille," 2001, 355. 'Après avoir pris ses ébats et dormi son content'; 'Madame Critès ne se le fit pas dire deux fois, et d'un saut la voilà hors du lit, ... dans la rue, ... au Louvre, ... au Salon, ... au no. 31, ... à mes côtés.'

<sup>72</sup> Gorsas, "La Plume du coq de Micille," 2001, 355. 'Aie! aie! aie! aie! Je suis mort.'



placate her. But he need not do so for long: when Madame Critès is momentarily distracted, he snatches the feather from her hands and uses its power to send her ‘out of the Salon, ... out of the Louvre, ... into the street, ... and into her bed’.<sup>73</sup> There is no place at this Salon for the wife alongside her husband: it was Discord, not a love of art or of her husband, that brought her there. For Madame Critès, the Salon is of interest only as the setting for her husband’s infidelity. Critès, for his part, is interested in placating her only for as long as the feather grants her power over him. The moment he reconquers possession of the feather, he drops his attempt at reconciliation and banishes Madame Critès to the conjugal home. In the remaining pages of the pamphlet, he is alone and free once more to do as he pleases, using the feather to look and listen in unseen (Cassandra had run away when the blows started falling). ‘Thus ended, more happily than I could have hoped, my tragic story.’<sup>74</sup>

Women play a significant role in *La Plume du coq de Micille*—but not as critics or even as members of the audience. The few sentences of criticism that Cassandra does utter, in denunciation of Ajax’s immodest ‘round rump’, are not spoken as art criticism but as personal insults against a loathed assailant. Yet Cassandra—a sculpture of a woman being carried off by a prospective rapist—is, in a sense, an ideal Salon woman: a work of art and an object of male pleasure. In her, Gorsas sees an opportunity for heroism, and a passive and willing prize for his male protagonist in his quest to love art as he would a mistress. The critic’s wife is an obstacle, a scold, who commits the ultimate sin when she claims the critic’s invisibility for herself in an act that reverses the dynamic of power between them. If women’s role at the Salon was to be looked at, then a woman who looks without being seen—who

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<sup>73</sup> Gorsas, “La Plume du coq de Micille,” 2001, 357. ‘[J]’arrachai des mains de ma chère épouse mon talisman; & par sa bienheureuse vertu, la voici au rebours hors du No 31, .... hors du Salon, ... hors du Louvre, ... dans la rue, ... & dans son lit’.

<sup>74</sup> Gorsas, “La Plume du coq de Micille,” 2001, 357. ‘Ainsi finit, plus heureusement que je ne devais l’espérer, ma tragique histoire.’

takes on the role of subject, reducing those around her to objects, while providing no pleasure—was a threatening prospect indeed.

### *Women of taste*

Not all female characters needed to be punished for exercising their gaze at the Salon. Some were even granted privileged art-critical status within their texts, with one important caveat: with rare exceptions, this privilege was withheld from modern Frenchwomen. The gulf between modern femininity and ideal femininity as portrayed in art criticism is great: the former familiar, ignorant, contemptible; the latter virtuous, wise, and beautiful; one cynical; the other utopian. For the most part, for a woman to be qualified to comment on art, she needed only be a mythical or allegorical figure.

*La critique* in French is grammatically feminine, and in 1779 two different pamphlets featured female allegories of Criticism. *Le Visionnaire, ou lettres sur les ouvrages exposés au Sallon; par un Ami des Arts* ('The Visionary, or letters on the works exhibited at the Salon; by a Friend of the Arts') introduces the God of Taste and his sister, the Goddess of Criticism.<sup>75</sup> The two divinities offer their guidance to the narrator in recognition of his good faith, impartiality, and humility. Despite these qualities, the narrator writes: 'I could not keep myself from turning my gaze more frequently to Criticism, or from desiring to hear her speak, so strongly does our natural inclination draw us that way.'<sup>76</sup> Criticism, meanwhile, laments her enemy Satire ('la Satyre'), who has tarnished Criticism's name by cloaking herself in her appearance. Accompanying him through the Salon, both divinities engage in the praise and criticism of the artworks on display. Criticism, by her nature, is the more severe of the two, and though her brother is sometimes hurt by her criticism of his favourites,

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<sup>75</sup> *Le Visionnaire, ou lettres sur les ouvrages exposés au Sallon; par un Ami des Arts*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1779).

<sup>76</sup> *Le Visionnaire*, première lettre, 7. '[J]e ne pouvois m'empêcher de tourner mes regards plus fréquemment vers la Critique, & de s

the two just as often agree and judge as one. The pamphlet frames her judgements as harsh but fair, motivated not by pedantry but by an earnest desire to help worthy artists improve.<sup>77</sup> She is a capable critic, discussing the details of brushwork, lighting, anatomy, and composition, among other things. Each sibling respects the other; their judgements complement rather than conflict with one another, and just as Taste sometimes gives criticism, Criticism sometimes gives praise. For instance, she is delighted by the paintings of Anne Vallayer-Coster—unable to hide ‘how proud she was to see works by a person of her sex at the Salon’, nor how disappointed she is to see that she has no company, despite knowing ‘as many as three’ other women worthy of a place there.<sup>78</sup>

However, Criticism is not without her dangers. Though most of her assessments are in the interests of truth and nature, it occasionally becomes clear from her ‘calculating smile’ (*rire malin*), or from her resentment at finding nothing to criticise, that she enjoys being critical, and on more than one occasion her brother feels the need to steer her away from an artist’s poorer works so that she may judge them at their best.<sup>79</sup> Criticism and Taste are justified in expressing themselves as they do because they are gods; any ordinary person who gives in to the temptation to criticise as freely would soon find themselves led astray. As the narrator warns when he finds, on his second visit to the Salon, that he has a criticism of his own to add: ‘the habit of criticising is rapidly formed’.<sup>80</sup> In other words, both men and women would do well to follow the example of the narrator, who makes little comment and no claim to expertise, deferring instead to Taste and Criticism. All this suggests an author who does not feel confident laying claim to the title of art critic; who does not feel that such a

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<sup>77</sup> *Le Visionnaire*, 26. As when Critique, criticising one of the God of Taste’s protégés, says to him: ‘You suffer, my brother [...]; but be assured that I am as much his friend as you are: in truth, I am harsher on my friends than I am on others’ (‘Vous souffrez, mon frère [...]; mais soyez assure que je suis autant son amie que vous: à la vérité, je suis plus difficile à l’égard de mes amis, que je ne le suis pour les autres’).

<sup>78</sup> *Le Visionnaire*, 49. Unfortunately, she does not give names.

<sup>79</sup> *Le Visionnaire*, 44–45.

<sup>80</sup> *Le Visionnaire*, 58.

claim would be well-received; who does not feel the general public should be encouraged to think of themselves as worthy judges; or some combination of the three. While stoutly endorsing the utility of criticism, the pamphlet remains cautious about the question of *who* might be suited to provide this criticism. Yet of all the Salon pamphlets of the 1770s and 1780s, this one alone gives the bulk of its art-critical content to a female speaker—and a competent one at that. Unusually among the Salon pamphlets that give prominence to women, *Le Visionnaire* is no more ambivalent about the female art public than it is about the public as a whole. Though hardly a ringing endorsement of any member of the public's right to voice their opinion, it is at least neutral on the subject of women (when abstracted into allegorical figures).

Recognising the utility of the allegory, another art critic reprised the characters of Taste and Criticism as the convenors of a mock-trial of the authors of the year's art-critical pamphlets. In *Le Lit de justice du Dieu des Arts, ou le pied-de-nez des critiques du Sallon, suivi de l'arrêt rendu contr'eux en la cour du Parnasse* ('The bed of justice of the God of the Arts, or mockery of criticisms of the Salon, followed by the judgement handed down to them at the court of Parnassus'), the God of Taste and the Goddess of Criticism object strenuously to the unauthorised use of their names by the author of *Le Visionnaire*. Not altogether unfairly, they point out the hubris of putting one's own words into the mouths of gods (I like to think that the author appreciated the irony of this statement, likewise uttered by 'gods').<sup>81</sup> Once more, we have a female character pronouncing with confidence on matters of art and art criticism, debating the finer points of critical decorum and refuting the judgements of other art critics with detailed examinations of individual artworks. This Goddess of Criticism is an interesting character. Like her counterpart in *Le Visionnaire*, she expresses a sense of

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<sup>81</sup> *Le Lit de justice du Dieu des Arts, ou le pied-de-nez des critiques du Sallon, suivi de l'Arrêt rendu contr'eux en la Cour du Parnasse* (The Hague & Paris: Belin, 1779), 7–10.

feminine solidarity with the painter Anne Vallayer-Coster. Her first defence of the artist is relatively conventional, expressing her shock that an art critic would go so far as to criticise a woman artist, praising ‘the firm and vigorous touch of a man combined with the graces with which a woman embellishes everything she touches’.<sup>82</sup> Her second rebuttal is more interesting, aimed not at criticism of the painter, but at the customary gallantry of her praise: ‘it is not true that in painting inanimate nature, she paints herself’; instead, her works should be acknowledged as ‘the fruits of a mature and learned genius’.<sup>83</sup> In other words, the beauty of a woman painter’s still lifes should be viewed as an expression of her professional skill, not her personal beauty. In all the pamphlets on women that follow, we will not encounter such nuance again.

The year 1783 gives us one more Salon pamphlet with an authoritative female character, this time of an even more mythical-mystical-allegorical kind. *Vision du Juif Ben-Esron, fils de Sépher, marchand de tableaux* (‘Vision of the Jew Ben-Esron, son of Sépher, paintings dealer’) is written in a mock-Old Testament style, in the deliberately overblown and repetitive language of prophecy. Ben-Esron (not the only Jewish caricature in the art criticism of this time, though by far the most sustained) dreams that he visits the Salon, where he is greeted and guided by ‘a woman whose gaze was kind and severe’, who ‘held golden scales in one hand, and a cedarwood measuring stick in the other’.<sup>84</sup> Her attributes identify her as a goddess or allegory of judgement. She guides Ben-Esron through the Salon, directing his gaze, asking his opinion, commanding him to be more or less critical depending on the quality of the painting under consideration, and commanding him to be silent when he goes

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<sup>82</sup> *Le Lit de justice du Dieu des Arts*, 17. ‘C’est avoir envie de tout critiquer, que de critiquer jusqu’au sexe des Artistes’.

<sup>83</sup> *Le Lit de justice du Dieu des Arts*, 29. ‘[...] il n’est pas vrai qu’en peignant la nature inanimée, elle se peigne soi-même. On voit sûrement des fleurs chez elle; mais le Sallon nous offre dans sa Vestale & dans ses Têtes de fantaisie, des fruits d’un génie mûr & savant.’

<sup>84</sup> *Vision du Juif Ben-Esron, fils de Sépher, marchand de tableaux* (Amsterdam, 1783), 4. ‘Et à l’entrée de la grande Salle il y avoit une femme dont le regard étoit doux & sévère; elle tenoit d’une main une balance d’or, elle portoit dans l’autre une règle de bois de cèdre.’

too far. She ends the tour with a monologue, a warning to artists which she instructs Ben-Esron to pass on, reprimanding them for letting art stray too far from nature and threatening to desert them forever if they do not mend their ways.<sup>85</sup> She condemns the ‘crowd of so-called connoisseurs, as ignorant as they are presumptuous’, for getting in the way of pure emulation between artists; and condemns artists for their preoccupation with screens and fans.<sup>86</sup>

The rest of the fictional women of taste in the Salon literature of this period are presented as tasteful explicitly because they are *not like other women*. This is the case with Dibutades in Robert-Martin Lesuire’s *La Morte de trois mille ans au Sallon de 1783* (‘The three-thousand-year-old dead woman at the Salon of 1783’): drawn from Greek mythology, she operates at an extreme temporal as well as temperamental remove from modern French women. As the mythological inventor of the art of painting, Dibutades has some authority to speak of the arts: she is permitted to offer not only passionate defences of modern artists, but also detailed critiques.<sup>87</sup> But Dibutades and the woman whose gaze was kind and severe have one important thing in common in addition to their mythic status: both appear only in the dream of a male narrator.<sup>88</sup> We could read these dreams purely as visions or visitations, or—I think more convincingly—as manifestations of the narrators’ desires. Dibutades satisfies her narrator’s desire to be singled out by a beautiful and intelligent woman; the woman whose gaze was kind and severe satisfies Ben-Esron’s desire to have his taste and his learning affirmed. The format of the dream ensconces them firmly not within the realm of female possibility, but of the male imagination.

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<sup>85</sup> *Vision du Juif Ben-Esron*, 25–28.

<sup>86</sup> *Vision du Juif Ben-Esron*, 26: ‘une foule de prétendus connoisseurs aussi ignorans que présomptueux’.

<sup>87</sup> In addition, Lesuire specialised in the figure of the *ingénue*, untutored, unspoilt and full of youthful passion for the arts; see chapter two for an extensive discussion of Dibutades and Lesuire’s two *ingénues*.

<sup>88</sup> Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans*, 23; *Vision du Juif Ben-Esron*, 28.

When real women were recognised for their cultivation and appreciation of the arts, it was often done through allegory—again, stressing what was exceptional rather than what was typical about them. When the *Vision du Juif Ben-Esron* praises Madame Du Barry, the king’s mistress, for her patronage of the arts, it is done in the allegorical terms characteristic of addresses from proteges to their patrons, and from subjects to members of the royal court. After an extended passage of praise for Joseph Vernet’s latest landscapes, the woman whose gaze was kind and severe tells Ben-Esron that he will soon meet ‘the Goddess who, so to speak, guided his pencil; she who is sure to generate only masterpieces when she tells an artist: “You work for me.”’<sup>89</sup> She guides Ben-Esron to a portrait bust of the comtesse du Barry, which he does not recognise as either a sculpture or as du Barry: instead, he sees ‘a celestial figure’ seemingly of flesh and blood.<sup>90</sup> When he realises that she is no person but a sculpture, he concludes that he is looking at a representation of ‘the Goddess who presides over the Fine arts’, ‘a model of ideal beauty’.<sup>91</sup> The woman whose gaze was kind and severe tells him that he is looking at ‘the protectress of the Arts, she who makes them shine with a new *éclat*. At the sound of her voice, the children of the Artists awakened, and produced masterpieces: this one is doubtless the first’.<sup>92</sup> It is Du Barry’s beautiful marble face that will immortalise her name and her patronage of the arts: ‘these forms as beautiful as they are radiant, this noble and majestic physiognomy, these features full of kindness, that a skilled hand has managed to render, will show posterity that the Arts, when they are welcomed, can

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<sup>89</sup> *Vision du Juif Ben-Esron*, 21. ‘[V]ous allez connoître la Déesse qui, pour ainsi dire, a conduit ses crayons, celle qui, pour ainsi dire, a conduit ses crayons; celle qui est sûre de ne faire produire que des chef-d’œuvres, lorsqu’elle dit à un Artiste, tu travailles pour moi.’

<sup>90</sup> *Vision du Juif Ben-Esron*, 22: ‘une figure céleste’.

<sup>91</sup> *Vision du Juif Ben-Esron*, 23. ‘[C]ette tête n’existe point dans la nature, c’est une idée qui s’est formée dans une entendement sublime, au moment où il a voulu représenter la Déesse qui préside aux Beaux-arts [...]; elle semble n’avoir été faite que pour servir de modèle au beau idéal.’

<sup>92</sup> *Vision du Juif Ben-Esron*, 24. ‘[V]oilà la protectrice des Arts, celle qui les fait briller d’un nouvel éclat. A sa voix, les enfans des Artistes se sont éveillés, & ils ont produit des chef-d’œuvres: celui-ci sans doute est le premier.’

elevate themselves as high as the most sublime nature'.<sup>93</sup> In this context, it is only natural for women to show an interest in the arts: beauty must seek out beauty.

The only pamphlet to give us a sympathetic modern Frenchwoman as a vehicle for criticism is *Le Miracle de nos jours, conversation écrite et recueillie par un sourd et muet* ('The miracle of our times, conversation written and recorded by a deaf-mute'), a review of the Salon of 1779.<sup>94</sup> It is perhaps, then, no coincidence that this pamphlet spends more time emphasising the difference between the virtues of its female protagonist and the vices of womankind in general than all of the above pamphlets put together. We begin not far from the Salon, in the Palais-Royal, an excellent location to observe the vices of modern Parisians and *Parisiennes*, and the narrator spends a considerable amount of time describing the setting before mentioning the Salon or even introducing the pamphlet's two main interlocutors. He sets the scene:

In this happy Garden, where no Flora lives,  
But ruled, in the evening, by Momus and Terpsichore,  
    Ah! I was very surprised  
    When I saw  
All these noisy swarms of unfaithful Nymphs  
    Mad for trifles,  
    To whom Loves and Laughs,  
    Running, attached wings,  
    And followed by a thousand fools  
    From all classes and countries,  
Betrayers, betrayed, fickle, inconsequential like them!<sup>95</sup>

In a highly critical catalogue of the gardens' frequenters, the narrator surveys mariners, bragging soldiers, and a 'withered old man' admiring young coquettes; 'the tender Amarinte, admirable model of stratagems', 'adroit at concealing the imprint of time'; the

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<sup>93</sup> *Vision du Juif Ben-Esron*, 24. '[C]es formes aussi belles qu'éclatantes, cette physionomie noble & majestueuse, ces traits pleins de douceur, qu'une habile main a su rendre, témoigneront à la postérité que les Arts, lorsqu'ils sont accueillis, peuvent s'élever jusqu'à la nature la plus sublime'.

<sup>94</sup> Labbes, *Le Miracle de nos jours*.

<sup>95</sup> Labbes, *Le Miracle de nos jours*, 7. 'Dans ce riant Jardin que n'habite point Flore, / Mais où regnent le soir Momus & Terpsichore, / Ah! je fus bien surpris / Lorsque je vis / Tous ces essaims bruyants de Nymphes infidelles, / Folles de bagatelles, / A qui les Amours & les Ris / Attachioient en courant des aîles, / Et que suivoient mille étourdis / De tous états, de tous pays, / Trompeurs, trompés, légers, inconséquents comme elles!'



jealous Fannière, ‘always at her toilette, and always cross, / with no declaration of love’, whose ‘disappointment mixed in all her features, / Fervour to be beautiful, / And her great multitudes / Of pompoms, baubles, / Pretentions, and embellishments / Bored me as much as they did her’; ‘The sad Pamière, / Bird of the night’, ‘Only going out in the evening / So as to appear pretty’. Finally, he sees ‘pouting Duchesses’, ‘[t]ired of pomp and of grandeur’, ‘Envyng the tender errors / Of our young Dancing girls; / And scolding Présidentes / Tired of sleepy Présidents, / Watching handsome Dancers with ardent eyes’.<sup>96</sup>

But the innocence  
 And candour  
 That are praised everywhere  
 With constancy,  
 With ardour,  
 Were strangers in this brilliant place,  
 Whose accent, and manners  
 (As I have confirmed)  
 Certainly inspired pity.<sup>97</sup>

These people are strikingly similar to those described by Cupid in the *Dévidoir du Palais Royal*: all too knowing but without knowledge, given to artifice, no longer the ‘good Gauls’ who ‘adored their wives, made children, defended their Fatherland [... and] cultivated their lands’.<sup>98</sup> If these are the people, and the values, that inform public opinion about the Salon, then it was a matter of utmost importance for these authors to seek to counter them, and cultivate a more enlightened viewing public in the process. If the author finds it

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<sup>96</sup> Labbes, *Le Miracle de nos jours*, 8–10. ‘Je détournai les yeux / Sur un vieillard flétri, languissant, soucieux; / Mais applaudissant en cachette, [...] / A la beauté la plus coquette, / Qui passoit près de lui. [...] / Je remarquai que la tendre Amarinte, / Modele admirable de feinte, / Très-légère en propos, & très-jeune en atours, / Du temps cruel, adroite à nous cacher l’empreinte, / Alongeoit, en riant, le fil de ses beaux jours. / La jalouse Fanniere / Toujours à sa toilette, & toujours en colère, / Sans l’aveu de l’amour, / Vint à son tour / Pour plaire; / Mais le dépit mêlé dans tous ses traits, / La fureur d’être belle, / Et cette longue kyrielle / De pompons, de colifichets, / De prétentions, & d’apprêts / Me gênoient autant qu’elle. / Parut après / La triste Pamière, / Oiseau de nuit, / Qui fuit, / Et qui craint la lumière; [...] / Qui s’enferme, s’ennuie / Toute la vie, / Et ne sort que le soir / Pour paroître jolie. / Lasses de pompes, de grandeurs, / Je vis des Duchesses boudeuses / Envier les tendres erreurs / De nos jeunes Danseuses; / Et des Présidentes grondeuses, / Lasses de Présidents dormeurs, / Suivre d’un œil ardent de très-jolis Danseurs.’

<sup>97</sup> Labbes, *Le Miracle de nos jours*, 10. ‘Mais l’innocence / Et la candeur / Que par-tout on encense / Avec constance, / Avec ardeur, / Dans ce brillant séjour étoient des étrangères, / Dont l’accent, les manières / (Comme je l’ai vérifié) / Décidément faisoient pitié.’

<sup>98</sup> *Le Dévidoir du Palais Royal, instrument assez utile aux peintres du Sallon de 1773* (The Hague, 1773), 2–3.

necessary to catalogue the full range of human (and especially feminine) folly on display in this public place before tackling the subject of art, it isn't because they're struggling to get to the point: it's because the people *are* the point.

The portrayal of the frivolous men and women of the Palais-Royal in *Le Miracle de nos jours* serves as a backdrop against which the virtue of the pamphlet's female protagonist might stand out more clearly—for this pamphlet is one of the few that feature an unambiguously favourable depiction of a female character. Having seen enough of human vices, our deaf-mute narrator is preparing to leave when he is halted by the sight of a woman who represents the opposite of all the others. It is she who will introduce the subject of the Salon, and guide our conscience as we consider the arts.

Little pleased with my promenade,  
I said my goodbyes;  
When before my eyes  
A charming woman appeared,  
Who, against my expectation,  
Showed no affectation  
In her bearing, her cheer;  
Who knew how to give fashion  
A gracious and commodious turn;  
Who showed herself true to nature  
In the choice of her flowers,  
Her rouge, her perfumes;  
Who without hysterics,  
Without deceit,  
Often mingled  
Unaffected sentiment  
With the gift of thought,  
And the double talent  
Of being amiable and sensible.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Labbes, *Le Miracle de nos jours*, 10–11. 'Peu content de ma promenade / Je faisais mes adieux; / Quand à mes yeux / S'offrit une femme charmante / Qui, contre mon attente, / Dans son maintien, dans sa gaieté / N'avait rien d'affecté; / Qui savoit donner à la mode / Un tour gracieux & commode; / Dans le choix de ses fleurs, / De son rouge, de ses odeurs, / Qui se montrait fidelle à la nature; / Qui sans vapeurs, / Sans imposture / Mêloit souvent / Au don de la pensée, / Le négligé du sentiment, / Et le double talent / D'être aimable & sensée.'

The narrator is at pains to demonstrate to us that, in her perfection, Cléophile (for that is her name) is not like other women. Meanwhile, her companion, the Marquis de Saint-Cyr, is very much like the other men in the gardens:

Next to her was seated  
The essence of all the fools;  
A very small person  
Who sometimes raved,  
Whose air said 'I am a Marquis,  
My merit astounds me;  
I have infinite talents,  
But see none around me.'<sup>100</sup>

The 'piquant' contrast between these two characters, speaking 'very intently', intrigues the narrator, who settles in 'to observe them at [his] ease'. Although deaf and mute, our narrator is an adept lip-reader, and is able to follow their conversation, a brief summary of which follows here.<sup>101</sup> Saint-Cyr speaks first, lamenting the decline of the arts in France—perhaps even their death following the deaths of Voltaire and Rousseau the previous year. Cléophile objects to this assessment in no uncertain terms:

CLÉOPHILE  
Many people will be deaf to your ill-tempered cries.  
Without doubt we have lost; —yet still we possess.  
SAINT-CYR  
[...] There are no more great men on my list.  
CLÉOPHILE  
What injustice, o Heavens!  
SAINT-CYR  
I will take nothing back.  
Philosopher, Historian,  
Poet, Orator, Oculist,  
Doctor, Painter, et cetera,  
Ah! Madame, today....  
CLÉOPHILE  
I'll stop you there.  
The talents of our day have a right to your homage.  
Let us respect the Wise,

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<sup>100</sup> Labbes, *Le Miracle de nos jours*, 11. 'Auprès d'elle est assis / L'extrait de tous les étourdis; / Une très-petite personne / Qui par fois déraisonne, / Dont l'air nous dit je suis Marquis, / Mon mérite m'étonne; / J'ai des talents infinis, / Mais je n'en trouve à personne.'

<sup>101</sup> Labbes, *Le Miracle de nos jours*, 11–12. 'Ce contraste piquant / Devoit avoir son agrément; / Tous deux causoient très-vivement. / Je plaçai donc ma chaise / Pour les voir à mon aise.'

And their works.  
 I have for some time  
 Cultivated the art of painting;  
 Let us speak of an Art based in nature.  
 The Salon will soon open, and at present....  
 SAINT-CYR  
 With all my heart. By Jove, I too am a painter.  
 Painting is, in my opinion, the charm of life.  
 Have I not the obsession  
 Of a delightful *cabinet*?  
 Let us speak of Painters: yes, for I judge them best.<sup>102</sup>

The two are presented as thesis and antithesis: female and male, agreeable and disagreeable, generous and pedantic. Interestingly, both characters allude to having taken up painting in some capacity. Cléophile says that she ‘cultivate[s]’ painting, though whether as a painter or a patron is not clear. Her encouragement of the arts fits nicely with women’s perceived role as both genteel amateurs and as facilitators, creators, ‘cultivators’ of spaces for the appreciation and promotion of art (it would seem that she is named after Clio, muse of history, responsible for memorialising greatness). Meanwhile, Saint-Cyr claims painting for himself, stating boldly that ‘I too am a painter’—a claim that seems to rest not on his ability to paint, but on his *possession* of an art collection and his desire to exercise his supposedly superior critical faculties. Art criticism, for Saint-Cyr, revolves around his own ego, with no respect for others (‘I have infinite talents, / But see none around me’), whereas for Cléophile, it revolves around respect for talent, nature, and learning. Cléophile illustrates an acceptable role for women in the art world as women of taste: as ‘amiable and sensible’ encouragers, bringing kindness and moderation to discussions of the arts. It is significant, too, that the

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<sup>102</sup> Labbes, *Le Miracle de nos jours*, 13–14. ‘CLEOPHILE: A vos cris emportés bien des gens seront sourds. / Sans doute on a perdu; —mais on possède encore. SAINT-CYR: [...] Plus de grands hommes sur ma liste. CLEOPHILE: Quelle injustice, ô Ciel! SAINT-CYR: Je n’en rabattrai rien, / Philosophe, Historien, / Poète, Orateur, Oculiste, / Médecin, Peintre, & cætera, / Ah! Madame, aujourd’hui... CLEOPHILE: Je vous arrête là. / Les talents de nos jours on droit à vos hommages. / Respectons les Savants; / et leurs ouvrages, / J’ai quelque temps / Cultivé la peinture, / Parlons d’un Art qui tient à la nature. / Le Sallon va s’ouvrir, & dans ce moment-ci... SAINT-CYR: De tout mon cœur. Parbleu, moi, je suis Peintre aussi / Peinture est, selon moi, le charme de la vie. / N’ai-je pas la manie / D’un cabinet délicieux? / Parlons des Peintres: soit, car je les juge au mieux.’

conversation takes place outside the Salon, and, in the ultimate guarantee against female vanity, is ‘overheard’—or more accurately overseen—by a voyeur of whose presence Cléophile is unaware: this allows her conversation to be read as ‘natural’ and unaffected.

Their entire conversation takes place at the Palais-Royal, and is more a general discussion about the state of the arts than a critique of specific artworks at the Salon. Cléophile serves largely as a prompt for Saint-Cyr, asking what he thinks and objecting good-naturedly but impotently to his barrage of criticisms. Rather than countering his harsh verdicts, she redirects the conversation, trying (usually fruitlessly) to exhort some small concession of an artist’s talent before giving up and moving on to the next painter. Saint-Cyr, who cannot see the wood for the trees, is full of witty putdowns but must have compliments extracted from him like pulling teeth:

CLÉOPHILE  
And what will you see in Monsieur le Prince?  
SAINT-CYR  
Not the Prince of talent.  
CLÉOPHILE  
But at least a charming Painter?  
SAINT-CYR  
Madame, isn’t his brush a bit slight?  
I do not find enough of what is natural.<sup>103</sup>

Saint-Cyr’s only foray into praise is an outburst of gallantry directed at Anne Vallayer-Coster—the very compliment objected to by the Goddess of Criticism in *Le lit de justice du Dieu des Arts*: ‘Rare prodigy who enchants me, / [...] Before your pure talents and your sweet charms / I admire in transports, I kneel’; ‘In her enchanting paintings / We always find her present.’<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Labbes, *Le Miracle de nos jours*, 21–22. ‘CLEOPHILE: Et qu’allez-vous vois dans Monsieur Le Prince? SAINT-CYR: Non pas le Prince du talent. CLEOPHILE: Mais du moins un Peintre charmant? SAINT-CYR: Madame, son pinceau n’est-il pas un peu mince? Je ne lui trouve point assez de naturel.’

<sup>104</sup> Labbes, *Le Miracle de nos jours*, 24–25. ‘Aimable Valayer, / Prodiges rare qui m’enchantes, [...] / Devant tes talents purs, & tes attraits si doux / J’admire avec transport, je fléchis les genoux [...] / Chez elle tout est fleurs, / Et dans ses tableaux enchanteurs / Nous la trouvons toujours présente.’

Although Saint-Cyr is unquestionably the more disagreeable character—a caricature next to Cléophile’s ideal—the structure of the dialogue presents him as a necessary part of artistic discourse. He is not presented as being *wrong* in any of his criticisms; it is the relentlessness of his focus on the negatives that makes his conception of art wrong-headed. Cléophile’s unfaltering goodness and willingness to take a general view is matched by Saint-Cyr’s unfaltering pedantry and unwillingness to look past the details; taken together, they present a balanced whole. The moral of the story seems to be that praise must be tempered with criticism and criticism with praise; the boiling down of these two characteristics to their extremes, and their embodiment in the figures of a man and a woman, echo the natural complementarity of gender roles as imagined in the eighteenth century. In the final section of the pamphlet, the narrator presents us with a critique of the Salon in the Saint-Cyrian mode of art criticism, bowing to a perceived public preference for the *piquant*. Ultimately, Cléophile’s idealised feminine presence is desirable but expendable.

### *Tasteless women*

Modern women who aspired to fulfil these idealised roles were almost inevitably seen to fall short in some way, and could then be lampooned for their ambitions in addition to their other failings.<sup>105</sup> Whether from the working, middle, or leisured classes, whether blissfully ignorant or aspiring to connoisseurship, the literature overflows with depictions of presumptuous women. These women are not solo exhibition-goers. They always travel with a male companion or with a group in order to learn or to show off—with only one exception. Mademoiselle \*\*\*, the protagonist of Part VI of *Le Dévidoir du Palais Royal, Instrument assez utile aux Peintres du Sallon de 1773* (‘The Spool of the Palais-Royal, a rather useful instrument to the Painters of the Salon of 1773’) is the only female character to have gone

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<sup>105</sup> See, for example, the caricature of the Protectrice in Part IV of Pierre Estève’s *Dialogues sur les arts*, 1755.

alone to the Salon and to have been entrusted with the narration of her own account of it. We shall soon see why.

For a long time, dear \*\*\*\*\*, we have sought the means to see each other, and our ingenuity has proved lacking. I will not have the merit of the invention, but I will have the pleasure of having shown you how to go about it. An agreeable Painter at this year's Salon gave me a most useful lesson in one of his paintings (fig. 7). The scene takes place in the Orient, and it strikes me as a matter of diplomacy that he set it there. He wished to please Lovers, without alarming Fathers and old Guardians. The painting represents a young man who has disguised himself as a Merchant of glasses, etc., in order to speak to his mistress, to whom he expresses all his passion, while her unwitting Father tries out a telescope.<sup>106</sup> It is a thoroughly charming scene, and treated with all the taste possible. I would like, my dear Friend, to resemble the young Greek woman who receives the declaration of her Lover with delight, at the same time as laughing at the old dupe. I would have the pleasure of seeing you from much closer, and of being much prettier than I am.<sup>107</sup>

Writing for her lover, Mademoiselle \*\*\* shows no inkling of an interest in the arts beyond what reminds her of their relationship. She exemplifies the argument that gallant subjects like Jean-Baptiste Le Prince's *Marchand de lunettes* (*Glasses merchant*) were injurious to public morality. For the critic, speaking through Mademoiselle \*\*\*, the painting's Oriental veneer does not disguise the fact that it is at heart a depiction of French libertines, setting an emboldening example for women like Mademoiselle \*\*\* as they stray from the authority of their 'Fathers and old Guardians'. In this way, Le Prince's painting (like the new and dangerous taste for novel-reading), becomes a threat not only to the morality of its female audience, but to the very structure of the patriarchal family. The painter becomes a provider

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<sup>106</sup> If its title is to be believed, the painting in fact shows the woman and her lover duping the woman's husband, not her father. Jules Guiffrey, *Collection des livrets des anciennes expositions depuis 1673 jusqu'en 1800*, 8 vols. (Nogent Le Roi: Librairie des arts et metiers-Editions, 1990), vol. 4, Salon of 1773, no. 49.

<sup>107</sup> *Le Dévidoir du Palais Royal*, 31–32. 'Depuis long-temps, cher ....., nous cherchons le moyen de nous voir, & notre génie se trouve en défaut. Je n'aurai pas le mérite de l'invention, mais j'aurai le plaisir de t'avoir indiqué comme il faudra t'y prendre. Un Peintre agréable du Sallon de cette année m'a donné dans un de ses tableaux la leçon la plus utile. La scene est en Orient, & c'est par politique qu'il me paroît l'y avoir placée. Il vouloit faire plaisir aux Amans, sans allarmer les Peres & les vieux Tuteurs. Ce tableau représente donc un jeune homme qui s'est déguisé en Marchand de lunettes, &c. pour pouvoir parler à sa maîtresse, à qui il exprime toute sa passion, pendant que ce bon homme de Pere essaye une lunette de longue vue. C'est une scene tout-à fait charmante, & traitée avec tout le goût possible. Je voudrois, mon cher Ami, ressembler à la jeune Grecque qui reçoit avec transport la déclaration de son Amant, & se mocque en même tems du Vieillard dupé. J'aurois le plaisir de te voir de plus près, & d'être beaucoup plus jolie que je suis.'

of libertine stratagems, encouraging the subversion of the familial rights and powers of guardianship that regulated young women's lives under the Old Regime. In this context, female viewership could be said to pose a dangerous threat indeed to existing hierarchies.

Any further exploration of female viewership is halted in its tracks as Mademoiselle \*\*\* describes a life with little meaning in the absence of a male viewer. She recognises herself in the figure of the temptress in Lagrenée's *Temptation of Saint Anthony*, and in Lagrenée's bathing Graces, who remind her of an outing she went on three days previously when she and the Demoiselles \*\*\* 'went bathing at that place on the river that you know so well'.<sup>108</sup> 'Do you remember that delicious moment when you surprised me daydreaming about a rendezvous I had arranged with you? I believe the Painter of a certain picture, of a young man caressing a daydreamer, was present at our encounter.'<sup>109</sup> In her lover's absence, 'reading, weeping, and bathing' are her 'most serious occupations': the weeping is done for him, and the bathing is described for his pleasure, mapped onto the voyeuristic contours of a mythological painting.<sup>110</sup> Mademoiselle \*\*\* sees more through her lover's eyes than she does through her own as she uses the paintings at the Salon to frame the events of her life in ways that she hopes will appeal to him. Her gaze, far from affirming her subjecthood, re-enacts her objectification, and while she presents herself to her lover as an object of desire, the author presents her to us as an object of scorn. She is the kind of imagined female viewer who struck righteous outrage into the hearts of critics. Together with Le Prince, her painters of choice are Lagrenée and Boucher, long associated with women's taste.<sup>111</sup> There is no boundary between

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<sup>108</sup> *Le Dévidoir du Palais Royal*, 32, 33. The artworks were nos. 180 and 9 in the *Livret* respectively: Guiffrey, *Collection des livrets des anciennes expositions depuis 1673 jusqu'en 1800*, vol. 4, Salon of 1773.

<sup>109</sup> *Le Dévidoir du Palais Royal*, 32. 'Te souviens-tu de cet instant délicieux où tu me surpris rêvant à un rendez-vous que je t'avois donné? Je crois que le Peintre d'un certain tableau, d'un jeune homme caressant une rêveuse, étoit présent à notre entrevue.'

<sup>110</sup> *Le Dévidoir du Palais Royal*, 33. 'La lecture, les pleurs & le bain, voilà mes plus sérieuses occupations dans cette saison accablante.'

<sup>111</sup> *Le Dévidoir du Palais Royal*, 33. 'I would like to be tremendously rich; I would have a *cabinet* decorated with paintings by [Lagrenée]. Since the death of Boucher, he is the Painter of grace and of taste. I am not what one would call a great *connoisseuse* of Painting, but I maintain that for richness of composition, freshness of



reality and representation as Mademoiselle \*\*\* ‘reads’ herself and her lover into all she sees. For her, paintings are simply the stuff of life, and her life the stuff of paintings—a shallow and self-centred mode of viewership that critics associated particularly with women’s frivolity and vanity. Ultimately, her gaze—which at first appeared so dangerous—is brought back under the control of her lover’s gaze, re-establishing masculine authority over her perception of the world around her.

The ‘Lettre de Mademoiselle \*\*\* à son Amant’ is the most singular instance of ventriloquism in *Le Dévidoir du Palais Royal*, but not the only one. The pamphlet in its entirety is one of the most extraordinary critiques of the Salon to appear in the eighteenth century. Into thirty-nine short pages, it manages to squeeze nearly every trend from the satirical art criticism of this period, presenting an eight-part pastiche of fable, allegorical dialogue, Mademoiselle \*\*\*’s letter, and an extract from a fictional gazette of the Roman underworld. Though *Le Dévidoir* says little about any specific works at the Salon, it says much about the contexts in which art was appreciated, the types of entertainments alongside which the Salon was enjoyed, and the types of people who were seen to enjoy it.

The introduction first takes us not to the Salon but to the gardens of the Palais-Royal, the favourite haunt of fashionable strollers, lovers, theatregoers, newsmongers, and less reputable sorts. Indeed, the Salon is not mentioned at all for several pages, yet what precedes it is far from irrelevant to the pamphlet’s later discussions of artistic matters. As we are treated to an account of Cupid’s exploits in Paris, we can only suspend our disbelief, follow Cupid, and see:

Cupid had escaped from Paphos to come and taste, in Paris, the delicious freshness of nights spent in the garden of the Palais Royal. [...] He had imagined until then that he was master of the world and had no more conquests to make. What a surprise he had upon arriving in Paris! People had often spoken to him of it as of a place of delights inhabited by his most

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colouring, choice of subject, beauty of forms, and the character of its figures, no pastoral painting can compete with the *Bathers*.’

faithful subjects [...]: he was soon set straight by the sight of the Capital of France inhabited by beings which, to his eyes, barely had the figures of men. He would have contented himself with calling them savages in favour of their wives, who still conserved some vestiges of the work of the Graces. “[...] Once the good Gauls cherished my rule, adored their wives, made children, defended their Fatherland from the incursions of a Britannic phlegm, cultivated their lands, and did not blush about being innocent of anything. In those times they did not know either vermilion or ceruse, they did not wear eau de Luce for the vapours, they did not have loges at the Opéra, they did not eat ice creams, and they were happier.”<sup>112</sup>

Cupid dreams of restoring the people of Paris to their pre-rouge, pre-vapours, pre-loge, pre-ice-cream state. Contemplating stratagems to achieve this goal, he enters the kitchens of the Café la Foi and ‘plunge[s] himself bodily into the vessel that held the ice creams that were to be distributed that evening in the Garden of the Palais-Royal.’<sup>113</sup> The effects of this scheme are ‘prompt and admirable’: under the influence of Cupid’s ice cream, a coquette expresses unaffected tenderness, a breeze stirs the fichu covering a young beauty’s breast and reveals it to her lover, an actress says ‘I love you’ and means it for the first time... Even the *nouvellistes* under the Tree of Cracow stop discussing the usual battles and newspaper reports, and turn to ‘pleasant and joyous conversations’ on the intrigues of Madam So-and-So and her beautiful sister, the ways of love in different countries, the ‘agreeable Arts’, and their usefulness in matters of love.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> *Le Dévidoir du Palais Royal*, 1–3. ‘L’Amour s’étoit échappé de Paphos pour venir goûter à Paris la fraîcheur délicate des nuis passées au Jardin du Palais Royal. [...] Il s’imagineoit jusqu’alors être maître du monde, & n’avoir plus de conquêtes à faire. Quelle fut sa surprise en arrivant à Paris ! souvent on lui en avoit parlé comme d’un lieu de délices où habitoient ses plus fidèles sujets [...]: il fut bientôt détrompé en voyant la Capitale de la France habitée par des êtres qui, selon lui, avoient à peine figures d’hommes. Il voulut bien se contenter de les appeler sauvages en faveur de leurs femmes, qui conservoient encore quelques vestiges de l’ouvrage des graces. “[...] Autrefois les bons Gaulois chérissoient mon empire, adoroient leurs femmes, faisoient des enfans, défendoient leur Patrie des incursions d’un plegme Britannique, cultivoient leurs terres, & ne rougissoient point d’être naïfs en tout. Dans ce tems ils ne connoissoient ni le vermillon ni la céruse, ils ne portoient point d’eau de Luce pour les vapeurs, ils n’avoient point de loges à l’Opéra, ils ne prenaient point de glaces, & ils étoient plus contents.”

<sup>113</sup> *Le Dévidoir du Palais Royal*, 3–4: “il se plongea tout entier dans le vase qui renfermoit les glaces qu’on devoit distribuer le soir dans le Jardin du Palais Royal.”

<sup>114</sup> *Le Dévidoir du Palais Royal*, 4–6. “L’Amour ne tarda pas à s’applaudir de sa ruse, dont les effets étoient aussi prompts qu’admirables. [...] Ici c’étoit une Coquette impérieuse qui venoit d’oublier tout le jargon d’usage, & serroit tendrement la main d’un Cavalier qui lui contoit les plus jolies choses du monde: là un Amant indiscret profitoit de l’ouvrage du zéphir, & complimentoit énergiquement sa bien-aimée sur la beauté d’un sein qu’elle avoit toujours craint de lui découvrir; de ce côté, une Héroïne de coulisse répétoit à un jeune Seigneur:

It is one of these *nouvellistes* who first introduces the topic of the Salon, in the roundabout and context-heavy way that we should by now have come to expect from the author of this pamphlet. The *nouvelliste* addresses his fellows:

Oh, Sirs, how we will laugh; it's no longer a matter of nonsense [...]. Imagine, Sirs, that I had just left the charming Daphné, whom I am not ashamed to adore sincerely, and that I was still having *rose-coloured* thoughts when I fell asleep [italics in original]. The ghost of Titian appeared before me in the most brilliant apparatus, which I will not amuse myself by describing to you. After having discussed the Painters of our time with me at quite some length, it gave me a Spool: 'It is', it told me, 'the spool of the Beautiful Laura, whom I am near to in the Elysian Fields, which I have amused myself by wrapping with a lively little opusculé on today's Painters, and some of the paintings they've put on show at the Salon. You will find Stories, Dialogues, etc. You may read them or not, but they're all for fun. However, I exhort you to show them to the Artists you know, and whom you sometimes have over for dinner in order to pass for an art-lover.' Thus spoke the Ghost, who disappeared straight after. When I awoke, I found the Spool on my bedside table, and I bring it to you to astonish and delight you.<sup>115</sup>

The curious *nouvellistes* agree to read the whole spool on one condition: that they each take turns reading aloud, since it is 'physically impossible for Old Men to listen and keep quiet for an hour at least.'<sup>116</sup> The pamphlet as a whole is presented as an 'opusculé' of indeterminate authorship—written or perhaps simply compiled by Titian's ghost, wrapped around the spool

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*Je vous aime, & le pensoit pour la première fois [...]; il n'y eut pas, jusqu'aux Nouvellistes de l'arbre de Cracovie, qui ne ressentissent les effets de sa bénigne influence [...], & l'arbre étoit étonné de n'entendre que des conversations amusantes & joyeuses. Il étoit question des intrigues de Madame une Telle, de la beauté de sa Sœur, & de décider dans quel pays du monde on sçavoit le mieux aimer. Quelquefois pour varier on dissertoit sur les Arts agréables, & sur l'utilité aux projets de l'Amour."*

<sup>115</sup> *Le Dévidoir du Palais Royal*, 6–7. 'Oh, Messieurs, nous allons bien rire; il ne s'agit plus de balivernes [...]. Imaginez-vous, Messieurs, que je venois de quitter la charmante Daphné que ne rougis point d'adorer sincèrement, & j'avois encore des idées *couleur-de-roses* lorsque je me suis endormi. L'ombre du Titien s'est montrée à mes yeux avec le plus brillant appareil, que je ne m'amuserai point à vous dépeindre. Après m'avoir entretenu pendant assez long-temps sur les Peintres de nos jours, elle m'a remis un Devidoir: c'est, m'a-t-elle dit, le Devidoir de la Belle Laure, auprès de laquelle je suis dans les Champs Élisées, que je me suis amusé à entourer d'un petit opusculé gaillard sur les Peintres du jour, & quelques-uns des Tableaux qu'ils viennent d'exposer au Sallon. Vous y trouverez des Contes, des Dialogues, &c. vous les lirez ou vous ne les lirez pas, mais le tout est pour rire. Cependant je vous exhorte à les montrer aux Artistes que vous connoissez, & à qui vous donnez quelque-fois à souper, afin de passer pour Amateur. Ainsi parla l'Ombre qui disparut aussitôt. A mon réveil j'ai trouvé le Devidoir sur ma table de nuit, je vous l'apporte pour vous étonner & vous réjouir.'

<sup>116</sup> *Le Dévidoir du Palais Royal*, 8: 'parce qu'il étoit physiquement impossible à des Vieillards d'écouter & de se taire pendant une heure au moins.'

of Petrarch's Laura, and now read aloud by a gathering of *nouvellistes* under the influence of Cupid under the Tree of Cracow in the gardens of the Palais-Royal. What is the point of this elaborate conceit? Thematically, it sets the tone for the parts that follow: their theme of love and lovers, their blending of mythology and modernity, and their light-hearted but persistent sense of the intertwined decline of French love, French masculinity, French femininity, and French art.

The next Salon saw the attendance of Fanfale, whom we meet in her loge at the Comédie-Française in 1775's *Entretiens sur l'exposition des tableaux* ('Conversations about the exhibition of paintings'). Mademoiselle Fanfale is joined at the end of the first act of an unnamed new tragedy by the Comte de Fioreventi and his friend, a Chevalier, who are late after losing track of time at the Salon. Fanfale has never been to the Salon and does not understand its appeal: 'I don't understand how people can be amused by such miseries. Is there something more extraordinary about the Paintings there than the ones I see everywhere?'<sup>117</sup> She is, however, deeply impressed by the play, citing the lead actor's 'terrible cries' and 'convulsions'. The Comte and the Chevalier, despite having arrived late to the play and 'having heard almost none of it', judge it to be 'detestable' and 'devoid of common sense' (3).<sup>118</sup> The three friends agree to visit the Salon together the next day, so that the Chevalier can teach Fanfale 'the difference between a good and a bad Painting.'<sup>119</sup>

The setting of the theatre efficiently introduces the characters through whose eyes we will see the Salon, and whose modes of viewership are as much, if not more, in question than the paintings themselves. Just as *Le Miracle de nos jours* and *Le Dévidoir* contrast the vices

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<sup>117</sup> *Entretiens sur l'exposition des tableaux de l'année 1775*, 1775, 4: 'je ne comprends pas qu'on puisse s'amuser de ces miseres. Est-ce que les Tableaux là ont quelque chose de plus extraordinaire que ceux que je vois par-tout?'

<sup>118</sup> *Entretiens sur l'exposition des tableaux*, 3-4, 5. 'Fanfale: Jamais \*\*\* ne m'a paru si charmant! qui diroit que d'une si petite poitrine il pût sortit de si terribles cris? tenez, voyez ces convulsions' (3-4). The Comte and the Chevalier decide 'que la Tragédie de la veille, dont ils n'avoient presque rien entendu, n'avoit pas le sens commun' (5) and is 'détestable' (3).

<sup>119</sup> *Entretiens sur l'exposition des tableaux*, 5: 'la différence qu'il y a entre un bon & un mauvais Tableau.'

of the Palais-Royal with the virtues of the Salon, the *Entretiens* oppose Salon and theatre. For many Old Regime art critics, the two settings were fundamentally at odds, representing incompatible art forms and modes of viewership. During the 1770s and 1780s, French history painting was thought to be enjoying a revival, a return to truth and nature after the ignominy of the rococo years. The theatre and the opera, by contrast, were regarded by many of the same commentators as being in decline, as decadent hotbeds of affectation, frivolity, and sexual licence both onstage and off.<sup>120</sup> Fanfale is shown to be enthusiastically appreciative of melodrama and theatrics but ignorant of art, while the Comte and the Chevalier are shown to be knowledgeable and interested but overly quick to judge. The private loge is a natural gathering place for such a group, illuminating their class, social relationships, and interests outside the Salon—all relevant considerations informing their judgement of art.

Fanfale agrees to go to the Salon with the Comte and the Chevalier for a simple reason: to compete with her rival Fifi. ‘I have never been to the Salon’, she says, ‘and I won’t be sorry to be able to shut Fifi up a little; she’s taken it into her head to play *connoisseuse*.’<sup>121</sup> Arriving at the Salon, they find Fifi being instructed on the arts by the Abbé D\*\*\*: ‘Ah, there we have it!’ cries Fanfale, ‘the source that Fifi draws from! She’s a second-hand *connoisseuse*.’<sup>122</sup> Fanfale, eager to attract the attentions of the Abbé for herself, poaches him from Fifi; the Abbé, despite protestations of modesty, is more than happy to transfer both his amorous and educational attentions to Fanfale.

In Fanfale he has quite a task on his hands. No sooner has he finished his introductory statement on the importance of knowing the arts before daring to judge them than Fanfale

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<sup>120</sup> As evinced, for example, in the pamphlets of Gorsas, who took every opportunity to lambast Beaumarchais’ Figaro and its audience in all three of his pamphlets featuring the character Critès: *Promenades de Critès*, *L’Âne promeneur*, and *La Plume du coq de Micille*. See Crow, *Painters and public life*, 223–27.

<sup>121</sup> *Entretiens sur l’exposition des tableaux*, 5: ‘je n’ai jamais été au Salon; & je ne serai pas fâchée de pouvoir un peu river les clouds à la petite Fifi, qui s’avise de faire la connoisseuse.’

<sup>122</sup> *Entretiens sur l’exposition des tableaux*, 5: ‘ah voilà donc, s’écria-t-elle, la source où Fifi va puiser! elle est connoisseuse de la seconde main.’

cuts in: ‘What nonsense! A little, a lot, or no knowledge at all; it’s all the same when it comes to pronouncing on these people. [...] It seems no more difficult to judge the beauties and flaws of a Painting than for a painter to compose his subject.’<sup>123</sup> This was anathema to eighteenth-century art critics: of all Fanfale’s confidently ignorant statements, this reads as the most outrageous of them all. The Abbé puts her to the test, starting with the first painting in the *livret*, Noël Hallé’s *Jesus Christ faisant approcher de lui les petits enfants pour les bénir* (*Jesus Christ beckoning the little children to bless them*): ‘doesn’t it seem to you that he took his models from the Sèvres manufactory?’ The criticism in this question goes over Fanfale’s head entirely: ‘All the better’, she says, ‘the Painting is more surprising for it, since the Painter has given the Canvas the effect of enamel.’<sup>124</sup> An enthusiastic, though quickly bored and easily distracted student, Fanfale does on occasion show herself capable of absorbing and applying the Abbé’s teachings. Her untutored voice—that of a total outsider to the art world—occasionally speaks the honest and unbiased truth; when the Abbé states that ‘the name alone of Van Loo is an accolade’, she replies: ‘It’s not about his name, it’s about his Painting.’<sup>125</sup> The Abbé also shows himself to be a less than ideal teacher, leaving some of Fanfale’s questions unanswered. Though a vain flirt transparently using his position as guide as a way to ingratiate himself with his female listener, he is given the share of the dialogue espousing views clearly intended to be read as common-sense. Above all, the dialogue stresses Fanfale’s ignorance and lack of self-awareness. She has no interest in following up what she has seen at the Salon by looking at paintings elsewhere, and is continually at the end

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<sup>123</sup> *Entretiens sur l’exposition des tableaux*, 6. ‘Quelle folie! peu, beaucoup, ou point du tout; c’est la même chose quand il s’agit de prononcer sur ces gens-là. [...] Il ne me paroît pas plus difficile de connoître les beautés & les défauts d’un Tableau, qu’au peintre de composer son sujet.’

<sup>124</sup> *Entretiens sur l’exposition des tableaux*, 7. ‘L’ABBE: [...] ne vous semble-t-il pas qu’il a pris ses modeles à la Manufacture de Seve? FANFALE: Tant mieux, le Tableau n’est que plus surprenant, puisque le Peintre a donné à la Toile l’effet de l’émail.’

<sup>125</sup> *Entretiens sur l’exposition des tableaux*, 8. ‘L’ABBE: [...] savez-vous que le nom seul de Vanloo est un éloge, & qu’il donne du prix à tout ce qui sort de son atelier. FANFALE: Ce n’est pas son nom dont il s’agit, c’est de son Tableau.’ Later, when the Abbé starts extolling the morals of Hubert Robert, Fanfale stops him: ‘Here, Abbé, talk about talents and not of morals; between us, they’re not your forte’ (‘Tenez, l’Abbé, parlez des talens, & non pas des mœurs; entre nous, ce n’est pas votre fort’, 28).

of her attention span: ‘Let’s go, let’s go, Monsieur l’Abbé, let’s move on to other paintings’.<sup>126</sup> She refuses to follow the order the Abbé has set and repeatedly mistakes things, including mistaking a Lagrenée for a Rubens: ‘I’d recognise this painter out of a hundred thousand; it’s something I learned from my mother; I heard her say that this Painter *coloured* a lot.’<sup>127</sup> She is inconsistent, criticising the Abbé for being too laudatory one moment and criticising his ‘passion for criticising’ the next.<sup>128</sup> When the group, unable to take in the whole Salon in one visit, reconvene the following day to continue their tour, we read:

The Count, the Chevalier and the Abbé arrived at Mademoiselle Fanfale’s house at exactly the hour indicated; the Abbé had arrived a quarter of an hour before the others, but he didn’t let that on. All three [sic] of them breakfasted and set off; Fanfale was delighted to have got up earlier than usual: this novelty made her cheerful for the rest of the day [...].<sup>129</sup>

Late to rise and loose in morals, Fanfale is hungry for novelty above all else.

As she grows more confident she begins to comment freely. In general, she is more interested in portraits and miniatures than in history paintings, and true to her word, is more interested in their subjects than their execution. She recognises a portrait bust of Sophie Arnould (‘A little flattering, Abbé, admit it’), saying of another portrait: ‘But here’s a woman, no. 128, whom I seem to recognise: doesn’t she live opposite the Opéra?’<sup>130</sup> Her points of reference when weighing up artworks are theatrical and quotidian. She is surprised to hear that Milet Francisque is a member of the Académie, having taken him for a man of

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<sup>126</sup> *Entretiens sur l’exposition des tableaux*, 8. ‘Allons, allons, Monsieur l’Abbé, passons à d’autres.’

<sup>127</sup> *Entretiens sur l’exposition des tableaux*, 18. ‘Ah! ah! voilà un Rubens. [...] Je distinguerois ce Peintre-là sur cent mille; c’est une connoissance que j’ai acquise de ma mère; je lui ai entendu dire que ce Peintre *coloroit* beaucoup.’

<sup>128</sup> *Entretiens sur l’exposition des tableaux*, 42, 45–46. ‘[L’Abbé] est comme ces Critiques paresseux qui aiment mieux louer tout que de prendre la peine d’entrer dans les détails.’ And later: ‘Ne voilà-t-il pas que la rage de critiquer va le reprendre? J’exige que vous trouviez tout cela bon, ou que vous vous taisiez.’

<sup>129</sup> *Entretiens sur l’exposition des tableaux*, 25. ‘Le Comte, le Chevalier & l’Abbé se rendirent exactement chez Mademoiselle Fanfale à l’heure indiquée; l’Abbé y étoit arrivé un quart-d’heure avant les autres, mais il n’en murmura pas. Ils déjeûnèrent tous les trois & partirent; Fanfale trouva délicieux de s’être levée plus matin qu’à l’ordinaire: cette nouveauté lui donna de la gaité pour le reste de la journée.’

<sup>130</sup> *Entretiens sur l’exposition des tableaux*, 40 (no. 128), 44 (Arnould). ‘Mais, voilà une femme, no. 128, qu’il me semble connoître: ne demeure-t-elle pas en face de l’Opera?’ No. 128, by Duplessis, is listed in the *Livret* only as ‘Other Portraits, under the same Number.’ On the bust of Arnould: ‘Un peu flattée, l’Abbé, convenez-en; elle n’est pas trop ressemblante.’ Houdon’s portrait bust of Arnould is discussed in more detail in chapter three (‘Marat/Sophie’).

the same name working as a set painter at the Opéra; she dislikes a still life by Anne Vallayer-Coster because ‘The plums aren’t ripe enough’; when asked if she recognises a figure in one of the portraits, she asks instead what fabric the curtains are made of. She scandalises the Abbé by comparing a gilded frame for a portrait of the queen to ‘sweets arranged on gingerbread’.<sup>131</sup> Battle paintings frighten her (though the Abbé suggestively points out that she ‘enjoy[s] more agreeable struggles’).<sup>132</sup> Admiring Vernet’s landscapes, she exclaims: ‘Oh! I’m beginning to appreciate the difference that there is between a good painting and a mediocre painting. I had never made that distinction.’<sup>133</sup> By the end of the group’s second day at the Salon, Fanfale summarises what she has learned: ‘I can’t thank you enough. I would never have imagined that there were so many Artists.’<sup>134</sup> Though the Salon has served her well as a source of diversion and flirtation, we are not left with the impression that it has done much for her edification. The Abbé, for all his pride and libertinage, remains a character capable of sense. Fanfale’s ignorance is irremediable, rendering any attempt to educate her ridiculous.

Four years later, in 1779, a Monsieur de Laus de Clauseau published *Les Connoisseurs, ou la Matinée du Sallon des Tableaux* (‘The Connoisseurs, or the Morning at the Salon of Paintings’), starring the Présidente de Milcourt and the Abbé de Germigny.<sup>135</sup> The Présidente has a lot in common with Fanfale, and the text is similar in form and substance to the *Entretiens* of 1775: a satirical dialogue between several men and one woman as they peruse the Salon. This time, rather than at the theatre, we begin in the home of the

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<sup>131</sup> *Entretiens sur l’exposition des tableaux*, 18 (plums), 20 (fabric), 26-27 (Milet Francisque), 36 (gingerbread).

<sup>132</sup> *Entretiens sur l’exposition des tableaux*, 46. ‘FANFALE: C’est un genre qui me fait peur. L’ABBE: Vous aimez de plus agréables combats.’

<sup>133</sup> *Entretiens sur l’exposition des tableaux*, 22: ‘oh! je commence à sentir la différence qu’il y a entre un bon tableau & un tableau médiocre. Je n’avois jamais fait cette distinction.’

<sup>134</sup> *Entretiens sur l’exposition des tableaux*, 48. ‘Je ne puis assez vous en marquer ma reconnaissance. Je n’aurois jamais imaginé qu’il y eût tant d’Artistes.’

<sup>135</sup> Laus de Clauseau, *Les Connoisseurs, ou la matinée du Sallon des tableaux* (Paris, 1779).



Présidente de Milcourt. We are introduced to the topic of the Salon by way of two pages of small talk illustrating the types of characters we are dealing with:

At ten o'clock in the morning the Présidente de Milcourt was ready to go out, when the Abbé de Germigny was announced:

'Well! Hello, Abbé? You're a rare sight! ... in truth I didn't know whether you still existed.'

'Madame, unavoidable matters...'

'Oh! I quite understand; are you already engaged for the day?'

'Today, fair Lady, I am entirely at your command.'

'Well then, Abbé, you will be my escort.'

'Where are you going so early in the morning?'

'To see the Comtesse de Lagis; she is distressed by the absence of her husband, who is hunting the English; she's a good little person, and I need you to be her consoler; she likes witty people.'<sup>136</sup>

'She does well to; but, Présidente? Will we drink chocolate before going out?'

'You're right; come along, make yourself useful, ring for it. What news is there?'

'Nobody has anything; people are only talking about this year's Salon; there are charming Paintings.'

'Abbé? It's early; we can stop by on our way before our visit [to the Comtesse].'

'That's a very good thought.'

During breakfast, the Abbé did a thousand silly things, which so amused the Présidente that he was called only clumsy for breaking a very beautiful Sèvres porcelain teacup. At last, when the time came to leave, the Présidente stepped into her carriage, accompanied by her Escort.<sup>137</sup>

The author's preface—a paragraph of nothing but ellipses—makes pointed reference to the censorship of art-critical pamphlets, drawing attention to the amount of material that must be cut before reviews make it to the press.<sup>138</sup> The conversation above, in its thorough lack of

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<sup>136</sup> The Comtesse's husband 'hunting the English' is likely a reference to the Anglo-French War of 1778-1783.

<sup>137</sup> Laus de Clauseau, *Les Connaissances*, 3-4. 'A dix heures du matin la Présidente de Milcourt était prête à sortir, on lui annonce l'Abbé de Germigny: —Eh! bonjour, l'Abbé ? vous devenez d'un rare! ... en vérité on ignore si vous existez. —Madame, des affaires indispensables... —Oh ! je vous reconnais bien là ; êtes-vous encore retenu pour aujourd'hui ? —Aujourd'hui, belle Dame, je serai entièrement à vos ordres. —Eh bien, l'Abbé ? vous me servirez d'Ecuyer. —Où allez-vous donc si matin ? —Voir la Comtesse de Lagis ; elle se désolé de l'absence de son mari, qui fait une chasse aux Anglais ; c'est une bonne petite personne, j'exige que vous soyez son consolateur ; elle aime les gens d'esprit. —Elle fait bien ; mais, Présidente ? prenons-nous le chocolat avant de sortir ? —Vous avez raison ; allons, rendez-vous utile, sonnez. Quelles nouvelles dit-on ? — On n'en débite aucune ; on ne parle que du Sallon de cette année, il y a des Tableaux charmants. —L'Abbé ? il est de bonne-heure, nous pourrions y passer avant notre visite. —C'est très-bien pensé.

'Pendant le déjeûné l'Abbé fit mille folies, qui égayerent tellement la Présidente, qu'il ne fut traité que de maladroit, pour avoir cassé une tasse d'une très-belle porcelaine de Sèves. Enfin, l'instant de partir arrivé, la Présidente monte dans sa voiture, accompagnée de son Ecuyer.'

<sup>138</sup> Laus de Clauseau, *Les Connaissances*, 2. The preface reads:

discussion of the Salon, serves in part to illustrate the preface’s suggestion that only what is insubstantial gets past the censors. The chosen vehicles for this insubstantial commentary are, quite naturally, a woman and an abbé: a classic pairing in the libertine and satirical literature of this period, as we have seen already in the *Entretiens*.<sup>139</sup> The abbé’s status as a clergyman made him an eminently suitable chaperone, and his status as a chaperone made him a constant companion for women, portrayed satirically as a sort of status symbol or pet—always at women’s beck and call, and seen as likely to be serving not only their spiritual needs but also other, less respectable ones in secret. There is no sign of a romantic dalliance between the Présidente and her abbé as there is between Fanfale and an abbé in the *Entretiens*: their worst sin is their triviality. Late to rise, they are more concerned with hot chocolate, Sèvres teacups, social visits, and the latest news, than with the Salon for its own sake—all certain indications of frivolity in the world of the pamphlet.

Arriving at the Salon, the Présidente proposes they ‘adopt the air of Connoisseurs’ by buying a *livret*, which she appoints the Abbé to read out to her.<sup>140</sup> One of the first artworks she comments on is a ‘grotesque figure at the end of the room’ with ‘a singular posture’. The Abbé, with his lorgnette, sets her straight:

‘what you’re taking for *a painting* is an Amateur in a black suit and a big wig, attentively examining a large Painting with a lot of people gathered in front of it... Hey! It’s Mr Dessornettes, your Doctor!’<sup>141</sup>

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See also Wrigley, “Censorship and anonymity in eighteenth-century French art criticism.”

<sup>139</sup> See also Monsieur Quillay’s comment to the apothecary Monsieur Dessence in *Entretiens sur les tableaux exposés au Sallon en 1783, ou jugement de M. Quil, Lay, procureur au Châtelet, & son épouse; Madame Fi, d'elle, & Mademoiselle Descharmes, nièce de maître Lami, & de M. Dessence, apothicaire-ventilateur*, 1783, 26: ‘You’re charming with the ladies! you ought to have been an Abbé, it would have been much more pleasant for you to be at the toilette of our women of the day than to be in your sad laboratory’ (‘Vous êtes charmant auprès des femmes! vous auriez dû vous faire Abbé, il auroit été bien plus agréable pour vous d’être à la toilette de nos femmes du jour, que de vous trouver dans votre triste laboratoire’).

<sup>140</sup> Laus de Clauseau, *Les Connoisseurs*, 4. ‘Prenons des airs de connoisseurs: un livre?’

<sup>141</sup> Laus de Clauseau, *Les Connoisseurs*, 5. ‘Ah! l’Abbé? regardez donc au bout de la salle cette Figure grotesque; on lui a donné une singulière posture; je ne vois pas son numéro. —Mais, Présidente? autant que je

The Présidente thinks her mistake a marvellous joke, and proposes they join the doctor, whose thoughts ‘seem profound’—his name, Dessornettes, translates to ‘Poppycock’. More small talk ensues, with the Présidente remarking on the chances of running into each other at the Salon, and the doctor reproaching the Présidente for being out ‘so early on a day of migraine’.<sup>142</sup> As they begin to peruse the Salon, the Présidente’s nerve fails her at the sight of the history paintings that surround them, of war, fistfights, and Jubellius Taurea, who has just slit the throats of his wife and children: ‘Sirs, leave these tragic subjects; they give me the vapours. Abbé, will you show me something pretty?’<sup>143</sup> She would prefer to look at portraits, Venuses, and religious paintings. The group swap anecdotes about the artworks on display, with the Présidente meting out ‘punishments’ for bad puns, condemning them to explain paintings to her, or worse—to subject their ears to the opinions of the crowd around them.<sup>144</sup> They listen to a sampling of men and women, each as silly as the last, as in the case of a *petite maîtresse*, who ‘maintained that Painting No. 151 [a still life by van Spaendonck] was no more than a subject for a fan, and that Madame de C’s Levite was a disappointment.’<sup>145</sup> At last, while Dessornettes is engaged in a lengthy discussion about history painting with the Chevalier de Sernet, who has joined them, the Présidente remembers her and the Abbé’s appointment with a friend and the party breaks up, promising to come back another time.

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puis juger avec ma lorgnette, vous prenez pour *une peinture*, un Amateur en habit noir & grosse perruque, qui examine attentivement un grand Tableau devant lequel beaucoup de personnes sont arrêtées.... Eh! c’est M. Dessornettes votre Docteur! —C’est fort plaisant; allons le joindre, il nous fera part de ses réflexions; elles paroissent profondes.’

<sup>142</sup> Laus de Clauseau, *Les Connaisseurs*, 6. ‘Comment, Docteur? vous au Sallon? s’écria la Présidente en lui frappant sur l’épaule; mais c’est incroyable. —Et vous aussi, belle Dame? de si bonne heure un jour de migraine! en vérité je ne puis m’empêcher de vous gronder, pour n’avoir pas plus de soin de votre santé.’

<sup>143</sup> Laus de Clauseau, *Les Connaisseurs*, 11. ‘Eh! Messieurs, laissons ces objets tragiques; ils me donnent des vapeurs. L’Abbé? montrez moi du joli?’

<sup>144</sup> Laus de Clauseau, *Les Connaisseurs*, 14, 16–17.

<sup>145</sup> Laus de Clauseau, *Les Connaisseurs*, 14–15. ‘Une petite Maîtresse soutenait que le Tableau du No. 151, n’était qu’un sujet d’éventail, & que la Lévite de Madame de C..... était manqué.’ The *levite*, influenced by Ottoman fashion, was a popular style of dress in the 1770s and 1780s.’

The Présidente, like Fanfale, is incorrigible: her failings are innate and cannot be educated out of her, and the Salon is wasted on her. *Les Tableaux du Louvre, où il n'y a pas le sens commun, histoire véritable* ('The paintings at the Louvre, where there is no common sense, a true story'), published in 1777, gives us two female characters from the bourgeois Valentin family, one of whom is not yet entirely lost. We meet them on their way to the Salon, where the author efficiently sketches out their characters for us:

Monsieur Valentin, stepping out of the cab, said to his very pretty daughter and his wife who thought herself so: 'You will see. It's not for nothing that I've made you leave the shop on a workday and brought you to the rue Saint-Denis, to the Paintings at the Louvre. I'm going to explain them to you so that you know them by heart; leave me to it, I know what I'm doing.'  
'I believe you, Papa,' little Julie replied modestly.  
'My God! Husband,' said Madame Valentin, 'do you take us for idiots? Keep your explanations to yourself, I don't care about them; I have eyes to see, taste to judge, and I'll judge very well, because I know what I'm doing.'  
'Undoubtedly, Mama,' said Mademoiselle Valentin again.<sup>146</sup>

Monsieur Valentin is the run-of-the-mill *bourgeois*, self-satisfied, not naturally suited to the appreciation of the arts, but aspiring to a participate in high culture; Madame Valentin is brash and given to overreactions; there is hope only for naïve, modest, pretty Julie, provided that she can escape her parents' influence before she follows in their footsteps. Madame Valentin takes the lead, uttering the pamphlet's first words of art commentary at the first *coup d'oeil* of the Salon:

'Ah! How beautiful it is!' cried Mrs Valentin, as soon as she was close enough to see colours, 'such blue! such green! such red! Look, husband! This landscape! My daughter, this portrait! The beautiful head! The beautiful point of view! The lovely figure! And the frames? How beautifully they're gilded!'

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<sup>146</sup> *Les Tableaux du Louvre, où il n'y a pas le sens commun, histoire véritable* (Paris: Cailleau, 1777), 3–4.  
'Disait M. Valentin, en descendant de fiacre, à sa fille fort jolie & à sa femme qui croyoit l'être; vous allez voir. Je ne vous fais pas quitter la boutique un jour ouvrable, & je ne vous amène pas pour rien de la rue Saint-Denis aux Tableaux du Louvre: je m'en vais vous les expliquer de façon que vous les saurez tous par cœur; laissez-moi faire, je m'y connois. Je le crois bien, Papa, répondit modestement la petite Julie. Mon Dieu! mon mari, dit Madame Valentin, nous prenez-vous pour des buses? Gardez vos explications pour vous, je n'en ai que faire; j'ai des yeux pour voir, du goût pour juger, & je jugerai fort bien: car je m'y connois. Sans doute, maman, dit encore Mademoiselle Valentin.'

‘Ah! How beautiful it is,’ they said, and all three remained in ecstasy on the staircase.<sup>147</sup>

So ecstatic is the family that Madame Valentin falls into a swoon. Once they have recovered from their dazzling first impression, the family are soon joined by the Chevalier de Crac, the Abbé Michel and his pupil, the young comte de Verville. Verville and Julie are instantly drawn to each other and conduct a shy courtship throughout their tour of the exhibition.

Julie’s quiet sentimentality contrasts strongly with her mother’s emphatic commentaries. When Verville interrupts the Abbé’s long-winded discourse on the need to follow a precise order as they peruse the paintings, to say that the only rule they need to follow is ‘[g]ood sense’, Julie adds that they must also be guided by feeling: ‘Verville looked at her, and felt that he had both.’<sup>148</sup> Verville takes on the role of Julie’s guide, and the two spend lingering moments in front of Lépicié’s genre painting *The desired response*.<sup>149</sup> Here, Julie tells him that she prefers paintings of this kind to ‘all the Seaports in the world’, and would be tempted to prefer them even to history paintings: a preference ‘that is better felt than expressed.’<sup>150</sup> In all things, she is guided by sentiment. By contrast, Madame Valentin is quick to express her opinions unprompted. Looking at a history painting, she dismisses ‘Monsieur Albinus’ for being insufficiently gallant and not having a big enough chariot; and

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<sup>147</sup> *Les Tableaux du Louvre, où il n’y a pas le sens commun*, 4. ‘Ah! que cela est beau! cria Madame Valentin, du plus loin qu’elle aperçut des couleurs, que de bleu! que de vert! que de rouge! tiens, mon mari! ce paysage! ma fille, ce portrait! la belle tête! le beau point de vue! la bonne figure! & les cadres donc? comme ils sont bien dorés! Ah! que cela est beau, disent-ils, & tous trois restent en extase sur l’escalier.’

<sup>148</sup> *Les Tableaux du Louvre, où il n’y a pas le sens commun*, 8: ‘quelle sera notre règle? que faut-il? Du bon sens. Et de l’âme, ajouta la naïve Julie, en baissant les yeux; Verville la regarda, & sentit qu’il avait l’un & l’autre.’

<sup>149</sup> *Les Tableaux du Louvre, où il n’y a pas le sens commun*, 22. Not named in the *Livret*: probably part of no. 24, ‘Plusieurs petits Tableaux & Têtes d’Etude’; the *Mercure de France*, October 1777 p. 167 lists this title as being among the ‘petits Tableaux’ exhibited by Lépicié at that year’s Salon.

<sup>150</sup> *Les Tableaux du Louvre, où il n’y a pas le sens commun*, 22. ‘Vous ne sauriez croire, dit-elle, combien j’aime les tableaux de ce genre: tous les Ports de mer du monde ne me disent rien; il faut être Vernet pour les animer; mais ceux-ci font autant d’honneur à l’ame du Peintre qu’à ses talents. —Eh quoi, mettriez-vous ce genre au-dessus de l’Histoire? —J’en serois tentée. —Pourquoi cela? —Je n’en sais rien. Cette préférence se sent mieux qu’elle ne s’exprime.’

before a painting of the *Judgement of Paris*, deems that Paris would have done well to keep the apple for a better occasion.<sup>151</sup>

Monsieur Valentin is very pleased with all these judgements, and to further convince himself of the superiority of his family's judgement, determines to listen to the judgements of others in the crowd. We are told '[h]e did not expect such stiff competition'; a woman 'in rouge and diamonds' enters on the arm of a Marquis:

'Ah, Marquis,' she cried upon entering, 'see there on the right! It looks like my poor Sultane, my little greyhound; if she hadn't died....'  
'Let's not remind ourselves of your suffering, Madame: she was charming. The Painter surely wished to paint her apotheosis: he couldn't have chosen a more interesting subject.'<sup>152</sup>

The woman in rouge and diamonds, moved by the recollection of her 'charming' departed pet, is unmoved by a painting of Alcestis (a story she only recognises from Glück's opera *Alceste*, which had its French-language premiere in Paris in 1776, with Sophie Arnould in the title role and sets designed by her lover, François-Joseph Belanger). The Marquis explains to her why she is so little affected by the painting of such a familiar story: 'Madame, it's because at the Opéra the Actors sing the music of Glück, and the ones here say nothing'; 'the Bourgeois' Monsieur Valentin 'did not understand this bad *bon mot*, and left our people of quality to return to the crowd.'<sup>153</sup> 'At last, Monsieur Valentin, having completed a turn about the room, and heard all sorts of judgements, concluded that, as it should be, nobody knew

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<sup>151</sup> *Les Tableaux du Louvre, où il n'y a pas le sens commun*, 14 (Albinus), 25 (Paris).

<sup>152</sup> *Les Tableaux du Louvre, où il n'y a pas le sens commun*, 28. 'Ah, Marquis, s'écria-t-elle, en entrant: regardez-là à droite; je crois que voilà ma pauvre Sultane, ma petite Levrette: si elle n'étoit pas morte.... Ne rappelons pas vos douleurs, Madame: elle étoit charmante. Le Peintre a voulu surement faire son apothéose: il ne pouvoit choisir de sujet plus intéressant.'

<sup>153</sup> *Les Tableaux du Louvre, où il n'y a pas le sens commun*, 28. 'Plus loin Alceste... Oui, c'est la scene de l'Opéra! Que cela est froid! [...] Pourquoi donc ne me fait-il pas la moindre impression? —Pourquoi? Madame, c'est qu'à l'Opéra les Acteurs chantent la musique de Gluck, & que ceux-ci ne disent rien. Le Bourgeois ne comprit rien à ce mauvais bon mot, & laissa-là nos gens de qualité pour se remettre dans la foule.'

what they were doing better than he.’<sup>154</sup> He is not alone in feeling this way: when the group is finished with the Salon, they shower each other with praise,

and there was no one in the party who, when complimenting the others on their *esprit*, did not believe they themselves had a hundred times more. Julie alone thought Verville was more connoisseurial than she, and Verville felt that, without Julie, he would have been much less so.<sup>155</sup>

Only Julie and Verville, by virtue of their love for each other, are shown as capable of esteeming anyone but themselves (excepting, perhaps, the noblewoman’s love for her dog). Although this makes them more agreeable by far than any of the other characters, they are nonetheless included in the pamphlet’s general assessment of the Louvre as a place ‘where there is no common sense’. Julie in particular has more sentiment than sense: sweet, meek, and inoffensive, she is a pleasant foil to her unenlightened parents without being depicted as having much to say. But her modesty, and her humble deferral to the man she loves, are her saving graces, in contrast to her self-satisfied father and ill-mannered mother.

There may have been hope for a young woman like Julie; but generally, pamphleteers were at pains to stress the impossibility of improvement for most modern women. To try to learn about painting like Fifi and Fanfale in the *Entretiens* of 1775, or the Présidente in *Les Connoisseurs*, or the similar *Bourgeoise* of 1787, was merely to follow fashion and put on airs: there was no possibility of a genuine knowledge of or appreciation for art. One of the harshest caricatures of this kind can be found in the character of Madame Quillay in *Entretiens sur les tableaux exposés au Sallon en 1783* (‘Conversations on the paintings exhibited at the Salon of 1783’). The first several pages take place in the household of

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<sup>154</sup> *Les Tableaux du Louvre, où il n’y a pas le sens commun*, 29. ‘Enfin, M. Valentin après avoir fait la tour de la salle, & entendu des jugemens de toutes couleurs, conclud, comme cela devoit être, que personne ne s’y connoissoit mieux que lui.’

<sup>155</sup> *Les Tableaux du Louvre, où il n’y a pas le sens commun*, 30–31. ‘On s’accâbla de complimens réciproques, & il n’y eût personne dans la société, qui, en disant aux autres qu’ils avoient beaucoup d’esprit, ne crut en avoir cent fois davantage. Julie seule, trouvoit Verville plus connoisseur qu’elle, & Verville sentoit que sans Julie il l’eût été beaucoup moins.’

Monsieur and Madame Quillay ('Mr and Mrs Who've-got-it), where we wait for Madame Quillay and her friend Madame Fidelle ('Mrs Faithful') to finish discussing their toilettes. Madame Fidelle is late: her hairdresser did not show up and she has had to rely on the services of Mademoiselle Descharmes ('Miss Charms') to do her plait. Their friendship is not one of mutual respect: Madame Quillay does not hesitate to inform Madame Fidelle that she is 'coiffed like a Convulsionary', and that her headdress is 'an edifice built on the foundations of frivolity; what your head thinks quite resembles your coiffure.'<sup>156</sup> She has taken it upon herself 'to make war on these Ladies' toilette'.<sup>157</sup> Vocally critical of the excesses of women's fashion, Madame Quillay has veered too far in the other direction. In the carriage on the way to the Salon, Mademoiselle Descharmes remarks in horror at the state of Madame Quillay's 'ruined' apron—a clerk had spilled ink on it while refilling an inkwell, and according to Madame Quillay, there would have been no point changing because 'it would be mad to get dressed to go to these places, one is mixed up with all sorts of people.'<sup>158</sup> She recalls later stereotypes of the bluestocking, whose attempt to set herself apart from other women intellectually results merely in disagreeableness and utter neglect of her appearance.

All told, the bourgeois characters in the *Entretiens sur les tableaux* of 1783 spend the first thirteen pages quarrelling before turning their attention to the paintings at the Salon. Monsieur Quillay (a prosecutor), Madame Quillay, Madame Fidelle, and Mademoiselle Descharmes argue at home and in the carriage-ride there about their toilettes, how far to take the carriage, and once at the Salon, about where to stand. Madame Quillay dominates the conversation, demonstrating the shallowness of her pretensions to seriousness when she holds

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<sup>156</sup> *Entretiens sur les tableaux exposés au Sallon*, 4–5: 'c'est un édifice bâti sur les fondemens de la frivolité; ce que votre tête pense ressemble bien à votre coëffure'; "coiffée comme une Convulsionnaire".

<sup>157</sup> *Entretiens sur les tableaux exposés au Sallon*, 5: 'je suis décidée à faire la guerre à la toilette de ces Dames.'

<sup>158</sup> *Entretiens sur les tableaux exposés au Sallon*, 6. 'Mlle. Descharmes: Ah! bon Dieu, Madame, qu'avez-vous donc sur le devant de votre jupon? Et c'est... & c'est... mais il est perdu. Mme. Quillay: Oui, c'est un de nos clercs qui a répandu de l'encre en en voulant mettre dans l'écritoire de ma chiffonnière; ce garçon est si mal-adroit! c'est une petite robe que j'ai sacrifiée; au surplus le mantelet cache cela; c'est bien une folie de faire toilette pour aller dans ces endroits là, on est confondu avec toutes sortes de gens.'



forth on the uselessness of learning history—especially French history. Monsieur Quillay curses her, adding with palpable sarcasm: ‘It’s properly up to women to judge talents’.<sup>159</sup>

Gradually, Monsieur Dessence (their apothecary) takes over the role of guide, identifying and explaining paintings to the group, for better or for worse. The women ask questions, give occasional opinions, break from the agreed order, discuss where to eat, and make the usual gaffes, as when they mistake Barbier’s painting of Henri IV and Sully for a work of enamel or porcelain.<sup>160</sup> On the day of the group’s second visit to the Salon, Mademoiselle Descharmes is unable to attend while she cares for her uncle, who is suffering from an apoplexy. Madame Quillay does not think the uncle would be a great loss if he died; and as for Mademoiselle Descharmes, despite her long face and odd get-up, she believes she would be suitable as a model for a painter—of shop signs.<sup>161</sup> But Madame Quillay’s war on her own sex does not extend to its more illustrious members: at the sight of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun’s paintings, Madame Quillay and Madame Fidelle women are ‘delighted to find an opportunity to desolate Monsieur Quillay in proving to him that there are women worthy enough to judge of talents when they have acquired so many’.<sup>162</sup>

All the characters in the pamphlet are more than faintly ridiculous, embodying the worst of self-satisfied bourgeois ignorance. But the choicest vitriol is reserved for Madame Quillay, the ultimate satirical representative of her class and of her sex. She feels no need to justify her opinions on anything:

MME QUILLAY  
I don’t like that Figure there.  
MME FIDELLE  
Why?

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<sup>159</sup> *Entretiens sur les tableaux exposés au Sallon*, 15. Incomprehensibly, Madame Quillay explains her husband’s resentment of the female sex by saying that the Abbé de \*\*\* once found a snail’s nest in Quillay’s wig.

<sup>160</sup> *Entretiens sur les tableaux exposés au Sallon*, 25.

<sup>161</sup> *Entretiens sur les tableaux exposés au Sallon*, 29.

<sup>162</sup> *Entretiens sur les tableaux exposés au Sallon*, 34. ‘Étonnée[s] de tant [de] talents, [...] elles furent enchantées de trouver une occasion de désoler M. Quillay, en lui prouvant qu’il y avoit des femmes dignes de juger des talents quand elles en avoient tant acquis.’

MME QUILLAY  
It's that I don't like it.<sup>163</sup>

(She soon scolds her husband for saying the very same thing.)<sup>164</sup> When Monsieur Quillay mentions one of his court cases, against a 'malicious gossip' whom he sought to have shut up in a convent, readers are evidently expected to desire the same punishment for his wife.<sup>165</sup>

As the group leaves the Salon on their way to dinner, Madame Quillay makes a parting jab at an unnamed artist. Monsieur Quillay is scandalised: 'Come, Madame, when you have left you may say what you like; but here I pray you to keep quiet, the walls have ears.'<sup>166</sup> In shock at his wife's impertinence, Monsieur Quillay trips on Madame Fidelle's skirts, taking a nasty fall from the carriage ramp. The fall is greeted with gales of laughter from the surrounding crowd; nobody rushes to help the bleeding and unconscious Monsieur Quillay. Eventually a surgeon arrives and a sedan chair is fetched, into which the unfortunate Mr Quillay is loaded, and to more gales of laughter the group makes its way home in a cab, leaving the author to hope that we will soon have news of 'the poor wounded person'.<sup>167</sup> Both their arrival at the Salon—with Madame Quillay, heedless of the safety of the thronging crowd, demanding the carriage driver take them right to the Salon doors—and their unceremonious departure call to mind the aristocrats in the 1741 *Lettre à Monsieur de Poiresson-Chamarande*. The aristocrats have been replaced with a group of *bourgeois*, their private carriage with a cab, their grotesque cosmetics with Madame Quillay's equally

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<sup>163</sup> *Entretiens sur les tableaux exposés au Sallon*, 32. 'MME. QUILLAY: Je n'aime pas cette Figure-là. MME. FIDELLE: Pourquoi? MME. QUILLAY: C'est que je ne l'aime pas'.

<sup>164</sup> *Entretiens sur les tableaux exposés au Sallon*, 37.

<sup>165</sup> *Entretiens sur les tableaux exposés au Sallon*, 36.

<sup>166</sup> *Entretiens sur les tableaux exposés au Sallon*, 57. 'Allons, Madame, quand vous serez sortie, vous direz ce que bon vous semblera; mais ici je vous prie de garder le silence, les murs ont des oreilles.'

<sup>167</sup> *Entretiens sur les tableaux exposés au Sallon*, 59.

grotesque rejection of respectable dress. The object of the pamphlet's class animus has changed, but the animus against women in particular remains, with only cosmetic changes.

### *Women's voices*

One could be forgiven for imagining, having read most of the art-critical literature surveyed above, that feminism of any kind had yet to emerge in France. In fact, publications including the *Journal des dames* had advocated for women in the arts in various capacities since the 1760s. Works that promoted women's right—and capacity—to write and paint alongside men in the public sphere, like Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S.'s *Avis important d'une femme* of 1785 and Madame de Genlis's educational novel *Les Veillées du château*, published in instalments from 1782 to 1784, were met with utter silence on the part of art critics. The same critics who spent every second autumn busily plagiarising each other's work and attacking even the most minor perceived faults, had virtually nothing to say about serious calls for the equality of women. It seems unlikely that art critics were unaware of these developments, given that the most relevant volume of Genlis's book sold out its first printing—seven thousand copies—in eight short days, while Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S.'s advocacy came from within the genre of art criticism itself.<sup>168</sup> Likewise, the omission cannot have come about because women's involvement was seen as an inconsequential issue: the entirety of the art-critical literature surveyed in the first part of this thesis attests to the significance of women's place as a subject of debate. Rather, the absence of engagement with emerging feminist ideas testifies to an unwillingness to give up the power of framing. Art-critical pamphlets resolutely hung onto the power to frame women's place in the art world as *an issue of women*, rather than a *women's issue*. Not until the period of the Directory would the exhortations of Genlis and

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<sup>168</sup> Félicité de Genlis, *Mémoires inédits de Madame la comtesse de Genlis sur le dix-huitième siècle et la Révolution française depuis 1756 jusqu'à nos jours*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Ladvocat, 1825), vol. 3, p. 190, cited in Schroder, "Elle était née pour peindre les héros!," 13.

Madame E.A.R.T.L.A.D.C.S. for the equal artistic education of girls find an echo in the art-critical literature. The Salon of 1796 saw the publication of the *Entretien sur le Salon de 1796, entre un père et sa fille* ('Conversation on the Salon of 1796, between a father and his daughter'), in which a painter uses the Salon as an opportunity to extend his daughter's painterly training.<sup>169</sup> Whereas Genlis, a countess and educator of the king's children, aimed her theories at mothers and children of privilege, the *Entretien* of 1796 shows the passing down of a respected family occupation from father to daughter.

As early as 1790, the feminist Marie-Madeleine Jodin (1741-1790) had posited instruction in the arts as part of an educational programme for women of much lower social status. Jodin, a *philosophe*, former actress, and protégée of Diderot, presented her *Vues législatives pour les femmes* ('Legislative views for women') to the National Assembly in 1790, which, although primarily political in focus, provide telling insights into Jodin's views on art as it related to women's place in society. On the one hand, an instruction in the arts formed part of her proposal to rehabilitate women living in 'vice and idleness' into emancipated Revolutionary subjects.<sup>170</sup> On the other hand, she described the display of immoral art as one of the chief impediments to public morality and, by extension, women's equality. She ranked prostitution first on her list of these impediments; private gambling houses second; obscene prints third; and the arts—encompassing the Salon along with licentious *petits théâtres*—fourth.<sup>171</sup> She argued that, just as prostitution degraded women and relegated them to lives of vice, so did obscene prints 'corrupt the eyes of children, giving

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<sup>169</sup> "A l'auteur du journal. Salon de 1796," and "Suite de l'entretien sur le Salon de 1796, entre un père et sa fille," *Journal général de France*, no. 32, 2 brumaire, pp. 131-132; no. 35, 5 brumaire, p. 143; no. 38, 8 brumaire, pp. 155-156; no. 41, 11 brumaire, pp. 166-167; no. 46, 16 brumaire, pp. 187-188; no. 47, 17 brumaire, p. 191; no. 51, 21 brumaire, p. 207; no. 54, 24 brumaire, pp. 218-219; no. 61, 1 frimaire, pp. 246-247 1796. A combined manuscript transcription of this rather dispersed serialised review can be found in the Deloynes Collection; "Observations tirées du journal general de france sur l'exposition des tableaux de 1796 par Mr. Ro...." (manuscript, 1796), <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10523771p>.

<sup>170</sup> Marie-Madeleine Jodin, *Vues législatives pour les femmes: adressées a l'Assemblée nationale* (Angers: Mame, 1790), 39 [42] (pages 42-43 are misnumbered 39-40): 'le vice et l'oisiveté.'

<sup>171</sup> Jodin, *Vues législatives pour les femmes*. On her views on art as expressed in this text, see Cameron, "Two 18th-century French art critics," 10-11; Jensen, "Portraitistes à la plume," 50-51.

them the idea of vice': these 'miserable refinements of a dying sensuality' ought to be left to 'Courtesans' and scrubbed from 'public places'.<sup>172</sup> On the Salon, she wrote:

We also see respect for public morality violated in the salon of the arts, which should find its safeguard in the guarantee of prudent admittance of the choice of subjects that should appear there. The object of all the imitative arts destined to depict virtuous or heroic actions [...] must be as pure as [nature] in its noble or joyous paintings; they must compete to reinforce national morals and virtues, and not to degrade them with compositions that cannot excite admiration without wounding decency. On seeing the loves of Paris and Helen, [or] the painting of Zeuxis choosing models from among the most beautiful girls in Greece, would the modest wife not be tempted to cover their nudity with a veil?<sup>173</sup>

In Jodin's view, the French state kept women in a state of subjugation by failing to constructively address their debasement by means of prostitution, obscene prints, and immoral paintings. Women's emancipation—their access to political life—would depend on their protection from such influences, on their embrace of 'feminine' virtues, and on the reform of the monarchical institutions that had failed them by giving licence to the moral corruption of the Old Regime.

In 1761, the teenaged Jodin, together with her mother, had been accused of prostitution by her family and imprisoned for two years in Paris's notorious Salpêtrière.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Jodin, *Vues législatives pour les femmes*, 15. 'Une troisième source d'immoralité nationale, c'est le peu d'attention que donne la police aux estampes obscènes dont vos places publiques, vos promenades et vos quais sont couverts. Ces objets retracés de toutes parts, corrompent les regards de l'enfance, lui donnent l'idée du vice, et en justifient la turpitude. Laissons aux Courtisanes, laissons aux êtres malheureux en qui tous les ressorts de la nature sont relâchés, ces misérables raffinements d'une volupté expirante'.

<sup>173</sup> Jodin, *Vues législatives pour les femmes*, 15–16. 'Nous voyons également violer le respect des mœurs publiques dans le sallon des arts, qui devrait trouver sa sauve-garde sous la garantie d'une prudente admission dans le choix des sujets qui doivent y paroître. L'objet de tous les arts d'imitation destinés à fixer les actions vertueuses ou héroïques, à reproduire à nos yeux les différentes scènes [sic] de la nature, doit être pur comme elle dans ses nobles ou riants tableaux; ils doivent concourir à renforcer les mœurs et les vertus nationales, et non les dégrader par des compositions qui ne peuvent exciter l'admiration sans blesser la décence. En voyant les amours de Pâris et d'Hélène, le tableau de Zeuxis choisissant les modeles entre les plus belles filles de la Grece, la modeste épouse ne sera-t-elle pas tentée de couvrir leur nudité d'un voile?' The paintings she refers to are David's *The loves of Paris and Helen* (1788, Paris: Louvre) and Vincent's *Zeuxis choosing models from the beautiful women of Croton* (1789, Paris: Louvre), both displayed at the Salon of 1789.

<sup>174</sup> For Jodin's remarkable biography, see Felicia Gordon and P. N. Furbank, *Marie Madeleine Jodin 1741–1790: actress, philosophe and feminist* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001); Gordon, "Filles publiques or public women: the actress as citizen: Marie-Madeleine Jodin (1741-90) and Mary Darby Robinson (1758-1800)," in *Women, gender, and Enlightenment, 1650-1850*, ed. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 610–29.

With first-hand knowledge of the harsh conditions women faced in such ‘hospitals’, Jodin advocated for the creation of an institution where women who were homeless, unemployed, or involved in prostitution could be housed, trained to work in the textile industries, taught reading, writing, and ‘the rules of commerce’, and furnished ‘even with studios where certain arts could be taught’.<sup>175</sup> Thus the arts, though morally suspect, could become a tool of emancipation when women graduated from the role of passive viewers to that of active learners and producers.

The subject of women’s morality was a common refrain in the art-critical pamphlet literature. The female gaze could be characterised as modest, virtuous, impressionable, and at risk of corruption by depictions of nude or libertine subjects; this was the view taken by Jodin.<sup>176</sup> But it could also be characterised as vain, frivolous, and itself a corrupting influence, so that art needed protection from women as much as women needed protection from art. Particularly as women artists and writers alike took concrete steps toward equality, the exceptions that had once been applied to a few exemplary women became morally suspect when applied to many. This ambivalence about women’s capacity to participate in the arts extended to the writings of women. Madame de Genlis, who in the 1780s had excoriated the limits imposed on women artists and writers, demonstrated an enduring interest in the subject, but the certainty with which she had once vindicated women’s entry into male-dominated genres wavered. Her postrevolutionary novels interrogate the figure of the woman artist, questioning her morality in a direct rebuke of the unfettered female genius celebrated

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<sup>175</sup> Jodin, *Vues législatives pour les femmes*, 39 [42]. Jodin advocates for ‘un asyle pour l’indigence et d’abri pour les mœurs, où le vice et l’oisiveté seroient sans excuse, où des manufactures de lainage, des lingers, des filatures, des broderies, des ateliers mêmes où certains arts pourroient être enseignés, occuperoient cette vermine qui infecte nos rues, nos jardins et nos places publiques, qui y trouveroit les ressources d’une éducation qui doit être commune à toutes les classes de l’humanité, la lecture, l’écriture et les règles de commerce.’ She also advocated, among other things, for the legalisation of divorce and the creation of a separate woman’s legislature run by women.

<sup>176</sup> On the scandal caused by the classicising nudity in David’s *Intervention of the Sabine women* (1799, Paris: Louvre), particularly as it related to concerns about female viewers, see Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, “Nudity à la grecque in 1799,” *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 2 (1998): 327–31.

in Germaine de Staël's *Corinne*.<sup>177</sup> Her 1811 treatise *De l'influence des femmes sur la littérature française* ('On the influence of women on French literature') showed a continued belief in women's capacity to lay claim to the status of cultural producers, but also alarm at the number of women now seeking that status. On women writers seeking publication, she wrote: 'I know all the reasons that one can oppose to this kind of ambition; I once used them myself, out of the feeling that often pushes impartiality to the point of exaggeration.'<sup>178</sup> But to stem 'the alarming number of women authors', she stipulated three conditions: women must hesitate to make their work public; their writings must 'invariably show [...] the most profound respect for religion, and the principles of an austere morality'; and they must never respond to criticism, except to correct factual errors.<sup>179</sup> Genlis's standards for women writers resonate both with her own expressed views on women artists, and with the high standards that Salon criticism demanded of its serious female characters. The shifts in Genlis's views on women over the decades, and her personal mixture of feminism and conservatism, show the influence of the same kinds of feminine archetypes elaborated in the art-critical literature.

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<sup>177</sup> Most notable among Genlis's novels as they relate to the arts are *Les fleurs, ou les artistes* ('Flowers, or artists', 1810), *Sainclair, ou la victime des sciences et des arts* ('Sainclair, or the victim of the sciences and the arts', 1808) and *Hortense, ou la victime des romans et des voyages* ('Hortense, or the victim of novels and voyages', 1808). See Jensen, "Portraitistes à la plume," 160–66; Florence Boulerie, "La femme peintre, modèle de vertu dans le théâtre de Félicité de Genlis," in *Femmes artistes à l'âge classique*, ed. Élise Pavy-Guilbert, Stéphane Pujol, and Patrick Wald Lasowski (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021), 253–66. On Staël's *Corinne*, see Jensen, "Portraitistes à la plume", chapter three, "Germaine de Staël's *Corinne*: the quintessential woman art critic", 181–246; Sheriff, *The exceptional woman*, 'Germaine, or *Corinne*', 243–261. On the representation of the women artist in another eighteenth-century novel written by a woman, see Élisabeth Lavezzi, "Femme peintre et fiction dans 'Histoire d'Ernestine' de Mme Riccoboni," in *Femmes artistes à l'âge classique*, ed. Élise Pavy-Guilbert, Stéphane Pujol, and Patrick Wald Lasowski (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021), 231–52.

<sup>178</sup> Félicité de Genlis, *De l'influence des femmes sur la littérature française comme protectrices des Lettres ou comme auteurs* (Paris: Maradan, 1811), xxi; quoted in Schroder, "Elle était née pour peindre les héros!," 7. 'Je connais tous les raisonnements qu'on peut opposer à cette espèce d'ambition, je les ai moi-même employés jadis avec ce sentiment qui fait souvent pousser l'impartialité jusqu'à l'exagération.'

<sup>179</sup> Genlis, *De l'influence des femmes*, xxiv–xxv. Italics in original. '[...] de sorte que le nombre effrayant de femmes auteurs seroit excessivement réduit, et il n'y en auroit plus de ridicules. Mais il faut que les femmes sachent à quelles conditions il leur est permis de devenir auteurs. 1. Elles ne doivent jamais se presser de faire paroître leurs productions; [...] 2. toutes les bienséances leur prescrivent de montrer invariablement dans leur écrits le plus profonde respect pour la religion, et les principes d'une morale austère; 3. elles ne doivent répondre aux critiques que lorsqu'on fait une fausse citation, ou lorsque la censure est fondée sur un fait imaginaire.'

The Salon literature presents us with two extremes and little in between. On the one hand, women of taste are almost invariably framed as rare and exceptional creatures whose good qualities distance them from other women. Beautiful, kind, and knowledgeable, and often presented in mythological or allegorical form, these women serve as idealised (and therefore unattainable) models for acceptable feminine artistic commentary. In contrast, there are the tasteless women, who, far from desiring to encourage the arts, are concerned purely with their own appearance, their reputations, their social lives and love lives. Little interested in history painting, unable to cope with difficult or indecent subjects, they prefer portraiture, genre painting, and miniature: genres which were seen to require no great effort of interpretation, and to appeal to vanity and to the baser sentiments. They are ignorant, unable to properly distinguish between painting and reality, confusing people for paintings and looking ‘through’ portraits to the sitters they represent; they are banal, more interested in people than in art, and sometimes as interested in the gold frames as in the paintings they contain.<sup>180</sup>

Interestingly, however, the very reviews that most satirise the supposed superficiality of the Salon public, typically by framing it as feminine, frivolous, fashionable, and fickle, also perpetuated this mode of engaging with the public space of the Salon: filling their pages with small talk, spending more time gossiping about the audience than examining the artworks, letting the narrative ‘frame’ take over from the art-critical content of their work. Many of the critics whose pamphlets ventriloquised women expressed a sense of being ventriloquised themselves, with the author wishing to write in a more dignified style, but fearing that the public would not be receptive to their ideas if not expressed according to fashion. If their aim was to control artistic discourse—to encourage the good and chasten the

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<sup>180</sup> The Présidente de Milcourt admires a frame while the Abbé explains a painting in Laus de Clauseau, *Les Connaisseurs*, 17.



bad—can they be said to have succeeded if their immediate achievement was to replicate and propagate the very type of criticism they most despised?

Chapter two:  
Robert-Martin Lesuire (1736-1815): the great ventriloquist

You know, Monsieur, the tale from ancient History that tells us of a son of Croesus, mute from birth, who, strongly inspired by filial love upon seeing a soldier about to slay his father in battle, cried all of a sudden, *stop!*, and who thenceforth owed the power of speech to the tenderness aroused in him by this happy accident.

I know more or less the parallel of this Prince: she is a young person endowed with all the graces of her sex, but condemned by Nature to a perpetual silence, which she nevertheless on occasion interrupts for a moment. When something strikes her, she speaks at once; she expresses the feelings that affect her, and reverts to silence as soon as her emotion has passed. People call her Mutine, not for any indocility of character, but for her muteness. I have taken her to the most beautiful places in Paris, and especially to our Spectacles; and because she has taste, I have recognised as striking everything that caused her to express her sensations to me. In taking her to see the exhibition of Paintings that is currently attracting all of Paris, I thought I would be able to judge the most striking pieces by virtue of their ability to give a voice to my beautiful Mute, by making an impression on her. I suggested this scheme to her yesterday; she accepted vocally—that is, with great enthusiasm—and we raced to the Salon.

Mutine is adorable: her little vocal deficiency, which one does not notice straight away, only serves to make her whole figure more expressive: her face seems in some way more transparent than others, and leaves her innocent soul almost unguardedly visible. Thus I found myself with a young Beauty who spoke only *à propos*; that is, when the occasion merited it. Aren't I to be envied? Incomparable girl! Why are you so rare?

—Lesuire, *La Muette qui parle au Sallon de 1781*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lesuire, *La Muette qui parle*, 3–4. ‘Vous connoissez, Monsieur ce trait de l’Histoire ancienne, qui nous apprend qu’un fils de Crésus, muet de naissance, voyant dans une bataille un soldat sur le point d’immoler son père, inspiré fortement par l’amour filial, s’écria tout à-coup, *arrête!* & dut la parole à sa tendresse exaltée par cet heureux accident. Je connois à peu près le pendant de ce Prince: c’est une jeune personne pourvue de toutes les graces de son sexe ; mais condamnée par la Nature à un silence perpétuel, qu’elle interrompt cependant quelquefois pour un moment. Si tôt que quelque chose la frappe, elle parle sur le champ; elle exprime les sentiments qui l’affectent, & rentre dans le silence dès que son émotion est passée. On la nomme Mutine, non pour aucune indocilité de caractère, mais pour son mutisme. Je l’ai conduite dans les plus beaux endroits de Paris, & sur-tout à nos Spectacles; & comme elle a du goût, j’ai reconnu pour frappant tout ce qui l’a mise dans le cas de m’exprimer ses sensations. J’ai cru qu’en lui faisant voir l’exposition de Peinture qui attire à présent tout Paris, je pourrois juger des morceaux les plus saillants, par l’avantage qu’ils auroient de donner la parole à ma belle Muette, en lui faisant impression. Je lui proposai hier la partie; elle l’accepta de vive voix, c’est-à-dire avec transport, & nous volâmes au Sallon.

It seems apt to open a chapter about a serial ventriloquist by making him speak for me. I would certainly be hard put to express more clearly the convergence, in late eighteenth-century art criticism, of the themes of voice and gender. In the extraordinary opening paragraphs to this *Salon* of 1781, a male narrator, addressing a male reader, introduces a character designed to intrigue and appeal: an attractive young woman with the miraculous ability *not* to speak. This ‘mute who speaks’, given voice to and silenced in the same gesture, is emblematic of the ambiguous place occupied by women in prerevolutionary art criticism, and in the public sphere more generally. But if Lesuire’s point is that women cannot be trusted to speak for themselves, then mine is that men cannot be trusted to speak for women.

What follows is an investigation of a neglected aspect of pre-Revolutionary art criticism, centred on Lesuire’s three pamphlets with female protagonists. My reading of these pamphlets is informed by three further texts, namely Lesuire’s two pamphlets with male protagonists, and his autobiographical *Confessions*. Weaving these texts together, with their blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction, I will explore one writer’s evocation of sexual difference at the Salon, from his insistence on the separate and complementary roles of the sexes to his simultaneous confusion of those roles. At its most basic level, this chapter is a re-evaluation of a neglected critic. More importantly, however, it introduces neglected aspects of art criticism as a genre: namely, the role of fictional women and characters in shaping our understanding of non-fictional artistic debates.

Of the many writers who populated their Salon criticism with women, Lesuire is exceptional for the quantity and consistency of his output. He reviewed every Salon from 1775 until 1783, featuring in successive years a blind connoisseur, a fourteen-year-old girl,

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‘Mutine est adorable: son petit défaut d’organe, qu’on ne devine pas sur-le-champ, ne fait que donner plus d’expression à toute sa figure: son visage semble en quelque sorte plus transparent que les autres, & laisse voir presque à découvert son ame ingénue. Je me trouvois ainsi avec une jeune Beauté qui ne parloit qu’à propos, c’est-à-dire, quand il y avoit une digne occasion de parler. Jugez si l’on devoit me porter envie. Fille incomparable! pourquoi es-tu si rare?’

the dead painter François Lemoyne, the ‘mute’ Mutine, and Dibutades, the Greek maiden supposed to have invented the art of painting.<sup>2</sup> During a period when most art critics published perhaps one or two Salon reviews and no more, it is a rarity to be able to draw on five consecutive reviews by the same named author—three of which feature female protagonists. Lesuire’s work provides a common thread for us to follow, leading us through the Parisian art world from the mid-1770s to the mid-1780s on a very different route than we might take following Diderot. For although Diderot remains the art critic *par excellence* of the ‘high Enlightenment’, Lesuire—neither a Diderot nor exactly a member of Robert Darnton’s ‘literary underground’—is in many ways more representative of the general state of art criticism before the turn of the century.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Robert-Martin Lesuire*

In 1819, four years after Lesuire’s death, a biographer by the name of Weiss described him as follows:

Lesuire had wit and imagination; but he lacked taste and judgement. His style is incorrect and trivial, full of shocking expressions and bad taste. Filled with an insufferable vanity, he often speaks of himself in his works, and he admits to seeing himself *as a man of extraordinary genius*.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to these pamphlets, he authored five issues of a gazette with greater pretensions to seriousness, published from 1780 until 1785, covering the years 1779-1783. Robert-Martin Lesuire, *Histoire de la république des lettres et arts en France* (Paris and Amsterdam: Quillau l’aîné, Veuve Duchesne & Esprit, 1780-1785). Brief summaries of Lesuire’s pamphlets are included in Bukdahl, *Diderot, critique d’art*, vol. 2, 302-5, 312-3, 319; Zmijewska, Helena, *La critique des Salons en France du temps de Diderot (1759-1789)* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1980), 109–14.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Darnton, *The literary underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> ‘Lesuire avait de l’esprit et de l’imagination; mais il manquait de goût et de jugement. Son style est incorrect et trivial, rempli d’expressions choquantes et de mauvais ton. Plein d’une vanité insupportable, il parle souvent de lui dans ses ouvrages, et il avoue qu’il se regardait *comme un homme d’un génie extraordinaire*.’ Italics in original. “Lesuire (Robert-Martin)”, *Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne, ou histoire, par ordre alphabétique, de la vie publique et privée de tous les hommes qui se sont fait remarquer par leurs écrits, leurs actions, leurs talents, leurs vertus ou leurs crimes* (Paris: L. G. Michaud, 1819), vol. 24, 333.

The literary critic dismisses Lesuire in the name of good taste (the same good taste that Lesuire, as we shall see, clearly felt he was defending). However different their conclusions may be, both Weiss and Lesuire are asking the same questions: who stands for good taste? Who is responsible for the spread of bad taste? And ultimately: how can we protect good taste from bad?

My aim here is not to vindicate Lesuire as a misunderstood great. There is no doubt that he had an inflated sense of his own abilities: among other things, he appears to have forged letters in praise of himself from Rousseau, Voltaire, and Madame Geoffrin, and once claimed to be the true inventor of the hot air balloon, defrauded by the Montgolfiers and Faujas de Saint-Fond.<sup>5</sup> But I believe we can ask similar questions about posterity's judgement of Lesuire as we can about Lesuire's judgement of women. For the same pamphleteers who declared themselves guardians of taste in art—defending the grand over the ephemeral, the serious over the light-hearted, the masculine over the feminine—have fallen foul of those very same conventions in literature. Lesuire, like most other pamphlet art critics, was no great aesthete, but he staked his claim in a culture war that was about much more than aesthetics. By asking only about the aesthetic significance of this writing, and concluding—however accurately—that it doesn't have much, we miss other potential meanings. And by addressing ourselves only to art critics who also qualify as art theorists, we miss out on a swath of historical source material—precisely that material in which women and other 'others' are most likely to feature. If the pamphlets' ephemeral appeal was due largely to their pursuit of

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<sup>5</sup> Rousseau's letter, dated 7 April 1767, was published as 'Lettre de feu Jean Jacques Rousseau, à M. le Suire', in Lesuire, *Le philosophe parvenu, ou lettres et pieces originales, contenant les aventures d'Eugene Sans-Pair, par l'auteur de l'Aventurier François* (London & Paris: chez l'auteur, Quillau l'ainé, veuve Duchesne, Belin, Desenne, 1787), vol. 1, v–vii. For the 'Billet de Madame Geoffrin, à M. d'Alembert', see vol. 4 of the same novel (London & Paris: Quillau l'ainé, veuve Duchesne, Belin, Mérigot le jeune, Desenne, 1788), i–ii. On the hot air balloon allegations, see Lesuire, *Histoire de la république des lettres et arts en France, année 1783*, 65–85.

difference, that same difference—both at the time and ever since—has been held up as an argument against their enduring relevance.

This is not to say that women and the pamphleteers who wrote about them were fighting for a common cause. Most art-critical pamphleteers, regardless of their political inclinations, sought—explicitly or implicitly—to define taste in ways that circumscribed the taste of women. Whether what they perceived to be the taste of women had much bearing in reality is another question altogether. But they have been similarly construed as frivolous, shallow, and typically *ancien régime*. In this chapter, I argue that no general discussion of prerevolutionary art criticism is complete without a consideration of its treatment of women and the ‘other’; and that no consideration of women in art criticism is complete without taking into account the satirical pamphlets which framed the debate about the role of women in the public sphere.

Lesuire’s art-critical works, unlike Diderot’s, were published and read in Paris contemporaneously with the Salons that they discussed. And unusually for an art critic of this period, Lesuire did so with official permission from the royal censor.<sup>6</sup> All his works were sold by Quillau l’aîné, a publisher and bookseller on the rue Christine, less than ten minutes’ walk from the Louvre and its Salon. Working for a publisher, under the watchful eye of the censor, necessitated that Lesuire maintain a laudatory and respectful tone in his coverage of the royal family, the Académie, its members and their productions. Part of the reason why he gravitated so consistently toward female protagonists could well be that their voices lent

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<sup>6</sup> ‘[A]ll his critiques were published with permission. Lesuire’s publisher was Quillau, a respectable bookseller who greatly feared artists, the Académie and especially the police. Lesuire therefore had to fall in line with the authorities and publish his critiques with their consent’ (‘[T]outes ses critiques ont été éditées avec l’autorisation d’imprimer. L’éditeur de Lesuire est Quillau, un libraire honorable qui craignait fort les artistes, l’Académie et surtout la police. Lesuire devait donc être en règle avec les autorités et publier ses critiques avec leur accord’), Zmijewska, Helena, *La critique des Salons en France du temps de Diderot (1759-1789)*, 114. As for the gazette: ‘Permission tacite du 12 mai 1780, après rapport du censeur Guidi, puis rayée, et accordée de nouveau le 27 sept. 1781 et renouvelée les 12 décembre 1781 et 4 mai 1783’. See François Moureau, “Histoire de la République des lettres,” in *Dictionnaire des journaux (1600-1789)*, ed. Jean Sgard, accessed February 4, 2021, <http://dictionnaire-journaux.gazettes18e.fr/journal/0602-histoire-de-la-republique-des-lettres>.

themselves more readily to the restricted kind of critique he was authorised to write.

Lesuire's three female protagonists—Aglantine, Mutine and Dibutades—all fit the model of women as natural conciliators, interceding on behalf of artists faced with criticism. This is also, I believe, at least part of the reason why it is in the work of Lesuire in particular—one of few critics who worked within the system of censorship—that we find the fullest realisation of a positive stereotype of women's behaviour at the Salon.

In addition to art criticism, Lesuire published dozens of volumes of novels and poetry. His greatest success was a novel called *L'Aventurier françois, ou mémoires de Grégoire Merveil* ('The French adventurer, or memoirs of Grégoire Merveil', 1782), an adventure-cum-detective story which prompted the following comment from Weiss, the biographer: 'It is a mass of incoherent nonsense; but there is imagination in it, and one is not surprised that it delighted frivolous readers for a time' [emphasis in original].<sup>7</sup> Lesuire's output further includes *Les noces patriarcales, ou Isaac et Rebecca* ('The patriarchal wedding, or Isaac and Rebecca', 1777), a prose poem that is part Biblical, part pastoral, and part divine voyage through space;<sup>8</sup> *Le Nouveau Monde* ('The New World', 1782), an epic poem about Christopher Columbus;<sup>9</sup> several libertine novels, including the satirical *Les amants françois à Londres, ou les délices de l'Angleterre* ('The French lovers in London, or the delights of England', 1780), and *La Paméla française* ('The French Pamela', 1803), after Samuel Richardson; and the fictive confessions of Rabelais (1797), Clément Marot (1798), Michel de Montaigne (1798), and Mirabeau (1799). Sometime after the Revolution, he wrote his memoirs in emulation of his friend, Restif de la Bretonne, though these remained unpublished

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<sup>7</sup> *Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne*, vol. 24, 333. 'C'est un amas de folies incohérentes; mais il y a de l'imagination, et l'on n'est pas étonné qu'il ait fait quelque temps les *délices* des lecteurs frivoles.'

<sup>8</sup> *Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne*, vol. 24, 334. 'La simplicité des récits de l'Histoire sainte y est défigurée par des épisodes qui ne tiennent que de loin au sujet; et, pour le style, comme pour l'invention, Lesuire est resté à une distance infinie de Gesner qu'il avait pris pour modèle.'

<sup>9</sup> *Biographie universelle, ancienne et moderne*, vol. 24, 334. 'Il est impossible de rien imaginer de plus bizarre et de plus extravagant que la conception de ce poème, dont le sujet est la découverte de l'Amérique.'

during his lifetime and for almost two centuries after.<sup>10</sup> What this list demonstrates above all else is Lesuire's penchant for reworking the greatest possible quantity and variety of source material, freely blending fact with fiction, and speaking through the mouths of others.<sup>11</sup> His work combines frequent banality with astonishing thematic richness and an often charming sense of the absurd. 'A man of extraordinary genius' he is not, but he must nonetheless be reckoned with as one of the most prolific and imaginative literary ventriloquists of the eighteenth century.

Lesuire published his first *Salon* in September of 1775, almost exactly two years after his return to Paris from Italy, where he had served as reader to the Duke of Parma—his first prestigious position, and one that granted him temporary access to more distinguished circles than those he had been accustomed to. Upon his return in 1773, his memoirs describe his haste to arrive on time to see that year's Salon. In a short paragraph, he notes his disappointment in the history paintings on display, and his pleasure at seeing the landscapes of Vernet and the portraits of Louis-Michel Van Loo. The 'interesting sight' of the Salon is among his first recorded impressions as a returned traveller, taking its place alongside two other vital aspects of Parisian life: the spectacles (the opera, the Vauxhall de Torr , the public gardens and boulevards) and the women (prostitutes for the most part, whose attention seems to have pleased him).<sup>12</sup> A dedicated consideration of the exhibition itself would have to wait until the Salon of 1775, when Lesuire was settled in the city once more.

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<sup>10</sup> Robert-Martin Lesuire, *Robert, ou confessions d'un homme de lettres pour servir   l' tude de la nature et de la soci t *, ed. B n dicte Obitz-Lumbroso (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> 'He is not afraid of contradictions: he blithely mixes libertinage and Rousseauian *sensibilit *, fiction and reality. On the one hand, he accepts fiction on its own account: he is among the first to overtly proclaim himself a novelist; on the other hand, he remains caught up in the rhetorical and institutional device which demands the disavowal of the novel in favour of the so-called authentic document.' Christian Angelet and Jan Herman, *Recueil de pr facs de romans du XVIIIe si cle* (Saint- tienne and Leuven: Publications de l'Universit  de Saint- tienne and Leuven University Press, 1999), vol. 2, 267-281.

<sup>12</sup> Lesuire, *Robert, ou confessions d'un homme de lettres*, 343-44.



*Salon of 1775: the blind man*

It has been so long since I lost my sight that I barely remember ever having seen; nevertheless, I have always loved Painting, and I even have a reputation as a Connoisseur of this Art. I have an old deaf Friend who is a great lover of Music, and who is regarded as an Oracle on the matter. He is a Mathematician who proves to you by A, plus B, that an Opera that has bored you out infallibly to have entertained you; and that one that has entertained you ought to have bored you. He assured me the other day that all of France, where I am known to five or six people, awaits my judgement on this year's Salon. Vainly I explained to him that, being Blind, I ought not to be an expert in Painting; he showed me that I am positively the right man to be the judge of this Art. 'It is accepted in France,' he said to me, 'that to have a sound idea of things, one must not have studied them at all. Ultimately, one may well say that most of the people here who meddle in judging everything, are blind people reasoning about colours, and the advantage you have over them of being deprived of your eyes, must surely give your judgement something a little more interesting [...].' I ceded to these reasons; I suspended a Treaty that I am writing on Colours, and I went to the Salon, conducted by a *Quinze-Vingt*, accompanied by my old deaf Friend.<sup>13</sup>

The *Coup d'oeil sur le Sallon de 1775, par un aveugle* ('A glance at the Salon of 1775, by a blind man') introduces many of the central themes that would continue to resonate throughout Lesuire's art-critical oeuvre, most notably, for our purposes, the theme of voice. Although the choice of a blind protagonist would seem to indicate an exploration of the sense of sight, the *Coup d'oeil* is at least as interested in exploring the significance of different kinds of speech. As Bernadette Fort has noted, the blind man in late eighteenth-century art criticism—who cannot see, and so instead must listen—'became a strategic means of opening up the art-critical forum, by inviting all viewers to participate in the evaluating process'.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Lesuire, *Coup d'œil sur le Sallon de 1775*, 3–5. A *Quinze-Vingt* is a patient of the famous hospital for the blind of the same name. 'Il y a si long-temps que j'ai perdu la vue, qu'à peine me souviens-je d'avoir jamais vu ; cependant j'ai toujours aimé la Peinture, & je passe même pour Connoisseur dans cet Art. J'ai un vieux Ami sourd qui est grand amateur de Musique, & qui est regardé comme un Oracle dans cette partie. C'est un Mathématicien qui vous prouve par A, plus B, qu'un Opéra qui vous a ennuyé, a dû vous amuser infailliblement ; & que celui qui vous a amusé, a dû vous ennuyer. Il m'assura l'autre jour que toute la France, où je suis connu de cinq ou six personnes, attendoit mon jugement sur le Sallon de cette année. Vainement je lui représentai qu'en qualité d'Aveugle, je ne devois pas me connoître en Peinture, il me démontra que j'étois positivement l'homme qu'il falloit pour juger de cet Art. « Il est reçu en France, me dit-il, que pour avoir une idée saine des choses, il faut ne les avoir point étudiées. Dans le fond, l'on peut bien dire que la plupart de ceux qui se mêlent de dédider ici sur tout, sont des aveugles qui raisonnent sur les couleurs, & l'avantage que vous avez sur eux, d'être privé des yeux du corps, doit sûrement donner quelque chose de plus piquant à votre jugement [...].' Je cédai à ces raisons ; je suspendis un Traité que je compose sur les Couleurs, & je me rendis au Sallon, conduit par un Quinze-Vingt, accompagné de mon vieux Ami sourd.'

<sup>14</sup> Fort, "Voice of the public," 377.

This flew in the face of earlier models of connoisseurship, which held that only artists and highly educated amateurs were qualified to critique works of art. The general public was expected to respond with wonder and admiration, and this is largely how they are represented in the *Coup d'oeil*:

I heard a multitude of chaotic voices which poured out for different pieces the epithets adorable, celestial, divine, prodigious, detestable, pitiable, etc. 'Pay no attention to all that,' said my deaf friend, who understood by their faces of the interlocutors what they were saying. 'They are echoes, wind instruments that repeat the sounds that strike them.' Among all the epithets that people repeated one after the other, I noticed that 'pretty' always dominated.<sup>15</sup>

The voices of the French audience are not depicted as instances of meaningful speech, but only as so much noise—a fashionable echo chamber. The blind man's connoisseurship is a connoisseurship of speech: he decides not which artworks, but which voices to give space to. Far from democratically 'inviting all viewers to participate', the blind man, at once a mouthpiece and a gatekeeper of public opinion, elaborates a hierarchy of ways to speak about art. When reporting opinions he deems sensible, the narrator tends to avoid attributing them to a single person, instead using general formulations ('people said', 'I heard talk of') to lend these passages an air of common sense. He gives specific identities to only two positively portrayed speakers. The first appears to be a stand-in for Lesuire himself: a 'Traveller still in boots', returned from a long sojourn in Italy, who notes such 'a marked decline in Painting since his departure' that he is driven to enquire of the blind man whether the Salon du Louvre has not in fact been replaced by the Salon de la Place Dauphine. (Also known as the Salon de la Jeunesse, or the Salon of Youth, the Salon de la Place Dauphine was an exhibition of works by artists who were not members of the Académie Royale). The traveller declares it 'a pink Salon', initiating the blind man's meditations on the decadence and pinkness of French

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<sup>15</sup> Lesuire, *Coup d'œil sur le Sallon de 1775*, 5. '[J]'entendis une multitude de voix confusées qui prodiguoient aux différents morceaux les épithètes adorable, celeste, divin, prodigieux, detestable, pitoyable, etc. Parmi toutes ces épithètes qu'on répétoit les uns après les autres, je remarquai que celle de joli, dominoit toujours'.

painting.<sup>16</sup> The second speaker of sense, a German, is deemed well-suited to the task of admiring landscape paintings by linguistic association with the Swiss landscape painter and pastoral poet Salomon Gessner.<sup>17</sup> For the rest, no individual member of the audience is depicted as being able to comment intelligently on the Salon. For example, the deaf man—something of a sophist—speaks with the specific aim of attracting attention, not for the love of art, but for the love of women. The very performativity of his connoisseurship implies its content is compromised. Among the other speakers of nonsense are a heavily perfumed Frenchman and two foreigners, an Italian and an Englishman who each claim their country's superiority in the arts, only to be rebutted by the critical but nonetheless patriotic blind man.<sup>18</sup>

The speech of the blind man himself is also compromised. The pamphlet goes to great lengths in the opening and closing passages to undermine the seriousness of any message he might be communicating, so that anyone reading only the beginning and the end could be forgiven for thinking the blind man is a purely parodic character. Foolish, easily led by his deaf friend, and alternately pompous and self-effacing, his self-proclaimed expertise in the art of painting would seem to suggest the arrogance of blind ignorance. Take, for example, his remarks in the pamphlet's conclusion:

It is based on all these remarks that I have scribbled my Pot-pourri, which I call *Coup d'œil sur le Sallon*. If people complain that I speak of things willy-nilly, without order, without consequence, forgetting an infinity of artworks that deserve to be mentioned, I will reply that it is the fashion in France, and that to be *au ton*, one must write a Critique that has neither head nor tail; besides, can one in good faith ask more of a Blind man?<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Lesuire, *Coup d'œil sur le Sallon de 1775*, 6–7. ‘Un Voyageur arriva tout botté, & s’approchant de moi: ‘Ah! dit-il, est-ce qu’on a transporté au Louvre le sallon de la place Dauphine?’ Cet homme avoit été long-temps absent; il revenoit d’Italie. Je trouvai sa question trop sévère; mais au moins je reconnus qu’il appercevoit une décadence marquée dans la Peinture depuis son départ. ‘Voilà, me dit-il, un Sallon couleur de rose [...]’

<sup>17</sup> Lesuire, *Coup d'œil sur le Sallon de 1775*, 16.

<sup>18</sup> Lesuire, *Coup d'œil sur le Sallon de 1775*, 10 (Frenchman), 24–25 (Italian and Englishman). On the significance of the foreigner in French art criticism of this period, see Lafont, “Comment peut-on être critique?”

<sup>19</sup> Lesuire, *Coup d'œil sur le Sallon de 1775*, 25. ‘C’est d’après tous ces propos que j’ai barbouillé mon Pot-pourri, que j’appelle *Coup d'œil sur le Sallon*. Si l’on se plaint que j’y parle des choses à tort & à travers, sans ordre, sans suite, oubliant une infinité de morceaux qui mériteroient d’être cités ; je répondrai que c’est la mode en France, & que pour être au ton, il faut bien faire une Critique, qui n’ait ni tête ni queue ; d’ailleurs peut-on de bonne foi en demander davantage à un Aveugle?’

But in the body of the pamphlet, the part of the narrative set at the Salon itself, the tone shifts dramatically. Here, the review's satirical punch no longer lies in our judgement of the narrator, but in the narrator's judgements about the world around him—judgements which we are clearly supposed to recognise as common sense. Once at the Salon, the blind man largely sheds the role of comic relief to perform instead the role of *honnête homme* and the *homme sensible*. Neither pedant nor philistine, neither prude nor libertine, he positions himself as a moderate and sensitive advocate for nature and the values of a lost golden age.

The pamphlet adopts the argument that was the bread and butter of almost all art criticism at that time: that is, that French painting was in decline as a result of its feminisation and its estrangement from nature. The blind man criticises royalty and the aristocracy for their lack of interest in commissioning grand sculptures and history paintings.<sup>20</sup> Unable to see the paintings himself, but capable of listening to the crowd's pronouncements, he describes a Salon (and a France) that is pretty, pink, and decadent. Indeed, he struggles to see how any artist could discern what is natural, or see any other colour than pink, in a country where the women 'hide their complexion under layers of red and white', where they wear coloured powders, hairpieces and 'edifices' on their heads, stilts on their feet, and panniers on either side, and where the men are 'simpering like the women, and powdered like them'.<sup>21</sup> The general 'taste for gallantry' ensures that artists, 'satisfied with producing pretty things, do not attain beauty; and, to express ourselves with an elegance analogous to their painting, glide tenderly in the clouds like the doves of Venus, instead of soaring through the skies like the

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<sup>20</sup> Lesuire, *Coup d'œil sur le Sallon de 1775*, 12, 21–22.

<sup>21</sup> Lesuire, *Coup d'œil sur le Sallon de 1775*, 7. '[N]os Dames cachent leur teint sous des couches de rouge & de blanc; leurs cheveux, tant vrais que postiches, sont déguisés sous une poudre rousse: elles ont une édifice au-dessus de leur tête, des échasses sous leurs pieds, des paniers de chaque côte; leurs sourires & toutes leurs mines sont étudiés. Les hommes sont grimaciers comme les femmes, poudrés comme elles, & chacun s'applique le plus sérieusement du monde à ne jamais laisser transpirer la nature.'

eagle of Jupiter'.<sup>22</sup> He recommends that painters leave Paris, travelling to the provinces or to foreign countries to observe middle-class rather than aristocratic subjects, to see 'beautiful virgins whose cheeks still retain the blush of modesty', and 'men who still have feelings and a face of their own' (it is one of these 'beautiful virgins' from afar whom Lesuire would choose to feature in his following *Salon*).<sup>23</sup> He criticises 'our great Painters' for not showing their work at that year's Salon, leaving the reputation of the French School to be upheld by less experienced artists.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, his deaf companion puts on a loud display of connoisseurship with the sole aim of attracting pretty women.

These criticisms are notable for their vagueness. Rarely does the narrator attach his criticisms to the name of a specific artist, and in several places he announces his decision to remain silent on a subject, perhaps indicating where passages have been excised, either by or in anticipation of the censor. But even these silences, deliberately announced rather than simply passed over, are charged with meaning:

If people say nothing of the grand genre of History painting, they keep just as quiet about the little genre of Miniature and of enamel. They do, however, distinguish a pretty wooden frame, carved with great finesse, in which the miniatures by Mr Hall are enclosed; and what is more, one may also remark pretty things among these paintings; but one must forgive a blind man for not having eyes good enough to see them.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Lesuire, *Coup d'œil sur le Sallon de 1775*, 8. '[C]'est ce gout de galanterie, ce prestige répandu dans Paris, qui fait que nos Artistes, tout satisfaits de produire de jolies choses, n'arrivent pas jusqu'au beau; &, pour nous exprimer avec une élégance analogue à leur peinture, planent tendrement dans les nuages comme les colombes de Vénus, au lieu de s'élancer dans les cieux comme l'aigle de Jupiter.'

<sup>23</sup> Lesuire, *Coup d'œil sur le Sallon de 1775*, 11. 'Il faut donc que les François sortent de chez eux, pour peindre des sujets étrangers [...]: encore doivent-ils quitter Paris, pour les peindre selon la nature. Ils pourroient voir dans nos provinces Septentrionales, sur-tout dans l'état mitoyen, de belles vierges qui ont encore sur leurs joues l'incarnat de la pudeur, & dont un air de modestie forme le physionimie décente, sans mélange de grimaces. Ils verront des hommes qui ont encore des sentiments & un visage à eux [...].'

<sup>24</sup> Lesuire, *Coup d'œil sur le Sallon de 1775*, 16. Fort describes the Salon of 1775 as notable for the number of artists who did not exhibit: 'Absenteeism of artists was rampant. According to one brochure, as many as thirty-three artists had failed to exhibit, or were exhibiting privately, shunning criticism'. See Fort, "An academician in the underground: Charles-Nicolas Cochin and art criticism in eighteenth-century France," 20.

<sup>25</sup> Lesuire, *Coup d'œil sur le Sallon de 1775*, 21–22. 'Si l'on ne dit rien du grand genre de l'Histoire, on garde le même silence sur le petit genre de la Mignature & de l'émail. On distingue cependant une jolie bordure en bois, sculptée avec beaucoup de délicatesse, dans laquelle sont enfermées les mignatures de M. Hall; & d'ailleurs on peut remarquer aussi de jolies choses parmi ces peintures; mais on doit pardonner à un aveugle, de n'avoir pas d'assez bons yeux pour les voir.'

The audience has no more to say about history painting than it does about the diminutive miniatures and enamels. Indeed, a carved wooden frame is more worthy of note than the artworks it contains, and if there is any merit in the paintings—well, the blind man is unable to see it. Though clearly an insult, its target is deliberately obscure. Is it directed at the history painters and miniaturists, who have failed in their mission to produce something noteworthy? At the audience, who fail to acknowledge the importance of the highest genre? Of both? If the paintings' good qualities are invisible to the blind man, and unspoken of by the public, can we conclude that there were in fact no good paintings on display at this year's Salon? These mutually reinforcing silences and invisibilities—whether strategic, enforced, or simple reportage—play their part in an intriguing art-critical game. Why the disconnect between how the character is presented and how he functions in the bulk of the text? Why the denial of authorship—the insistence that he is merely repeating the words of others, when in fact much of the review clearly, and quite earnestly, represents the opinion of the protagonist as well as of the author? Why the awkward tension between trying hard to be taken seriously and not to be at the same time?

This is in part a way of anticipating criticisms. Undercutting the seriousness of the critique is an effective way to maintain plausible deniability before the censor, the artists of the Académie, and other critics. But there is more at stake here. Sustained attacks by the Académie and its associates on the layperson's right and ability to judge art had created a climate in which any public criticism of the Salon could be construed as an act of malice and unspeakable arrogance: two qualities utterly incompatible with the character of the *homme sensible*. The sin lay in its publicity, whether this took the form of publication or of attention-seeking pronouncements at the Salon (as illustrated by our protagonist's deaf companion). For Lesuire, a minor libertine by inclination and an *homme sensible* by conscience (and more

than a little self-importance), this presented a dilemma.<sup>26</sup> He made his living through publication, and the Salon's popularity combined with his long-standing interest in the arts made it a natural subject to write about.<sup>27</sup> Lesuire wanted to be listened to. His *Salons*, for all their professed frivolity, betray above all a wish to be of use, a patriotic desire to exert an improving influence on the French School and the French public. But how could he write about art in an environment where criticism of any kind risked being branded as hostile? How could he communicate his honest intentions to an audience primed to expect idle self-aggrandising or malice?

The answer lay in finding ways to speak publicly without appearing to desire publicity. The blind man is Lesuire's first attempt at this task, and the pamphlet is an effective send-up of the politics of speaking at (and about) the Salon. It shows the circuitous displacement of speech from person to person, with the protagonist serving both as a stand-in for the author and for the hypothetical audience. The seriousness of the blind man's criticism is partially concealed behind flourishes of satirical misdirection whose target is not fixed: is it artists, aristocratic patrons, the public, or the blind man himself? The *Coup d'oeil* is by far the most critical of Lesuire's reviews, and bears the corresponding marks of censorship, as indicated in a commentary published in the *Mémoires secrets* that same year: 'It is vague and says nothing. There are a few good jokes, and even sarcasms, but apparently the work has been heavily edited by the censor'.<sup>28</sup> Yet the strategy was a success insofar as the pamphlet was eventually published with official approval. However, this was the first and last time that Lesuire would write a critique that presents itself transparently as such, written in the first

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<sup>26</sup> Restif de la Bretonne (perhaps not the most reliable witness) praised Lesuire's character to the skies, describing him as 'bon et simple comme moi', 'd'une probité stricte, d'un caractère probe, d'une naïveté innocente [...]'. Voilà le seul homme que j'excepte de l'immoralité générale. Car je ne m'en excepte pas.' Quoted in Obitz-Lumbroso's introduction to Lesuire, *Robert, ou confessions d'un homme de lettres*, 11.

<sup>27</sup> According to his *Confessions*, Lesuire had supplemented his income in his youth by painting portraits in pastel. Lesuire, *Robert, ou confessions d'un homme de lettres*, 166–69.

<sup>28</sup> *Mémoires secrets*, vol. 8, 233 (18 October 1775). 'Elle est vague et ne dit mot. Il y a quelques bonnes plaisanteries, et même des sarcasmes, mais vraisemblablement l'ouvrage aura été très châtié à la censure'.

person from the point of view of his fictional protagonist. All his subsequent *Salons* take on an epistolary form, addressed to an anonymous 'Monsieur' by an anonymous narrator, who recounts his impression of the Salon and of his remarkable companions: the fourteen-year-old Aglantine, the dead painter Lemoyne, the mute Mutine, and Dibutades, inventor of the art of painting. While Lesuire never abandoned satire entirely, the blind man is the last of his protagonists to be presented as the butt of the joke, for without exception each one of his successors is presented as exemplary. Why the shift from one formula to another? And why, in this context, the sudden preponderance of women, after the total absence of female speaking characters in the *Coup d'oeil* of 1775?

The combination of feminine voices, male narrators and epistolary form provided the author with a uniquely effective way to express his ideas without compromising his sense of identity as an *homme sensible*. The dialogue between narrator and character in each subsequent *Salon* creates the illusion of private conversation rather than public criticism—an illusion reinforced by the presence of women, whose speech is presented as inherently private even when the intrusion or voyeurism of the crowd renders it public. In order to maintain an image of respectable masculinity, Lesuire sought out loopholes in the private sphere of respectable femininity. His female protagonists, for all their superficial differences, embody a consistent ideal, their gentleness, modesty, and compassion always associated with the attractiveness and innocence of youth. They are the spoonful of sugar to sweeten the narrator's more serious criticisms. This interplay between 'masculine' and 'feminine' speech lies at the heart of Lesuire's art criticism from 1777 onward, with two important and contradictory implications: firstly, that feminine speech is acceptable only insofar as it is intended to be private; and secondly, that public opinion is most acceptably expressed through the conventions of feminine speech. Despite his insistence on the private nature of



women's virtue, what Lesuire's *Salons* achieve is to place fictive women at the centre of the public sphere of Salon criticism.

*Salon of 1777: Aglantine, or the ingénue*

Lesuire's first female protagonist could hardly be more different than the blind man of 1775. Aglantine, a young girl adopted from the French colonies by the narrator, belongs not to the world of satire but to the novel of sentiment. Our introduction to this orphaned *ingénue* reads quite as much like the beginning of a novel as one might expect:

You know, Monsieur, my little Aglantine, the young Creole abandoned by her parents, adopted by me, who is the delight of my small circle. She is not yet fourteen, and already her sensitive soul seems developed on her charming face, before her lively features fully are. Her two sparkling eyes, her white and animated complexion, her air of candour and at the same time of vivacity—all this wins her hearts. She already excites passions, and as for myself, where would I be if it weren't such a pleasure to serve as her father? She is passionate about the Arts, not because it is fashionable, but because she has a soul [...].<sup>29</sup>

A still more apt comparison would be to the paintings of Greuze. Greuze's adolescent girls—painted on the brink between innocence and experience—captured eighteenth-century imaginations. Emma Barker has described the significance of their precise combination of titillation and sentimentality, arguing that the paintings are 'addressed primarily to the repressed desires of the *homme sensible*, offering as it does the illusion of intimacy with the naïve and innocent *jeune fille* without any disturbance to the spectator's conviction of his own paternalistic rectitude': 'For such a spectator, Greuze's painting offers the high-minded,

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<sup>29</sup> Lesuire, *Jugement d'une demoiselle de quatorze ans*, 3–4. 'Vous connoissez, Monsieur, ma petite Aglantine, cette jeune Créole abandonnée par ses parents, adoptée par moi, qui fait les délices de ma petite société. Cela n'a pas quatorze ans, & déjà son ame sensible paroît développée sur son charmant visage, avant que ses traits piquants le soient entièrement [sic]. Ses deux yeux de feu, son teint blanc & animé, son air de candeur & en même temps de vivacité, tout cela lui gagne les cœurs. Elle fait déjà des passions, & moi même où en serois-je, si ne n'avois pas tant de plaisir à lui servir de pere? 'Elle est passionnée pour les Arts, non par ton, mais parce qu'elle a une ame [...].'

indeed self-congratulatory, pleasure of triumphing over his own base desires'.<sup>30</sup> Lesuire's Aglantine offers his narrator the same pleasure. Lesuire was a great admirer of Greuze (and, as made clear in his *Confessions*, of young girls), and he espoused the same kind of *sensibilité* that fuelled the popularity of the painter's works.<sup>31</sup> From 1777 on, it is primarily through *sensibilité* rather than satire that Lesuire seeks to make his criticism palatable. If we smile at Aglantine, it is with affection rather than derision as she bounds around the Salon full of naïveté and youthful energy, blushing and bowing before the statue of a chancellor, exclaiming in wonder, and asking questions with a childlike and prelapsarian innocence ('Why is that woman showing her thigh?' 'It's to show her virtue...').<sup>32</sup> Importantly, we are told to read on not for the judgements contained in the review, but for the simple appeal of Aglantine herself:

The young person told me, with some volubility, her sentiment on everything that she saw; and I will attempt to communicate some of her judgements to you at random, to which I will sometimes join my own. I will not always constrain myself to report her own words to you, so as not to get bogged down in details. You understand that the judgement of this young lady is of no consequence; I give it only for what it is. It is a spark, and not a light.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Emma Barker, "Reading the Greuze girl: the daughter's seduction," *Representations*, no. 117 (2012): 104, 109.

<sup>31</sup> Lesuire's *Confessions* lovingly describe his admiration of a number of fourteen- and fifteen-year old girls, as well as the author's pride in the decency of his conduct for not acting on this admiration: 'Quant aux jeunes personnes, qui sont sages chez leurs parents, j'ai toujours senti le le tort irréparable qu'on leur fait, en les débauchant; et je n'ai jamais voulu acheter, à leurs dépens, des plaisirs étouffés par les remords. Je n'ai donc pas été un vil séducteur'. Lesuire, *Robert, ou confessions d'un homme de lettres*, 186. See also, by way of example, pages 239-240, 254-6, and 381.

<sup>32</sup> Lesuire, *Jugement d'une demoiselle de quatorze ans*, 9. "Pourquoi cette femme montre-t-elle sa cuisse?" "C'est pour faire voir se vertu". The woman in question is Porcia, the wife of Brutus, painted by Lépicié in the act of stabbing her thigh to prove her trustworthiness and ability to withstand torture if questioned about her husband's plot against Julius Caesar.

<sup>33</sup> Lesuire, *Jugement d'une demoiselle de quatorze ans*, 6-7. 'La petite personne me disoit, avec assez de volubilité, son sentiment sur tout ce qu'elle voyoit; & je vais tâcher de vous rendre au hasard quelques uns de ses jugements, auxquels je joindrai quelquefois les miens. Je ne m'asservirai pas toujours à vous rapporter ses propres termes, pour ne pas tomber dans des détails trop minutieux. Vous sentez que la décision de cette jeune demoiselle est sans conséquence; je ne la donne que pour ce qu'elle est. C'est une étincelle, & non pas une lumière.'

Here indeed is a Salon review trying to position itself as narrative rather than as criticism. The narrator exploits the value of feminine *sensibilité* as spectacle without ceding editorial control. Unlike the blind man, Aglantine does not narrate her own story: in order to see the Salon through her eyes, we see her through the eyes of the male narrator, who presents us with the spectacle of her reactions so as to make her legible to us. We join the spectators at the Salon as the public for Aglantine's private interactions with her adoptive father. Voyeurs, we bear witness to her expression of her thoughts, and sometimes even of thoughts that she is unaware of expressing:

While my Aglantine gravely pronounced her judgements, everybody watched her. When words failed her, she enchanted with her charming embarrassment; one could see all the pretty little muscles of her face conspiring at every opportunity to second her voice, and to show all that she was feeling.<sup>34</sup>

Aglantine is a perfectly transparent conduit for her emotions, a vessel for all that is good, natural, and innocent, quite without the capacity for subterfuge. She is not, however, a purely emotional creature, for we are also shown her eagerness to learn and her capacity for thought. She specialises in elegantly balancing criticism and praise, noting, for example, that we must

esteem the Authors [of history paintings] more for the difficulty of their genre than for the perfection of their work, and that for this reason they will always deserve the highest honours; like the great Lords to whom one always pays the greatest homage, even though one often enjoys oneself more in simple bourgeois company.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Lesuire, *Jugement d'une demoiselle de quatorze ans*, 22. 'Pendant que mon Aglantine prononçoit gravement ses jugements, tout le monde l'observoit ; quand les expressions lui manquoient, elle enchantoit par son charmant embarras, on voyoit tous les jolis petits muscles de son visage conspirer à l'envi pour seconder sa voix, & peindre tout ce qu'elle sentoit.'

<sup>35</sup> Lesuire, *Jugement d'une demoiselle de quatorze ans*, 8. 'Elle convint [...] qu'il fallait en estimer les Auteurs, plutôt sur la difficulté de leur genre, que sur la perfection de leur travail, & qu'à ce titre ils méritoient toujours les premiers honneurs; comme de grands Seigneurs à qui l'on rend les premiers hommages, quoiqu'on s'amuse mieux souvent avec de simples bourgeois.'

Later, she adds that ‘if this Salon is not, on the whole, of the grand genre, and does not altogether merit laurels, then we do at least owe it flowers’.<sup>36</sup> She advocates for a return to history painting, for moral painting in the style of Greuze, for less make-up in women’s portraits. Aglantine’s opinions coincide with the narrator’s and with the blind man’s before him, so it is hardly surprising when the narrator contrasts Aglantine’s good sense to the audience’s lack of it.<sup>37</sup> Often, her criticisms are phrased as questions rather than as statements, in the picturesque phrasing of a child trying to understand the world. This lends even the most cutting criticisms a disarming air of innocence, as when she remarks that ‘a number of figures look as if they are being tortured in Paintings too small to contain them’, asking whether they are ‘unfortunate prisoners’ or merely the result of a strange artistic exercise.<sup>38</sup>

She displays a sense of solidarity with other women, and a sensitivity to the attacks routinely directed their way. Faced with a painting by Hubert Robert, which depicts a frightened woman in bed without showing the cause of her fear, she wonders: ‘She is afraid without us knowing why; is this an Epigram that the Painter wishes to make against women?’<sup>39</sup> The question is left open, however, and we move straight to a discussion of the still lifes of Anne Vallayer-Coster, ‘whose works affected [Aglantine] singularly. Flowers, Natural History, figures, portraits, everything is treated in a superior manner by this young Lady. Aglantine seemed proud that a person of her sex was distinguishing herself in such a

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<sup>36</sup> Lesuire, *Jugement d’une demoiselle de quatorze ans*, 20–21: ‘si ce Sallon, dans sa totalité, n’est pas du grand genre, & ne mérite pas tout à-fait des lauriers, on lui doit au moins des fleurs’.

<sup>37</sup> Lesuire, *Jugement d’une demoiselle de quatorze ans*, 19–20.

<sup>38</sup> Lesuire, *Jugement d’une demoiselle de quatorze ans*, 10–11: ‘elle remarqua qu’il y avoit au Sallon plusieurs figures entieres mises à la torture dans des Tableaux trop petits pour les contenir: “Sont-elles donc, me dit-elle, dans ces cachots où les malheureux prisonniers ne peuvent s’étendre; ou bien a t-on donné à ces Peintres cinq points bizarrement arrangés, comme on le fait quelquefois par passe-temps, pour y tracer une Académie, en mettant la tête sur un de ces points, les pieds & les mains sur les quatre autres?”’

<sup>39</sup> Lesuire, *Jugement d’une demoiselle de quatorze ans*, 19. ‘Elle a peur, dit-elle, sans qu’on sache pourquoi; est-ce une Epigramme que le Peintre a voulu faire contre les femmes?’

flattering way.<sup>40</sup> However, it is shortly after this, in the final paragraphs of the review, that we find perhaps the most interesting description of Aglantine's role in the text.

I committed myself to making her observe the overall spirit of this *Salon*, if I may express myself so, by making her imagine it from the perspective of a man who cultivates the art of Letters rather than of Painting. 'Notice, my dear,' I said to her, 'that the genius of the century of enlightenment, and the spirit of humanity that it has brought, live and breathe in this Salon; almost nothing is painted here but acts of benefaction: the Minister of the Arts seconds the views of the Monarch well by having statues erected of our great men, and paintings made of events that honour the Nation.'

In wishing to instruct my pupil, I bored the crowd that surrounded us, and my conversation ensured that people turned their eyes away from my little Aglantine; and soon a new object captured the eyes of the multitude.<sup>41</sup>

The new object of the crowd's admiration—the Oracle of the day, or rather of the moment—is a handsome and intelligent young man, mute from birth. The man says nothing, but his appearance, flanked by the blind man and the deaf man from Lesuire's previous Salon, causes such a stir that soon his supposed pronouncements are flying about the room. Aglantine's gentle pronouncements have left no lasting impression on the fickle public: forgetting her instantly, their attention span is as lacking as their willingness to learn from the narrator's explicitly educational speech. Motivated by the pursuit of pure novelty and appeal, and more interested in the messenger than in the message, this public is difficult to reach—though they must be reached if the problem of poor taste is to be overcome. If a speech by a man of letters is not enough, then what is? Lesuire's cynical view of the public goes a long

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<sup>40</sup> Lesuire, *Jugement d'une demoiselle de quatorze ans*, 19. 'Il faut dire un mot en particulier de Mlle Valayer, dont les Ouvrages l'affectèrent singulièrement [sic]. Fleurs, Histoire Naturelle, figures, portrait, tout est traité par cette Dlle d'une maniere supérieure. Aglantine parut glorieuse de ce qu'une personne de son sexe se distinguoit d'une maniere si flatteuse.'

<sup>41</sup> Lesuire, *Jugement d'une demoiselle de quatorze ans*, 22–23. 'Je m'attachai à lui faire observer en gros l'esprit de ce Sallon, si l'on peut s'exprimer ainsi, en le lui faisant envisager sous le coup d'œil d'un homme qui cultive les Lettres, plutôt que la Peinture. "Remarquez, lui dis je, ma chere, que le génie du siècle des lumieres, & l'esprit d'humanité qu'el-ont [sic] amené, respirent dans ce Sallon; on n'y a presque peint que des traits de bienfaisance: le Ministre des Arts seconde bien les vues du Monarque en faisant ériger des statues à nos grands hommes, & peindre des traits qui honorent la Nation." 'En voulant instruire mon élève j'ennuyai la foule qui nous entourait, & ma conversation fut cause qu'on détourna les yeux de dessus ma petite Aglantine; & bientôt un novel objet enleva les regards de la multitude.'

way toward explaining the emphasis on character in his work. It was a question of finding the most widely appealing vehicle for his ideas, and given that he did not judge himself (a humble man of letters very much like the narrator) to be sufficiently appealing to an audience whose taste he despised, his search for attention-grabbing alternatives makes sense. ‘The loveable Aglantine’ is Lesuire’s means of differentiating himself from other critics, and of communicating to an audience he does not respect:

I pray you not to share this with the public. Neither [Aglantine] nor I are great connoisseurs of Painting; and it is quite enough for some Journalists to spoil taste in literary matters through their partiality, their lack of care in instructing themselves on the matters on which they report, and the other little failings that people reproach them for, without also doing this disservice to the public regarding Painting. Above all, do not show this bagatelle to these *Messieurs*, or at least have it presented to them by the loveable Aglantine.<sup>42</sup>

*Salon of 1779: François Lemoyne, the painter’s ghost*

For his third *Salon*, Lesuire returned to a masculine protagonist in the shape of François Lemoyne, the celebrated former First Painter to the King, whose suicide in 1737 had shaken the art world.<sup>43</sup> In 1779, however, readers of *Le mort vivant au Sallon* were informed that the painter—‘a man universally recognised as dead for more than forty years’—‘was nonetheless really living’, and had attended that year’s Salon together with Lesuire’s narrator.<sup>44</sup>

In the pamphlet, the artist (now ninety-one) describes how after his suicide attempt, a surgeon, ‘observing my sad remains’, saw that he was still breathing. Having already taken

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<sup>42</sup> Lesuire, *Jugement d’une demoiselle de quatorze ans*, 25–26: ‘je vous prie de n’en pas faire part au public. Ni elle ni moi nous ne sommes pas de grands connoisseurs en Peinture; & c’est bien assez que quelques Journalistes gâtent le goût en matiere littéraire par leur partialité, leur peu de soin à s’instruire des matieres dont ils rendent compte, & les autres petits defauts qu’on leur reproche, sans qu’on rende encore ce mauvais office au public touchant la Peinture. Ne montrez pas sur-tout cette bagatelle à ces Messieurs, ou faite-la leur présenter par l’aimable Aglantine.’

<sup>43</sup> On Lemoyne’s death, see Hannah Williams, “The mysterious suicide of François Lemoyne,” *Oxford Art Journal* 38, no. 2 (2015): 225–45.

<sup>44</sup> Lesuire, *Le Mort vivant au Sallon de 1779*, 3: ‘un homme universellement reconnu pour mort depuis plus de quarante ans, & qui cependant étoit réellement vivant’.

his leave of the world, Lemoyne begged the surgeon to tell nobody, and absented himself from society. Upon his return, he found his reputation as a dead man ‘more accommodating than the one that costs us so dearly during our lifetime; people praised me greatly in order to demoralise existing artists’.<sup>45</sup> The complaint that dead artists are elevated at the expense of the living is a common refrain of Lesuire’s, and finds its fullest expression in 1783 in a monologue by Dibutades, another artist returned from the dead.

Lemoyne and the narrator decide to visit the Salon together, for what Lemoyne prophesies will be his last visit before he departs this life once and for all. Once at the exhibition, however, their ability to appreciate the exhibition is impeded as their style is cramped by the very stylishness of the crowd around them. The narrator describes the scene:

We barely managed to climb the grand staircase, and the old man and I pierced, not without difficulty, into a brilliant crowd where our ladies take up a lot of space with the size of their hoops and the false parts that surround them, fairly well resembling, if the comparison is permitted, pretty water-carriers hiding their pails under their skirts in order to be received into the palace of Kings.

He raised his eyes and saw, as well as he could through the pyramidal coiffures of our *Élégentes*, the history paintings...<sup>46</sup>

The problem of the pressing crowd is here construed not as an excess of people, nor as an excess of ‘the people’, but as an excess specifically of ‘ladies’ (*dames*). Overdressed, overwhelming, blinding, even, with their padding and their hairpieces, they are as out of place in the royal exhibition space of the Louvre—‘the palace of Kings’—as an under-dressed water-carrier would be. In the prints of Saint-Aubin and Martini, fashionable women

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<sup>45</sup> Lesuire, *Le Mort vivant au Sallon de 1779*, 5. ‘[O]n me laissa entre les mains d’un Chirurgien qui, en observant ma triste dépouille, s’aperçut que je respirois encore; il me rappella aisément à la lumiere, & me guérit en peu de temps. Je ne fus pas fâché de résusciter; mais ayant fait les frais de mourir, je ne voulus pas reparoître dans ma patrie au nombre des vivans. Je priai mon Esculape de me garder le secret, & je m’absentai long-temps. A mon retour je trouvai ma réputation de mort bien établie, & plus commode que celle qui nous coûte si cher pendant notre vie; on me louoit beaucoup pour déprimer les artistes existans.’

<sup>46</sup> Lesuire, *Le Mort vivant au Sallon de 1779*, 7–8. ‘Nous montâmes avec peine le grand escalier, & je perçai avec mon vieillard, non sans difficulté, une foule brillante, où nos dames occupent beaucoup de place par l’ampleur de leurs cerceaux & des pieces postiches qui les entourent, représentant assez bien, si la comparaison est permise, de jolies porteuses d’eau qui cacheroient leurs seaux sous leurs jupons, pour être reçues dans le palais des Rois. Il éleva les yeux, & vit, comme il put, à travers les coeffures pyramidales de nos Elégantes, les tableaux d’histoire...’

are shown as perfectly in harmony with their environment, making up no more and no less than their fair share of the elegant crowd. Here, they retain their ornamental function (they are ‘brilliant’, ‘pretty’), but they are also an obstacle, even a threat: they take up *too much* room, eclipsing the men in the audience until they seem not to exist, turning the Salon into a space so overrun with femininity that our two male protagonists must push and ‘pierce’ to even enter. The feminine crowds, as numerous as they are frivolous, represent the reverse side of the coin from our ideal protagonists. There are right and wrong ways to occupy public space, and women are placed firmly in the wrong.

*Salon of 1781: The mute who speaks*

Nowhere do the themes of voice and gender come together more explicitly than in Lesuire’s *La muette qui parle* (The mute who speaks), the 1781 pamphlet that lends this thesis its title. The pamphlet follows the narrator and his mute companion as they make their way through the courtyard of the Louvre and into the *Salon carré*. Like a detectorist with his metal detector, the narrator hopes that Mutine’s miraculous utterances will help him discover the greatest treasures of that year’s exhibition. Another reviewer that year described the pamphlet (not altogether unfairly):

*La Muette au Sallon* is by an Amateur of art, to whom we must be grateful for his intention of encouraging artists. It is extremely respectable, but not expert enough to be of any use.<sup>47</sup>

Lesuire had already evoked the theme of muteness in his Salon review of 1777, in which a mute man, accompanied by the blind man and the deaf man of 1775, serves to emblematises the art public’s suggestibility and obsession with novelty. In the same pamphlet, the narrator,

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<sup>47</sup> *Le Pourquoi ou l’ami des artistes* (Geneva, 1781), 9. ‘*La Muette au Sallon* est d’un Amateur à qui l’on doit savoir gré de l’intention qu’il a d’encourager les Artistes. Il est extrêmement honnête, mais pas assez savant pour être d’aucune utilité.’



recalling the art exhibition held the previous year at the Colisée pleasure gardens (most famous for their balls, spectacles, and women of pleasure), relays the gossip of ‘certain spiteful tongues’ who had said the exhibition was a case of ‘mute paintings substituted for talking ones’.<sup>48</sup> Lesuire was not the only art critic to play with the satirical potential of the deaf, mute, or blind ‘viewer’. Many years earlier Diderot, in his *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*, had described looking at paintings as though he were a deaf observer of mute conversations.<sup>49</sup> In 1779, a Salon review titled *Le Miracle de nos jours* (‘The miracle of our times’) took the form of an overheard conversation between the fictional Marquis de Saint-Cyr and a woman called Cléophile, ‘written and collected by a deaf-mute’.<sup>50</sup>

Mutine is an interesting addition to this tradition. Her muteness is lifted only a handful of times throughout the review, when, true to form, she helpfully announces ‘the most striking pieces’ (‘Voilà!’ ‘What an enchanting sight!’) before returning to silence to allow the narrator to say his part.<sup>51</sup> She speaks briefly (by necessity, one suspects) and in generalities; on the rare occasions when she desires to say more, she must hasten to express what little she can before being muted again.<sup>52</sup> It all makes little difference to the narrator, who reviews everything at his leisure. Whether Mutine speaks or not, she is transparent to him, for he reads her with a precision sometimes bordering on the ridiculous:

Returned to silence, Mutine spoke to me with her eyes: she found the  
Maréchal de Catinat, by Monsieur de Joux, simpler, though perhaps a little

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<sup>48</sup> Lesuire, *Jugement d’une demoiselle de quatorze ans*, 4. ‘C’étoient, selon quelques mauvaises langues, des peintures muettes substituées à des peintures parlantes’.

<sup>49</sup> Denis Diderot, *Lettre sur les sourds et muets, à l’usage de ceux qui entendent & qui parlent* (Paris: Jean-Baptiste-Claude II Bauche, 1751)..

<sup>50</sup> Labbes, *Le Miracle de nos jours*. See chapter one (‘Women of taste’).

<sup>51</sup> Lesuire, *La Muette qui parle*. Mutine cries ‘voilà’ multiple times throughout, and exclaims ‘Ce coup d’œil est enchanteur’ on page 6.

<sup>52</sup> Lesuire, *La Muette qui parle*, 6. ‘I saw her eyes of fire straying like lightning bolts. She hastened to express to me thus everything that she felt’ (‘Je voyois ses yeux de feu s’égarer comme des éclairs. Elle se hâta de m’exprimer ainsi tout ce qu’elle sentoit’).

too much so; it would have sufficed to be calm. Blaise Pascal, by Monsieur Pajou, struck her as thinking with more realism than interest.<sup>53</sup>

Either Mutine's eyes are uncommonly articulate or the narrator is an extremely perceptive companion. Who needs a voice when whole paragraphs can be extrapolated from a woman's looks and gestures alone? To borrow from Jacqueline Lichtenstein's description of the mute eloquence or *muta eloquentia* of painting, Mutine becomes a beautiful object: 'a body that ceases to speak so as to simply be seen'.<sup>54</sup>

Lesuire's mute is clearly heavily inspired by the deaf-mute of 1779. But she differs from him in one important respect: she is deprived not of one of her senses, but of her means of expression. The deaf-mute in *Le Miracle de nos jours* may be mute, but (like the two blind protagonists) he is his own narrator. He tells his own life story before relaying the overheard conversation, for although deaf from birth, he can miraculously 'read' conversations by 'the most ardent application, gathering all his soul into his eyes'.<sup>55</sup> In *La Muette qui parle*, it is not the mute but the narrator who does the 'reading': Mutine's 'ingenuous soul' and 'transparent' body are an open book to him.<sup>56</sup> Mutine must rely on the narrator to transcribe her already limited words for her, a task which he undertakes gladly, but also vaguely, paraphrastically, and often patronisingly. Although the pamphlet ostensibly depicts 'the mute who speaks', in reality the narrator does the talking for her. It was not proper for an eighteenth-century woman to seek publication: this would have been a form of attention-seeking bordering on

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<sup>53</sup> Lesuire, *La Muette qui parle*, 5. 'Rendue au silence, Mutine me parla des yeux: elle trouva le Maréchal de Catinat, par M. de Joux, plus simple; mais il l'est aussi un peu trop: il suffisoit d'être calme. Blaise Pascal, de M. Pajou, lui parut méditer avec plus de vérité que d'intérêt.'

<sup>54</sup> Jacqueline Lichtenstein, "Contre l'ut pictura poesis: une conception rhétorique de la peinture," *Word and Image* 4, no. 1 (1988): 101: 'un corps qui cesse de parler pour se donner simplement à voir.'

<sup>55</sup> Labbes, *Le Miracle de nos jours*, 7. The narrator describes lip-reading by means of 'l'application la plus ardent, en rassemblant tout son ame dans ses yeux.'

<sup>56</sup> Lesuire, *La Muette qui parle*, 4–5. '[S]on visage semble en quelque sorte plus transparent que les autres, & laisse voir presque à découvert son ame ingénue.' This description appears almost verbatim for each of Lesuire's three female protagonists; compare the *Jugement d'une demoiselle de quatorze ans*, 3: 'already her sensitive soul appears developed on her charming face' ('déjà son ame sensible paroît développée sur son charmant visage').

indecenty.<sup>57</sup> But it is not only public speech that Lesuire deprives his protagonist of (ironically, in the act of making her speech public), for Mutine's condition limits her ability to speak in all situations. Lesuire's solution—Mutine's muteness—relieves both Mutine and the narrator of responsibility for their words: Mutine, because her power of speech is given and taken by an external power before being further mediated by the narrator, and the narrator because he can claim to be no critic at all, but the simple transcriber and educator of a lovely young girl.

This brings us to an additional level of silencing at work. Whereas the deaf-mute of 1779 earns the miracle of hearing through his own 'ardent application', Mutine's miraculous speech is not under her voluntary control. Given and taken at the whim of an unspecified outside force, it is not the product of conscious thought, but of a reflexive succession of 'emotions' and 'sensations' produced by her environment. She is 'struck' ('frappée'), 'affected' ('affectée'), 'impressed' ('impressionnée'), 'given voice to' ('donnée la parole'). Like the mute eunuchs in eighteenth-century tales of Oriental seraglios, she is given no name or identity apart from her voicelessness.<sup>58</sup> It is difficult not to read a double meaning into the narrator's description of Mutine's 'little vocal deficiency', or *petit défaut d'organe*—'organe' meaning both 'voice' and 'organ'.<sup>59</sup>

Significantly, it is a woman's painting that causes Mutine's first instance of excessive speech. In front of the portraits and still lifes by Anne Vallayer-Coster, she flies into transports of delight:

Madame Vallayer-Coster, who has lost none of her talent in passing into a married state, has distinguished herself in this genre. The portrait of Madame Sophie is as skilful as if it had been made by a very skilful man. The one of a young Lady cultivating flowers induced my little Mute to say a

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<sup>57</sup> Goldsmith, *Writing the female voice*, vii.

<sup>58</sup> Jacques Proust, "Les maîtres sont les maîtres," in *L'objet et le texte* (Geneva: Droz, 1980), 263.

<sup>59</sup> For the 'petit défaut d'organe', see Lesuire, *La Muette qui parle*, 4. The actress Sophie Arnould reportedly made this very pun in reference to the castrato Antonio Albanese: 'It is true that his *organe* is ravishing; but don't you think that there's something missing?' ('Il est vrai, dit Sophie, que son organe est ravissant; mais ne sentez-vous pas qu'il y manque quelque chose?'). Quoted in Deville, *Arnoldiana*, 103.

thousand gallant things. [...] Mutine halted by these pretty pieces, which are one of the Salon's most joyful ornaments, especially in the eyes of a young person. It is here that *the colour pink* is permitted, and where it must be relegated.<sup>60</sup> [emphasis in original]

Vallayer-Coster is singled out for high praise all while being held to a lower standard than her male colleagues. The narrator frames her as a private, feminine individual and not as a professional participating in the public sphere. Vallayer-Coster's talent is situated in her private (married or unmarried) 'state', while her artworks serve as exemplars of friendly rivalry between the sexes. As an ornamental supplement to the Salon rather than a true part of it, her work is an acceptable manifestation of difference (and the dreaded 'colour pink') at the Salon. Unlike men who paint, who must compete for glory with the whole canon of Old Masters, Vallayer-Coster need only paint as well as any 'very skilful man'. As for Mutine's response to the paintings, we are not told exactly what she said. Evidently, the more she speaks, the less it means. The narrator's fondly patronising commentary merely reminds us of her youth and femininity, as if this explains her sudden talkativeness in the presence of pink and pretty objects.<sup>61</sup> Her usual muteness is here shown to serve as a built-in quality control—which, in a woman, is assumed to be the same thing as quantity control.

Elsewhere in the review, Mutine describes the artworks she sees using much the same words as the narrator uses to describe her: 'adorable' ('adorable'), 'beautiful' ('beau'), 'pretty' ('joli'), 'delightful' ('délicieux'), and 'enchancing' ('enchanteur'). Indeed, her entire descriptive vocabulary is of the same profuse, empty kind that Lesuire's blind protagonist had

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<sup>60</sup> Lesuire, *La Muette qui parle*, 17. 'Madame Vallayer-Coster, qui n'a rien perdu de son talent en passant à l'état du mariage, s'est distinguée dans ce genre. Le portrait de Madame Sophie est aussi savant que s'il avoit été fait par un homme très habile. Celui d'une jeune Dame cultivant des fleurs a fait dire mille choses galantes à ma petite Muette; & les autres tableaux de fleurs & de fruits, de la même main, se soutiennent agréablement auprès de ceux du même genre de M. Van-Spaendonck; ce qui est beaucoup dire. Mutine s'arrêta autour de ces jolis morceaux, qui font un des ornements les plus riants du Sallon sur tout aux yeux d'une jeune personne: c'est-là que *le couleur de rose* est permis, & qu'il doit être relégué.'

<sup>61</sup> On the feminine associations of the colour pink in the eighteenth century, see Hyde, *Making up the rococo*, 90.

mocked at his Salon six years earlier. In the blind man's account, the proliferation of words such as these demonstrates the vapidness of the crowd's judgement (or rather, the lack of it). Mutine, on the other hand, is the very embodiment of *sensibilité* and natural taste. More knowledgeable than most, she smiles at the sight of spectators taken in by 'some very well-painted' trompe-l'oeil bas-reliefs by Piat Joseph Sauvage, and immediately recognises the landscapes of Claude-Joseph Vernet: 'Voilà du Vernet!' she cries. This is immediately offset by a misrecognition, for 'seeing the Landscapes of Mr. Hue, she also cried: "Look, more Vernet, or something that resembles him very much"'. To which the narrator responds: 'Praise as high as it is deserved!' Hue was Vernet's protégé, occupying a junior position as *agrée* in the Academic hierarchy.<sup>62</sup> Mutine's mistaking of the pupil for the master is not presented as a sign of vapidness, but much more agreeably as a sign of the natural enthusiasm and *naïveté* of a young girl. It reinforces her status as perceptive student rather than connoisseur (a more natural role for a woman), establishing her affinity with the young pupil of the artist. This is the opposite of the mean-spirited ignorance that Lesuire attributes to his fellow Salon critics: instead, it is all childlike wonder, pure admiration of skill without seeking to criticise or show off one's knowledge. This is very much a feminine role for the spectator to play in relation to the Académie and the artist: submission, acceptance of one's own limitations faced with one's superiors, of a defined role.

Mutine epitomises eighteenth-century conceptions about the female voice. In writing and art alike, women were said to possess a 'natural' and pleasing style—a style whose very artlessness precluded them from writing in any other way.<sup>63</sup> Men had no such innate style, being credited instead with superior mental discipline. Thus a talented man could learn to counterfeit a feminine style just as he had learned to emulate the masters of the literary

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<sup>62</sup> Lesuire, *La Muette qui parle*, 17–18.

<sup>63</sup> Katharine A. Jensen, "Male models of feminine epistolarity; or, how to write like a woman in seventeenth-century France," in *Writing the female voice: essays on epistolary literature*, ed. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 25–45.

canon. In other words, men could (when it suited them) adopt a feminine authorial voice, whereas women had no comparable ability to write across the boundaries of sex.

Melissa Percival notes how the eighteenth century differentiated between the male and female imagination. Her analysis of the men and women who make up Fragonard's series of 'fantasy figures' presents striking parallels to the respective depiction of our two mutes (Mutine and the deaf-mute of 1779), 'in that the female images explore sensibility and desire, whereas the male figures reflect intensity and force of thought'.<sup>64</sup> Mutine is a perfect caricature of eighteenth-century feminine *sensibilité*; virtuous but doomed to unfulfillment, she is Lesuire's answer to the novelistic trope of the romantic heroine.<sup>65</sup> Nowhere is this clearer than at the very end of the review, when Mutine, inspired by all that she has seen at the Salon, launches into her one and only monologue. The passage is worth quoting in full:

'This,' she said, 'is a spectacle that will linger long before my eyes, that will follow me into my boudoir and into my bedchamber. It will appear to me in pleasant dreams for many nights: the portraits, the flowers, the paintings large and small, and lastly the History paintings—all will cause my soul to feel a sweet persecution. I want to imitate the brilliant efforts of the arts. A new Dibutades, I will force stone to display the outline of the people who are dear to me; I will paint fields, gardens, countrysides. Flowers will be born beneath my brush with which to crown the cherished mortal who will possess my heart. Let us hasten to carry out such a delightful project...' In speaking these words, she left rapidly; I could barely follow her. She quickly arrived at her house, where her imagination was immediately frozen by dreary visits. She sighed, and gestured to me to at least write down some of the observations we had made at the Salon. I carried out her commission, writing as an amateur rather than a Painter, seeking to seize the spirit rather than the technicalities of the arts. This account is neither profound nor complete; neither is it malicious, nor consequently provoking [...]; and since it is not exactly according to the Author's discretion, it will struggle to gain the public's approval; but so long as it has Mutine's, you will find that I am content.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Percival, *Fragonard and the fantasy figure*, 206. 'Mademoiselle Guimard's gently inclined head and wistful expression are suggestive of a fleeting desire; *The Writer's* poised pen, intense gaze and sharply turned face are indicative of a more gripping but equally elusive thought'.

<sup>65</sup> On the doomed heroine theme, see Jensen, "Male models of feminine epistolarity." See also Aurora Wolfgang, *Gender and voice in the French novel, 1730-1782* (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>66</sup> Lesuire, *La Muette qui parle*, 61–63. 'Voilà, dit-elle, un spectacle qui sera long-temps sous mes yeux, qui me suivra dans mon boudoir & dans mon alcove. Des songes agréables me le présenteront pendant plusieurs nuits; les portraits, les fleurs, les grands & les petits tableaux, l'Histoire enfin, tout fera sentir à mon ame une douce persécution. Je veux imiter les brillants efforts des arts. Nouvelle Dibutade, je forcerai la pierre d'offrir les traits

Mutine's outburst marks a dramatic break with the style of the rest of the review: the suddenness and intensity of her urge to paint, followed by her equally sudden descent into *ennui*, are nothing short of bathetic. Why introduce such exalted projects only to dash them? Why end on such a decided anti-climax, from creative potential to 'frozen' passivity? The passage is an affectionate travesty of the female literary voice. Flowery and sentimental, it leans on the association of women's writing with the love letter and the romantic novel—with the boudoir and the bedchamber.<sup>67</sup> Mutine's artistic projects are portraits and the natural world (love, fertility, and nature): portraits to immortalise the people she loves, flowers and plants 'will be born' beneath her brush in a profusion of Rousseauian fertility. These flowers in turn—products of her fertile brush—serve a concrete purpose: 'to crown the cherished mortal who will possess my heart'.

Impassioned but inconstant, Mutine's monologue describes a female imagination that has more in common with caprice than genius.<sup>68</sup> Her feelings pass as quickly as they come on: Mutine hastens through the Salon until, peppered with 'quicklies' and 'immediatelies', she arrives home and promptly gives up on her grand artistic schemes. She is a creature of her environment: surround her with great art and she will strive to equal it; surround her with a woman's social duties and she will be equal to nothing more. What is more, Mutine's

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des personnes qui me sont cheres: je les ferai respirer sur la toile ; je peindrai des champs, des jardins, des bocages. Des fleurs naîtront sous mon pinceau, pour en couronner le mortel chéri qui possédera mon cœur. Hâtons-nous de remplir un si délicieux projet.....”

‘En disant ces mots, elle sortit rapidement: j’eus peine à la suivre. Elle arriva bientôt chez elle, où de tristes visites glacèrent sur-le-champ son imagination. Elle soupira, & me fit signe de jeter au moins sur le papier quelques-unes des observations que nous avons faites au Sallon. Je me suis acquitté de sa commission, écrivant moins en Peintre qu’en amateur, cherchant à saisir plutôt l’esprit que le mécanisme des arts. Ce récit n’est ni profond ni complet, ni méchant, ni par conséquent piquant: [...] & puisqu’il n’est pas tout à-fait au gré de l’Auteur, il aura difficilement le suffrage du public; mais s’il a celui de Mutine, on trouvera bon que je me contente de ce partage.’

<sup>67</sup> According to Goldsmith, ‘The association of women’s writing with the love-letter genre has been perhaps the most tenacious of gender-genre connections in the history of literature.’ Goldsmith, *Writing the female voice*, vii.

<sup>68</sup> Percival, *Fragonard and the fantasy figure*, “Chapter six: fantaisie and caprice”, 197-228.

inability to bring her own story to completion ensures that the pamphlet ends up, once more, being the story of the male narrator. Mutine's only remaining desire is the narration of her story, and even this cannot be done by herself: it must be done for her. Despite Mutine's prominence in the title, it is the narrator's opinions, experience of the Salon, and view of Mutine that are centred. The reference to Dibutades—the star of Lesuire's following Salon—in the context of creative 'caprice' is telling. Mutine's request that the narrator 'at least write down some of the observations' they had made reads like a desperate clutching at a more lasting relationship with the world. Mutine is both an ideal and a caricature at once. Despite the text's wish that more women would speak less, it nonetheless provides a model according to which a young woman could speak and be admired, arguably helping to normalise the presence of women's voices in the public space of the Salon.

At one point in *La Mulette au Sallon*, Lesuire—in describing the process of selection that makes a successful history painting—provides an apt description of his own process for writing women's voices, Mutine's in particular: 'Not all deeds merit being transmitted to posterity; one must distinguish those that are the most worthy of this honour, and to augment their interest, [one must] choose those that have the most to do with us.'<sup>69</sup> Just as not all subjects are worthy of being painted, not all words are worthy of being published. Whereas the painter performs his selection with thoughtful expertise and deliberation, Mutine's selection is made for her by the possibility or impossibility of speech, and of course by the narrator's pen, which does not fail to exercise its task of judicious exclusion when her utterances are deemed unworthy. This is in stark contrast to how male characters were written: no matter how silly, they were in many cases still allowed to 'speak' for themselves in the sense of narrating the reviews they featured in. Even though many of these reviews

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<sup>69</sup> Lesuire, *La Mulette qui parle*, 48.



foreground the ignorance of their protagonists, they did not always feel the need to place the expression of their opinions under the control of an enclosing authorial voice.

### *Salon of 1783: Dibutades*

Our final protagonist is none other than Dibutades, the mythological inventor of the art of painting and arguably the jewel in Lesuire's collection of protagonists.<sup>70</sup> Sometimes referred to as the Corinthian maiden, her story first appears in Pliny the Elder's *Natural history*.<sup>71</sup> In this version, a young woman traces the outline of her lover's shadow on a wall. Her father, Butades—a potter—fills the silhouette with clay, which he fires, thereby creating the first relief sculpture. In Pliny's telling—considerably embellished since—the young woman has no name. The portrait she traces is of secondary importance to the sculpted portrait by her father. Her eventual name, Dibutades, is a patronymic, and it is only later that her part in the story expands to become an origin myth for the arts of drawing and painting.

The myth of Dibutades enjoyed a period of heightened popularity in art and literature at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>72</sup> This popularity coincided with the rise to fame of a number of women painters, as Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux has pointed out, who also links the fashion for representations of Dibutades to the proliferation of self-portraits and allegorical depictions of the art of painting by women painters (with the caveat, however, that 'the gallant, even erotic tone' of many painted representations of Dibutades 'should restrain the temptation of a feminist interpretation').<sup>73</sup> Despite the large amount that has been written about Dibutades, and despite the recent interest in women artists and women art critics, the

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<sup>70</sup> An early version of this section appears in Anna Rigg, "Dibutade au Salon de 1783: écrire la voix féminine dans la critique d'art," in *Femmes artistes à l'âge classique*, ed. Élise Pavy-Guilbert, Stéphane Pujol, and Patrick Wald Lasowski (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021), 281–96.

<sup>71</sup> Here, I draw on the excellent article by the classicist Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux, "'La fille de Dibutade', ou l'inventrice inventée," *Cahiers du Genre*, no. 43 (2007): 133–51.

<sup>72</sup> See Robert Rosenblum, "The origin of painting: a problem in the iconography of Romantic Classicism," *The Art Bulletin* 39, no. 4 (1957): 279–90.

<sup>73</sup> Frontisi-Ducroux, "'La fille de Dibutade', ou l'inventrice inventée," 135–36.

relevance of *La morte de trois mille ans* to these areas of research remains to be commented upon.<sup>74</sup>

It is 1783, three thousand years after the death of Dibutades, and the year in which she apparently made her appearance at the Paris Salon. The narrator announces the arrival at the Louvre of ‘a person even more extraordinary than all the previous ones [...]’. It was a young woman dead for three thousand years, fresh as the budding rose; yes, a Nymph dead for more than thirty centuries.<sup>75</sup> The passage in which this ‘Nymph’ is described for the first time is worth quoting at length:

I was already in the courtyard, where I was observing the Sculptures, [when] I saw a tall Grecian figure arrive—very beautiful, with an antique air, costume and forms, the most exquisite purity, with the expression of a virginal and primitive nature, and who appeared to be neither of our nation, nor of our century. All eyes fixed themselves on her with admiration. A small Abbé, a great antiquarian, assured that, according to an antique medal and a head that he had seen, this must be that Dibutades, the lover, who had been named the inventress of Painting [...].<sup>76</sup>

Having appeared thus at the Louvre, Dibutades attracts a crowd of curious people. She addresses a few brief remarks to them on the sculptures on the display in the courtyard, before stopping in front of a sculpture of Achilles by Claude Dejoux (1732-1816).

She found the proud Achilles a little too familiar, in appearing nude in front of Ladies, although this was an antique custom; he draws his sword, doubtless to frighten those who would fault his nudity; for the rest his attitude is pleasing; and the Ladies, who appeared in public in their shifts (*en*

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<sup>74</sup> Zmijewska’s summary of Lesuire’s critical *oeuvre* describes the pamphlet as ‘Lesuire’s best Salon’ and describes the protagonist as incarnating ‘an authentic antiquity where all is nobility and beauty’, but inexplicably neglects to mention the fact that we are dealing with the inventor of painting, and does not even mention Dibutades’ name. Zmijewska, Helena, *La critique des Salons en France du temps de Diderot (1759-1789)*, 109–14.

<sup>75</sup> Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans*, 4: ‘d’une personne encore plus extraordinaire que toutes les précédentes [...]. C’était une jeune morte de trois mille ans, fraîche comme la rose naissante; oui, une Nymphé morte depuis plus de trente siècles.’

<sup>76</sup> Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans*, 6: ‘j’étois déjà dans la cour, où j’observois les Sculptures, [quand] on vit arriver une grande figure à la Grecque, fort belle, avec un air, un costume & des formes antiques, de la pureté la plus exquise, avec l’expression d’une nature virginale & primitive, & qui ne paroissoit être ni de notre nation, ni de notre siècle. Tous les regards se fixerent, avec admiration, sur elle. Un petit Abbé, grand antiquaire, assura que, d’après une médaille & une tête antique qu’il avait vues, ce devoit être cette Dibutadis, cette amante, qui avoit été nommé l’inventrice de la Peinture’.

*chemise*), could not criticise his attire too much; their own contrasted with the noble simplicity that made up the ornament of the beautiful Greek woman.<sup>77</sup>

We can only laugh at the image of the warrior Achilles, exposing his sword (and himself) to a crowd of prim *Parisiennes* to shock them out of their prudery and into some more decent clothes. As far as returns to antiquity go, this one is stranger than most. The ostensible target here is the newly fashionable chemise dress, or *robe en chemise*, and the women who wore it. However, it seems almost certain that Lesuire's comments are aimed at one wearer in particular. It was in this year that Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun exhibited her scandalous portrait of Queen Marie-Antoinette, dressed in a *robe en chemise*.<sup>78</sup> Lesuire, we should remember, could hardly satirise the queen openly, and refers to the portrait directly only once (in praise and in passing, in a speech by Dibutades that we will come to shortly). Yet here the queen is implicitly counted among 'the Ladies, who appeared in public in their shifts', and accused—with them—of the sin of immodesty, confusing what is appropriate in private with what is appropriate in public. Not only are the chemise-wearers accused of appearing in their underwear (a common charge levelled against them by critics), but their state of undress is further likened to the 'too familiar' nudity of Achilles. Dibutades alone has the right to critique the sculpture's appearance, thanks to 'the noble simplicity' of her own attire. The Grecian maiden, 'who appeared to be neither of our nation, nor of our century', is the ideal by comparison with which modern Frenchwomen are bound to disappoint; her right to speak rests on the same set of values that holds that less modestly dressed women should remain silent. Only after this has been established does Dibutades speak at greater length.

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<sup>77</sup> Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans*, 6: 'elle trouva le fier Achille un peu trop familier, de paroître nu devant des Dames, quoique ce fût un usage antique; il tire son épée, sans doute pour faire peur à ceux qui blâmeroient sa nudité; au reste son attitude plaît; & les Dames, qui paroissoient en chemise devant le public, ne pouvoient pas trop critiquer son ajustement; le leur contrastoit avec la noble simplicité qui faisoit la parure de la belle Grecque.'

<sup>78</sup> For an excellent discussion of this portrait and the reaction to it, see Sheriff, *The exceptional woman*, 165–68.

When she climbs the staircase into the *Salon carré* to take her first look at the assembled works of art, ‘we saw her struck with ecstasy and enchantment’; ‘impressions of joy, terror and pity [...] painted themselves by turns on her charming face.’<sup>79</sup> But while Dibutades is ‘in a state of ravishment’, some people in the crowd commit the faux pas of telling her, by way of a compliment, ‘that she must find this exhibition very inferior to what she had seen during her lifetime.’ ‘How far above this you must be, they told her, you, the inventress of Painting!’ Dibutades’ response is modest. ‘If I am an inventress’, she says,

then it is of portraits *à la Silhouette*; for I have heard this name used for a black profile, traced after the shadow of a young person. It is positively the same process that love once inspired in me, and for which you affect to admire me.<sup>80</sup>

If this passage bears witness to Dibutades’ virtuosity, then it is not in painting but in feminine modesty. She attaches no more importance to her own invention of the art of painting three thousand years earlier than to the silhouette portraits that were so fashionable in the late eighteenth century. The 1770s and 1780s saw the invention of mechanical procedures to transcribe silhouettes, among others by the physiognomist Johann Caspar Lavater. Dibutades classes herself not among artists, but among lovers, dilettantes and simple copyists. In her own words, she has invented ‘the process’ rather than the art of painting: thus she describes her greatest creation. Dibutades is the only one of Lesuire’s three female protagonists to be granted not only a voice, but expertise. As a mythological artist and a representative of antiquity, she is eminently qualified to discuss art. In placing these modest words into the mouth of Dibutades, Lesuire picks up a strategy often used by women writers (and by art

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<sup>79</sup> Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans*, 6. ‘[N]ous la vîmes frappée d’extase & d’enchantement. Les impressions de joie, de terreur & de pitié, que lui inspiroient les différens chefs-d’œuvre, se peignoient tour-à-tour sur son charmant visage.’

<sup>80</sup> Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans*, 6–7. ‘Tandis qu’elle étoit dans le ravissement, on eut la maladresse, pour lui faire un compliment, de lui dire qu’elle devoit trouver cette exposition bien inférieure à ce qu’elle avoit vu de son vivant. “Combien vous êtes au-dessus de cela, lui dit-on, vous, l’inventrice de la Peinture!” — “Si je suis inventrice, c’est donc des portraits à la *Silhouette*; car je viens d’entendre nommer ainsi un *profil noir*, tracé d’après l’ombre d’une jeune personne. C’est positivement le même procédé que l’amour m’avoit jadis inspiré, et pour lequel vous affectez de m’admirer.”

critics), who often felt the need to begin their published works by justifying, or qualifying, their abnormal pursuit of publicity.<sup>81</sup> For not only does Dibutades speak, she speaks to an assembled public: a rarity for men as well as women in the art criticism of this period. In this respect, though her defence of living artists also echoes Cléophile's in *Le Miracle de nos jours*, Dibutades resembles Lesuire's Lemoyne more than she does any other woman in the pamphlet literature.<sup>82</sup> She is exceptional for her mythic standing, her antiquity, and her femininity, and she addresses each of these qualities in turn.

'It is a beautiful thing to be dead, especially when one has been so for three thousand years. [...] You who are living do justice only to the dead; suffer that I, dead, do justice to the living. I see beauties here that no one would have doubted in my century; therefore what is its glory next to yours, and what is mine?'

'But', people said to her, 'your sex augments this glory, in relation to you.' 'And', she replied, 'how much glory does this sex not acquire here? See these paintings by Madame Lebrun, where nature is so brilliant, and at the same time so touching; these portraits of the Queen, of Monsieur and Madame; of the Author; this Juno, so interesting, who borrows the belt of Venus, and who, losing her majesty, already has more graces than the Queen of Cythera; this Venus binding the wings of Amor; this charming painting of Peace bringing Abundance, and all the other portraits by the same hand. Does the sex that rules have anything more perfect to compare to these exquisite pieces? Does Madame Vallayer-Coster, with this beautiful vase of flowers, not worthily rival M. van Spaendonck, the rarest of men in this genre? Do you think that the birds, tricked, will not come to peck at the fruits created by these two emulators, like the grape from the brush of Zeuxis? Look at this painting of game, by the same artist; consider that this same hand yet traces the human figure with success; and see whether any man can flatter himself that he outshines such a skilful person. Madame Guiard, with all her portraits, does she not follow gloriously in the footsteps of these two luminaries? And this portrait of M. Briard, performing as King Lear, would it not bring honour even to a highly esteemed man?'<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup> See, for example, the preface to Henriette-Louise Dionis's *Origine des Grâces*, discussed in chapter four of this thesis.

<sup>82</sup> See the discussion of this pamphlet in chapter one.

<sup>83</sup> Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans*, 7–9. 'C'est une fort belle chose que d'être morte, sur-tout quand on l'est depuis trois mille ans. [...] Vous autres vivans, vous ne rendez justice qu'aux morts; souffrez que, morte, je rende justice aux vivans. Je vois ici des beautés dont on ne s'étoit jamais douté dans mon siècle; ainsi quelle est sa gloire auprès de la vôtre, et quelle est la mienne?'

'—mais, lui dit-on, votre sexe l'augmente, cette gloire, par rapport à vous.'

'Et, reprit-elle, combien ce sexe n'en acquiert-il pas ici? Voyez ces tableaux de Madame Le Brun, où la nature est si brillante, & en même temps si touchante; ces portraits de la Reine, de Monsieur & de Madame; celui de l'Auteur; cette Junon si intéressante qui emprunte la ceinture de Vénus, & qui, perdant sa majesté, a déjà plus de graces que la Reine de Cythere; cette Vénus liant les ailes de l'Amour; ce tableau charmant de la Paix, qui ramene l'Abondance, & tous ces autres portraits de la même main. Le sexe qui commande a-t-il rien de plus

This is a remarkable passage: a speech in praise of women painters by the first woman painter, in which she affirms women's capacity to rival even the most distinguished men. Modest on her own account, Dibutades showers praise on others—generously radiating outward the admiration that she cannot graciously accept herself. She does not engage in detail with any of the paintings she lists, describing them in superlative but generic terms: 'brilliant', 'touching', 'charming', 'perfect', 'exquisite'. She is speaking the language of the gallant compliment: of friendly rivalry between the sexes. In fact, her language here is of a very similar kind to that Lesuire parodied in his *Salon* of 1775.<sup>84</sup>

This first and only 'feminist' discourse kills two birds with one stone. It acknowledges the protagonist's femininity, bringing it out into the open and pinning down its significance. And it effectively separates the discussion of women painters from the rest of the Salon review. Dibutades, Lebrun, Vallayer-Coster, and Labille-Guiard are framed as prodigies ('but your sex augments this glory'): they may be 'skilful', they may 'rival' the abilities of men, but they are distinguished as much by their sex as by their skill, and ultimately belong in a separate category. After this speech, there is no more discussion of women artists in *La morte de trois mille ans*. Dibutades changes the subject as if returning from a digression, and the rest of the review follows its habitual path, moving down through the hierarchy of genres.

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parfait à opposer à ces morceaux exquis ? Madame Vallayer-Coster ne rivalise-t-elle pas dignement, dans ce beau vase de fleurs, avec M. Van Spaendonk, homme des plus rares dans ce genre. Croyez-vous que les oiseaux trompés ne viendront pas béqueter les fruits enfantés par ces deux émules, comme le raisin sorti du pinceau de Zeuxis ? Regardez ce tableau de gibier, de la même artiste; songez que cette même main trace encore, avec succès, la figure humaine; & voyez si aucun homme peut se flatter d'effacer une personne si habile. Madame Guiard, avec tous ses portraits, ne marche-t-elle pas avec gloire sur les pas de ces deux Coryphées? Et ce portrait de M. Briard, représentant le Roi Léar, ne feroit-il pas honneur, même à un homme très estimé?

<sup>84</sup> Lesuire, *Coup d'œil sur le Sallon de 1775*, 5. '[J]'entendis une multitude de voix confusées qui prodiguoient aux différents morceaux les épithètes adorable, celeste, divin, prodigieux, detestable, pitoyable, etc. Parmi toutes ces épithètes qu'on répétoit les uns après les autres, je remarquai que celle de joli, dominoit toujours'.

‘But allow me to consider the History paintings. This genre, which belongs only to creative Genius [...].’<sup>85</sup> Dibutades admires the history paintings first, in particular David’s *Andromache mourning Hector* (fig. 8). The narrator describes her reaction:

People asked her what she thought of it; by way of an answer, her eyes filled with tears; and weeping, breast heaving, she indicated the head of the touching widow. The same Princess had interested her in the painting by M. Ménageot, where the cruel Ulysses orders her Child taken from her, in order to throw it from the top of a tower [...].<sup>86</sup>

Dibutades’ reaction to ‘the touching widow’—a demonstration of empathy from one beautiful and virtuous Greek to another—is emotional rather than rational. It is easy to picture Dibutades as a *tableau vivant*, pointing to Andromache’s head as Andromache gestures toward her husband’s body. David has succeeded in painting female emotion so powerfully that, in Dibutades, it is made reality. Is this a model for feminine art spectatorship? For women to make themselves conduits for the emotions of virtuous, painted heroines—the tragic, austere wives and mothers of Antiquity—and in so doing, elevate their own emotions and develop a better sense of their own proper role.

Dibutades’ response to the figure of Andromache, though it seems doubtful that Lesuire recognised it, also invites another reading. As Hector’s corpse lies against a dark backdrop, his face outlined in crisp near-profile, he recalls the image of the sleeping lover—in some tellings, a soldier—whose portrait Dibutades first traced. Andromache’s outstretched arm echoes Dibutades’ own as she reached to commit her lover to posterity, commending him to the viewer just as Dibutades’ gesture toward the head of Andromache now commends

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<sup>85</sup> Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans*, 9. ‘Mais laissez-moi considérer les tableaux d’Histoire. Ce genre, qui n’appartient qu’au Génie créateur [...].’

<sup>86</sup> Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans*, 10. ‘On lui a demandé ce qu’elle en pensoit; pour toute réponse ses yeux se sont remplis de larmes; & la poitrine oppressée, elle a montré en sanglottant la tête de la touchante veuve. Cette même Princesse l’a intéressée dans le tableau de M. Ménageot, où le cruel Ulyssse lui fait enlever son Enfant, pour le précipiter du haut d’une tour; ce sujet fut autrefois exécuté plus en grand, par M. Doyen.’

her to the reader. Her response to David's history painting is inspired by much the same sentiments that she describes shortly afterwards in relation to portraiture:

How flattering this genre is! It returns husbands to their widows and fathers to their children; it renders a far-away lover present before the eyes of his lover; it returns the man to himself, for it fixes and restores, before his eyes, the flower of his youth which had flown away on the wings of time. Through it, man breathes in several places at once; an entire nation benefits from the sight of its Monarch and of its great Men; and he who has descended into the tomb, still exists in the eyes of his equals.<sup>87</sup>

For Dibutades, the portraitist—faithful in portraiture as in love—the role of painting is essentially commemorative. It is the faithfulness of a portrait that matters, and from which it draws its commemorative power.

When Dibutades recovers from her emotion, she continues to peruse the history paintings, dispensing praise and recommendations. She recommends that history painters represent fewer revolting subjects (she counts no less than three immolations) and more national subjects, congratulating those who already demonstrate a will to draw their subjects from French history. If this sounds like strange advice coming from an ancient Greek, the narrator steps in to explain that 'we see, from this language, that Dibutades knew our current French school; the dead know everything.'<sup>88</sup> She congratulates the king on his patronage, thanks to which 'the grand genre of History is resuscitated among you.'<sup>89</sup>

They then move on to the 'numerous' smaller paintings. Just a few sentences are devoted to the genre paintings, which make Dibutades smile.<sup>90</sup> The portraits and landscapes

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<sup>87</sup> Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans*, 16. 'Combien ce genre est flatteur ! il rend à la veuve son mari, aux enfants leur père; il fait qu'un amant éloigné se trouve présent aux yeux de son amante; il rend l'homme à lui-même, puisqu'il fixe & remet, sous ses yeux, les fleurs de sa jeunesse, qui s'étoient envolées sur l'aile du temps. Par lui, l'homme respire en plusieurs endroits à la fois; une nation entière jouit de la vue de son Monarque & de ses grands Hommes; & celui qui est descendu dans la tombe, existe encore aux yeux de ses semblables.'

<sup>88</sup> Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans*, 12. 'On voit, par ce langage, que Dibutatis connoissoit notre Ecole françoise actuelle; les morts savent tout.'

<sup>89</sup> Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans*, 14: '& l'on voit, par quelle heureuse munificence, le grand genre de l'Histoire est ressuscité parmi vous.'

<sup>90</sup> Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans*, 15.



hold her attention for longer, though oddly, despite her personal and sentimental connection to portraiture, she mentions not a single painter or painting of this genre by name. Having largely ignored her successors, the portraitists, Dibutades fills nearly two pages with her praise for the landscapes of Claude-Joseph Vernet and his followers.<sup>91</sup> She devotes a single sentence to still life and finally moves on to sculpture, ‘of which my father was named the inventor’ and which ‘has been the triumph of the French.’<sup>92</sup> She passes over the drawings and prints, ‘of which, based on a simple general glance, she formed a very advantageous impression.’<sup>93</sup> Dibutades concludes her tour of the Salon by saying that she takes ‘as much pleasure [...] in seeing this Salon, as in living in the Elysian fields’, adding that she hopes ‘that the representation of several of these works will be conserved there.’<sup>94</sup>

Dibutades is a more serious character than either Aglantine or Mutine, who are endearing largely for their youthful naïveté. But among the epithets which accumulate, ‘beautiful’ is the one that recurs most insistently. In an amusing vignette toward the end of the pamphlet, the narrator observes the effect of Dibutades’ beauty on the people around her:

While the beautiful Greek spoke to me, a young Artist, watching her with an amorous eye, traced on the wall the outline of her shadow; and *marchandes de modes* observed her attire in order to copy it and have our *petites maîtresses* wear it.<sup>95</sup>

The artist and the *marchandes de modes* are the unwitting players in a modern-day parody of the ancient myth of Dibutades. In this scene, Dibutades ceases to be a spectator and becomes instead a spectacle—as she was upon first arriving at the Louvre, when the small *abbé*

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<sup>91</sup> Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans*, 18–19.

<sup>92</sup> Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans*, 19. ‘Ce bel Art, dont mon pere fut nommé l’inventeur [...], a fait le triomphe des François.’

<sup>93</sup> Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans*, 22. ‘Dibutatis assura qu’il falloit remettre, a un autre jour, l’examen des Estampes & des Dessins, dont, sur un simple coup-d’œil général, elle concevoit une idée très avantageuse.’

<sup>94</sup> Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans*, 22–23. ‘J’ai autant de plaisir, dit-elle, à voir ce Salon, qu’à respirer dans les Champs-Elisées, séjour de récompense & de bonheur. J’espere que la représentation de plusieurs de ces morceaux y sera conservée.’

<sup>95</sup> Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans*, 22. ‘Pendant que la belle Grecque me parloit, un jeune Artiste, qui la considéroit d’un œil amoureux, traçoit, sur le mur, le contour de son ombre; et des Marchandes de modes observoient son ajustement, pour le copier, et le faire porter à nos petites maîtresses.’

identified her by comparing her with antique portraits (thus the reproduction confirms the truth of the original). The young artist, whose ‘amorous eye’ leads him to act out the very moment of the invention of painting by Dibutades, reproduces Dibutades’ image once again. Likewise, the *marchandes de modes* make their own copies—copies which will in turn be copied both in fashion plates and in fabric. The myth of the origin of painting, drawing, and relief sculpture demonstrates its malleability once more, as Dibutades’ outline, scratched into the wall, here comes to resemble the engraved lines of a print, becoming an origin myth of the fashion plate.<sup>96</sup> Love, fashion, and reproduction: these are the salient aspects of Dibutades’ story when transplanted into the modern world.

Finally, after Dibutades has paid her last compliments to the state of the arts in France, it is time for someone to take her home to the Elysian fields. The narrator writes:

I offered myself; her look announced to me that she accepted me as her escort. I was extremely flattered by this preference: I promised myself the greatest pleasure in courting this Greek beauty. I present her my hand, she accepts it graciously, I believe I feel her deign to squeeze it tenderly. The excess of pleasure wakens me, and I realise that I have only had an agreeable dream; but I had previously visited the Salon; and I believe I can show you how much it struck me, in sketching for you the very detailed dream that it inspired in me.<sup>97</sup>

Dibutades is ultimately no more than the fruit of the narrator’s imagination. The love that inspired Dibutades to invent the art of painting is replaced by the narrator’s desire for

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<sup>96</sup> On the myth’s use by Josiah Wedgwood as an origin story for pottery, see Ann Bermingham, “The origin of painting and the ends of art: Wright of Derby’s Corinthian Maid,” in *Painting and the politics of culture: new essays in British art 1700-1850*, ed. John Barrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 147–55. See also Sarah J. Lippert, “Going back to the beginning of things: wishful travel and the ancient origins of the arts in France,” in *Artistic responses to travel in the Western tradition*, ed. Sarah J. Lippert (London & New York: Routledge, 2018), 170–88.

<sup>97</sup> Lesuire, *La Morte de trois mille ans*, 23. ‘Je m’offris; son œil m’annonça qu’elle m’agréoit pour son Ecuyer. J’étois extrêmement flatté de cette préférence: je me promettois la plus grande volupté à faire ma cour à cette beauté Grecque. Je lui présente ma main, elle l’accepte avec grace, je crois sentir qu’elle daigne la serrer tendrement. L’excès du plaisir m’éveille, et je m’aperçois que je n’ai fait qu’un rêve agréable; mais j’avois précédemment visité le Salon; & je crois vous montrer combien il m’avoit frappé, en vous peignant un songe si détaillé qu’il m’avoit inspiré.’

Dibutades. Inventor, artist, and speaker, Dibutades ends up playing the role of muse, art object, and object of desire.

The three women in Lesuire's art-critical pamphlets are among the most positive representations of women characters in all of eighteenth-century art criticism. All are young, tasteful, and attractive (Dibutades is quite literally a dream woman). Unlike many of their counterparts in contemporary pamphlets, Aglantine, Mutine, and Dibutades were clearly not intended as demonstrations of women's inability to speak on matters of taste, nor do they read as such today. Indeed, they represent the ideal female viewer according to the gendered notions of late eighteenth-century France. They possess *sensibilité*, taste, and virtue; they are modest and agreeable; they do not make harsh criticisms; they do not seek publicity on their own account; and, young and unmarried, their charms are presented as being available. In this latter point, female viewers had much in common with women painters, whose artworks were often described as simply another manifestation of their personal charms.<sup>98</sup> In all cases, their interest in art is ascribed to love, leisure, or youthful enthusiasm—not to professionalism or genius. And of course, while an ideal may be a pathway to recognition of sorts for some, it is also something for others to fall short of. All three women have been chosen to speak about art because they have something that sets them apart from women in general: Aglantine is an *ingénue*; Mutine a 'young Beauty who spoke only *à propos*'; and Dibutades a 'Nymph' who is 'neither of our nation, nor of our century'. All three are used as the basis for unfavourable comparisons with modern Frenchwomen. In other words, all three represent thoroughly ambiguous choices, for it was evidently only in adopting Aglantine,

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<sup>98</sup> See Fort, "Indicting the woman artist: Diderot, Le Libertin, and Anna Dorothea Therbusch"; and Fort, "Esthétique et imaginaire sexuel: la femme peintre dans les 'Salons.'"

muting Mutine, and dreaming of Dibutades, that Lesuire could imagine female art critical voices.

Chapter three:  
Souvenirs of Sophie Arnould (1740-1802): anecdote as art history

Different critiques of the Salon have appeared, among others *La Vision*, which contains quite good things and occasional judicious and discerning reflections. But the taunt of Mademoiselle Arnould desolates the painters more than all the brochures. ‘Never’, she said, ‘has the saying ‘poor as a painter’ been proven better than today, when ten of them have not been able to make five Louis’.

—*Mémoires secrets*, 21 September 1773<sup>1</sup>

The problem with public exhibitions is that anybody can say what they want. We have seen art critics grapple with the problem of the female public, seeking to regulate their relationship with art through fictional proxies. In this chapter, I leave fictional women behind to consider the artistic commentaries of a historical woman—one who, at first glance, appears to embody many of the charges laid against women by the art critics of the eighteenth century. Sophie Arnould, a soprano at the Paris Opéra, was one of Paris’s most quotable personalities throughout the 1760s and 1770s. ‘People are always interested in everything that comes out of Mademoiselle Arnould’s mouth—she is the female Piron of ripostes and witticisms’, wrote the *Mémoires secrets* in February 1770.<sup>2</sup> Her quips about artworks, artists, and their sitters, among many other subjects, circulated by word of mouth and by correspondence before filtering into the press (both licit and illicit), and eventually into memoirs and popular

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<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires secrets*, vol. 7, pp. 56-57 (21 September 1773). ‘Il paroît différentes critiques du Sallon, entr’autres *La Vision*, où il y a d’assez bonnes choses, des réflexions judicieuses & fines quelquefois. Mais le quolibet de Mlle. Arnoux désolé plus les peintres que toutes les brochures. “Jamais, dit-elle, le proverbe *Gueux comme un peintre*, ne s’est mieux vérifié qu’aujourd’hui, où, à dix, ils n’ont pu faire cinq [Saint] Louis”.’ It was this comment, reproduced in Wrigley’s *Origins of French art criticism*, that first pointed me in the direction of a public discourse on art outside the bounds of art criticism and the Académie: Wrigley, *The origins of French art criticism*, 77.

The *Mémoires secrets* continue their report on the Salon in the form of a tamer anecdote, characteristic of news reports about royalty: ‘Last Monday, Monsieur the Dauphin and Madame the Dauphine, and the Count and Countess of Provence came to see the Salon. Madame the Dauphine was particularly pleased to examine the painting by Mr. Machy, representing this Princess at the Tuileries with her august Husband, going towards the turning bridge on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June, 1773.’

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires secrets*, vol. 5, p. 62 (5 February 1770). ‘On est toujours curieux de tout ce qui sort de la bouche de Mlle. Arnoux, le Piron femelle pour les ripostes & les saillies.’ Alexis Piron (1689-1773) was a playwright notorious for his epigrams.

anthologies.<sup>3</sup> Not always kind but always interesting, her *bons mots* paint her as the very embodiment of the *piquant*—that all-important dash of novelty and intrigue that oiled the wheels of eighteenth-century conversation and literature. It was the *piquant*, despite protestations to the contrary, that reigned in the press, and that rendered an actress's quip as much worth disseminating as any more formal artistic commentary.

In the eighteenth century, anecdote as a mode of storytelling ranged from conversation to journalism to a method of writing history and art history.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, as Mark Ledbury has argued, anecdote has been a core strand of art history since its inception, from Pliny's tale of Zeuxis and the grapes to Vasari to Diderot.<sup>5</sup> I would like to pursue this line of thought further, considering not only the anecdotes that have already been inscribed into art history, but asking how art history might be enriched by anecdotes that have so far fallen outside its purview, and yet which have much to tell us about art. In particular, I am interested in the anecdote as a marginal discourse on art—one that women of a certain

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<sup>3</sup> Albéric Deville anthologised her anecdotes and *bons mots* on all subjects in 1813 under the title *Arnoldiana*. In 1857, her biography was taken up by Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, and the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen a steady trickle of monographs and popular biographies: see Goncourt and Goncourt, *Sophie Arnould*, 1857; Emile Dacier, ed., "La vente Sophie Arnould," in *Catalogues de ventes et livrets de salons illustrés par Gabriel de Saint-Aubin*, vol. 8. Ventes Charles Natoire et Sophie Arnould, 1778, 11 vols. (Paris: Société de reproduction des dessins de maîtres, 1909), 52–58, 68–71; Maurice Dumoulin, "Sophie Arnould, mère de famille," in *Etudes et portraits d'autrefois, avec neuf portraits* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1911), 37–75; André Billy, *La vie amoureuse de Sophie Arnould* (Paris: Flammarion, 1929); Jean Stern, *A l'ombre de Sophie Arnould: François-Joseph Belanger, architecte des Menus Plaisirs, premier architecte du comte d'Artois*, 2 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1930); Rodolphe Trouilleux, "Sur les traces des Goncourt, une nouvelle biographie de Sophie Arnould," *Cahiers Edmond et Jules de Goncourt* 1, no. 2 (1993): 4–12; Rodolphe Trouilleux, *N'oubliez pas Iphigénie: biographie de la cantatrice et épistolière Sophie Arnould* (Grenoble: Alzieu, 1999); Olivier Blanc, "Une solide amitié (novembre 1778)," in *L'amour à Paris au temps de Louis XVI* (Paris: Perrin, 2002), 182–90, on Arnould's relationship with the comte de Lauraguais; Raphaëlle Legrand, "Les débuts de Sophie Arnould à l'Opéra (1757-1760): images de l'actrice chantante et de son répertoire," *Musurgia* 11, no. 1/2 (2004): 21–36; Isabelle Joz-Roland, *Une femme libre: Sophie Arnould, chanteuse et courtisane* (Paris: France-Empire, 2007) (a fictionalised biography-as-novel); Jones, "French crossings IV." Jones' essay, which considers the libertinage of some of the actress/courtesans of Old Regime Paris as a form of proto-feminism, has been one of the most influential works in the formation of this chapter. Dacier in 1909 was the first to give serious consideration to Arnould's activity as a collector, and his description of the sale of part of her collection in 1778 remains the most sensitive and rigorously documented treatment of the subject. Since then, numerous articles, all referring back to Dacier, have made mention of Arnould's collecting and of her famous wit. But beyond simple retellings of the same few anecdotes in *catalogues raisonnés*, there are no analyses that treat them as texts or as parts of a discourse: see, for example, Bailey et al., *Gabriel de Saint-Aubin (1724-1780)*, 280–81; Anne L. Poulet, *Jean-Antoine Houdon: Sculptor of the Enlightenment* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2003), 97–103.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Nougaret, *Anecdotes des beaux-arts*.

<sup>5</sup> Ledbury, "Anecdotes and the life of art history," 173–76.

celebrity were freer to participate in than they were in art criticism. Stripping back the moralistic assumptions of the critics, I will examine the role played by a woman like Sophie Arnould in prerevolutionary art discourse. Drawing together the anecdotes about her that relate to art, I will explore their characterisation of difference both in gender and in genre.

Feminist art historians have made great inroads into recovering the work of women who wrote about art. Heather Belnap Jensen's ground-breaking 2007 doctoral thesis, and more recently the invaluable volumes of extracts and essays published as *Plumes et pinceaux*, have churned up exceptionally rich ground, revealing not only the work of women art critics in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but also the breadth of other genres in which women wrote about art.<sup>6</sup> According to Jensen, 'the lack of attention given to women's writings on art can be explained in part by the unassuming formats in which these discussions appear': in instruction manuals, advice books, artists' biographies, and art anthologies rather than criticism or monographs on aesthetics. Just as often, she writes, 'women who wrote on art tended to embed their aesthetic ruminations within the pages of a novel or travel guide or political polemic rather than declare their forays as autonomous productions'.<sup>7</sup> Jensen's thesis heralds a welcome shift from a narrow definition of art criticism toward a more expansive embrace of art writing in all of its many forms.

What, then, of the many women who left no written oeuvre? The question is not as futile as it may at first seem. Eighteenth-century France possessed a vibrant oral and 'semi-oral' culture, and women like Sophie Arnould, who spoke memorably and often, left traces throughout the margins of the Paris art world.<sup>8</sup> From the literal margins of auction catalogues,

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<sup>6</sup> Jensen, "Portraitistes à la plume"; Fend et al., *Plumes et pinceaux — essais*; Lafont et al., *Plumes et pinceaux — anthologie*.

<sup>7</sup> Jensen, "Portraitistes à la plume," 16.

<sup>8</sup> On Old Regime oral culture, see Lüsebrink, "Semi-Oralität: zur literaturwissenschaftlichen Tragweite einer provokativen Kategorie"; Lüsebrink, "L'espace public semi-oral dans les Mémoires secrets"; Robert Darnton, "An early information society: news and the media in eighteenth-century Paris," *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 1 (2000): 1–35.

where fellow auction-goers noted her purchases, to the news items where her sayings and doings were so eagerly reported, Arnould's name appears throughout the historical record. Art, though not a dominant theme, was a frequent topic of conversation in the anecdotes circulating about her. Witty, gossipy, and perfectly packaged for ease of repetition, anecdotes speak eloquently of the semi-public role of art in Paris's demi-monde, according to a set of values quite different to those of the Académie. While Arnould's anecdotes and *bons mots* have often been reproduced for their sheer illustrative enjoyability, they have not been seriously considered as a form of art commentary. For the first time, this chapter considers Arnould's anecdotes not as a series of isolated utterances, but as an oeuvre worthy of analysis in its own right.

A few words of caution seem in order before continuing. Anecdotes raise a number of problems as a way of telling history. Though presenting themselves as snippets of overheard conversations, they are never straightforward transcriptions of real speech but *versions* of *presumed* or *possible* speech, having passed through many mouths and pens since being uttered by the reputed original speaker. A well-chosen *bon mot*, spoken in the hope of achieving publicity, could be an act of self-fashioning by the speaker, but anecdote could just as well be wielded as a weapon, whether by the speaker against a third party or by the teller against the anecdote's protagonist. They therefore present a particularly interesting study in literary voice, and a particularly thorny predicament for the historian. My aim here has not been to verify or debunk the anecdotes in question, or to confirm or deny the attribution of *bons mots* to Arnould. Operating on the principle that their value lies not in the truth of what they convey, but in their function, I am most interested in the way they shape and reinforce particular views of Arnould, her contemporaries, and the role of art in her milieu.



*Conversation with the Saint-Aubins*

At three thirty in the afternoon on Thursday the twelfth of March 1772, Sophie Arnould—an actress at the height of her career—attended the auction of an art collection. Leaving, perhaps, from her rented apartment on the rue neuve des Petits-Champs, Arnould made her way to the monastery of the Grands-Augustins on a route that would have taken her past the gardens of the Palais-Royal, past the Louvre, and across the Pont Neuf to the other side of the Seine (passing midway the Place Dauphine, home every summer to the Salon de la Jeunesse: an open-air exhibition for artists who were not part of the Académie). The monastery, situated at the end of the Pont Neuf on the corner of the present-day Quai des Grands-Augustins and Rue Dauphine, rented out rooms and often hosted auctions, including, on this day, the sale of the collection of Louis-Léon de Brancas, comte de Lauraguais (1733-1824), Arnould’s life-long friend and former lover.<sup>9</sup> It was a chilly spring day. Although greeted by a crackling fire in the auction-room, Arnould removed her muff but not her wrapper and installed herself by the hearth, surrounded by Lauraguais’ soon-to-be former possessions.

This, at least, is where we find her in a sketch of the occasion by Gabriel de Saint-Aubin (fig. 9).<sup>10</sup> The drawing is captioned in the artist’s cramped hand: ‘Souvenir de M<sup>lle</sup> Arnou aux augustins le 12 mars 1772’ (‘Memory of Mademoiselle Arnould at the Augustinians, 12 March 1772’). Arnould stands by the open hearth, lifting her skirts slightly with her left hand to warm a tiny foot by the fire. The architecture of the auction room is suggested rather than described; the perspective of the room is indeterminate, geared not

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<sup>9</sup> Lauraguais had been Arnould’s lover on and off since her début at the Opéra in 1757, and was the father of their four children born between 1758 and 1767. Lauraguais, a collector, polymath and inveterate experimenter, was known for his wit, romantic escapades, and spectacular spending habits. By 1772, Arnould had met the second love of her life, the architect Belanger (more on whom later), had an affair with the prince de Conti, and settled on the prince d’Hénin as her *entreteneur en titre*. Once, in a typical stunt, Lauraguais attempted to have the prince d’Hénin, ‘the king of bores’, arrested for attempted murder: claiming that it was possible to die of boredom, he accused him of attempting to bore his mistress to death. On Arnould and Lauraguais, see Dumoulin, “Sophie Arnould, mère de famille”; Blanc, “Une solide amitié”; Jones, “French crossings IV,” 20–23.

<sup>10</sup> Bailey et al., *Gabriel de Saint-Aubin (1724-1780)*, cat. 74.

toward documentary fulness but toward reinforcing the air of intimacy that pervades the image. Her right hand reaches out, perhaps to steady herself on the mantelpiece, perhaps to indicate her lover's vases arranged there, or in some other gesture, for she is absorbed in conversation. A woman in black leans against Arnould's shoulder, 'whispering in her ear' according to Edmond de Goncourt and Pierre Rosenberg, although she could just as well be the one listening.<sup>11</sup> Really, it's impossible to tell which of the two women is the speaker, just as it's impossible to tell what they are talking about, though it seems to be pleasant; Arnould's smiling mouth could be open in speech or in laughter. What Saint-Aubin has captured is the give and take of conversation, and above all the unknowability of conversation that—by necessity in a medium such as drawing—is seen and not heard. We are at once invited to share in the memory of an intimate moment and reminded that we can never truly gain access to it.

Viewed by itself, the sketch, although charming, tells us little that we might not have guessed without it: Arnould was there, she was elegant, she was sociable. Yet it is a compelling image. Richly evocative, it shares the spontaneity of anecdote at its best: we feel, though we cannot know, that we have glimpsed Arnould and her surroundings just as they were; that we have been admitted, for a fleeting moment, into exclusive company. The image stands on its own as a masterful pictorial exercise in anecdote, a full and lively demonstration of Saint-Aubin's skill as a chronicler of the social life of Paris. But Gabriel de Saint-Aubin was not the only one observing those around him, for below the drawing is a second caption, this one added by the artist's brother, Charles-Germain. This caption recalls a quip by Arnould at Gabriel's expense:

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<sup>11</sup> Goncourt's description is cited in Dacier, "La vente Sophie Arnould," 54; and see Rosenberg's catalogue entry in Bailey et al., *Gabriel de Saint-Aubin (1724-1780)*, cat. 74.

Seeing Saint-Aubin drawing, M<sup>lle</sup> Arnould says to me: ‘Your brother has no teeth, he paints more *croûtes* [‘crusts’ or ‘bad paintings’] than he eats.’<sup>12</sup>

Charles-Germain’s anecdote, with the addition of Arnould’s words, reframes the whole picture: now we are not only looking in at the subject from the artist’s perspective, but out at the artist from the subject’s perspective. In stark contrast to Charles-Germain’s *Livre de caricatures tant bonnes que mauvaises* (‘Book of caricatures both good and bad’), where captions and sketches combine to skewer their subjects, in this caption the subject bites back.<sup>13</sup> We can almost picture the scene: Gabriel de Saint-Aubin sitting, drawing the two women before him (the low angle of the picture suggests a seated position); Charles-Germain standing nearby, just outside the picture plane; Arnould looking up, noticing that she is being sketched, and interrupting her conversation to launch one of her famous verbal missiles.<sup>14</sup> Three voices converge on this sheet of paper: not just the voices of Gabriel and Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin, who put pen to paper, but also of Sophie Arnould, who spoke. The anecdote in the caption serves as a reminder of the subjectivity of the woman who is presented for our visual delectation—a souvenir, if you will, of Sophie Arnould.

We are faced with a double representation of the actress as both image and word, object and subject. The two pairs do not map onto one another as neatly as they perhaps first appear to; in both cases, Arnould occupies the grey areas in between. She looks at home by the fireplace; there is a proprietorial quality to her gesture at Lauraguais’ vases. Yet the

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<sup>12</sup> ‘En voyant dessiner Saint Aubin, M<sup>lle</sup> Arnould me dit, votre frere n’a point de dents, il fait plus de crouttes qu’il n’en mange.’ In his catalogue entry for the drawing, Pierre Rosenberg translates this as ‘On seeing Saint Aubin’s drawing, Mlle Arnould said to me, your brother is toothless, he daubs more than he dents’; Bailey et al., *Gabriel de Saint-Aubin (1724-1780)*, cat. 74. While this translation captures the gist of the original and is certainly more elegant than my own, I have opted to render Arnould’s puns as faithfully as possible; in most cases, this has meant translating them literally and providing glosses for the French, rather than trying to replicate their wordplay in English.

<sup>13</sup> The *Livre de caricatures*, containing drawings dated to between c.1740-c.1775, is conserved at Waddesdon Manor in Aylesbury, accession number 675.

<sup>14</sup> The scene, so cohesive and meticulously labelled, tempts us to view it as a single moment—a single memory—rather than as a composite image condensed, composed and rearranged from any number of moments. Given Saint-Aubin’s working methods, either reading of the image is possible. His drawings encompass both observational sketches and allusive and allegorical works, sometimes combining the two in dreamlike compositions.

porcelain oval of her face, echoed in ovoid shapes of the vases on the mantel and the marble curves of the nude sculpture, serves as a teasing reminder of the nature of Arnould's role as Lauraguais's mistress. The drawing depicts Arnould, along with the sculpture and vases, as another soon-to-be former possession of Lauraguais, available to the highest bidder. Artfully juxtaposing real and sculpted, nude and clothed women, this is just the sort of gossipy allusion that Saint-Aubin liked to draw.<sup>15</sup>

Of the three figures depicted (two real, one sculpted) only Arnould's features are visible. Her upturned eyes, tilted head and open smile all testify to her enjoyment and engagement in the conversation. Although we cannot see the face of her friend in black, turned towards Arnould and depicted in lost profile, the curve of her cheek makes her smile unmistakable. Their heads lean together, the pale silk of Arnould's dress and the dark of her friend's blending to grey, the folds of their skirts intermingling. Everything in the image is linked by touch, from the spotted muff resting on the chair to the tight compositional grouping around the hearth: the mantel, the vases, Arnould, her friend.<sup>16</sup> Only the sculpted figure stands alone, demarcated from the others by empty space. Its white marble surfaces seem almost superfluous in an otherwise self-contained composition: Arnould and the bright fire, neatly framed by her friend and the dark *repoussoir* of the chair, form an intimate cluster all of their own. The white heightening applied to the sculpted breast is matched only by that of Arnould's décolletage and the heart of the fire, linking cold marble, warm flesh, and fiery heat.

What the drawing thoroughly obscures is the identity of the sculpture. The side view presented to us—of undulating shoulder, breast, abdomen, thigh, and calf—suggests an unambiguously female figure. Yet readers of Lauraguais' auction catalogue will find only a

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<sup>15</sup> See, for comparison, nos. 76 and 77, Bailey et al., *Gabriel de Saint-Aubin (1724-1780)*.

<sup>16</sup> For a superb analysis of touch in painting from a psychoanalytic perspective, see Lajer-Burcharth, "Pompadour's touch."

single full-length sculpture among the lots. Just under life-size, it is neither female nor male. Its description appears to match what we can see of its left side in the drawing: ‘Standing Hermaphrodite, his right arm raised, holding a scroll in his closed hand; his left arm falls downward. It is said that this marble figure, which is 5 *pieds* (162 cm) high, is of the highest antiquity [...]’<sup>17</sup> Present when the drawing is read with knowledge of its context, but absent from the drawing alone, the *Hermaphrodite* reads like a private joke. Only people familiar with Lauraguais’s collection, present at the auction, or with access to the auction catalogue could recognise its identity. Like so much of Saint-Aubin’s oeuvre, this is a private sketch, perhaps intended to be shared with friends and ultimately assembled in a family sketch album. It assumes inside knowledge, allowing for a play of things that are known but not seen. The sculpted *Hermaphrodite* (sold for 1,500 *livres*) reveals only its feminine side to the uninitiated, any hint of a frontal view turned away with teasing deliberateness.

The figure of the hermaphrodite disrupts our gendered readings of the drawing in interesting ways. In association with the figure of Arnould, it opens up possible allusions. Actresses in the eighteenth century were sometimes considered a ‘third gender’, echoing the way that women writers and artists were satirised as hermaphrodites for their ‘masculine’ ambition.<sup>18</sup> More pointedly, the eighteenth century viewed women who slept with women as

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<sup>17</sup> Pierre Remy, *Notice de tableaux, figures, bustes de marbre, laques, ouvrages en marqueterie de Boule, porcelaines du Japon, & autres effets curieux [de M. le comte de Lauraguais], dont la vente se fera le jeudi 12 mars 1772, trois heures & demie précise de relevée, & jours suivants à pareille heure, dans une salle des Révérends Pères Augustins du Grand Couvent* (Paris: Didot, 1772), lot 12. ‘L’Hermaphrodite debout, il a le bras droit élevé, tenant dans sa main qui est fermée un rouleau; son bras gauche tombe en bas. On prétend que cette figure de marbre, qui a 5 pieds de haut, est de la plus haute antiquité; son travail nous paroît précieux; les Savants & plusieurs Artistes du premier rang l’ont admirée; ils l’estiment un chef-d’œuvre rare qu’on ne peut apprécier.’

<sup>18</sup> On ‘hermaphrodite’ as an insult applied to women artists and writers, see notably Sheriff, *The exceptional woman*, chapter six: “The portrait of the artist,” especially pages 180-186. On the association of actresses with deviant sexuality, see Lenard R. Berlanstein, *Daughters of Eve: a cultural history of French theater women from the Old Regime to the fin de siècle* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 114–15; Jeffrey Merrick, “The Marquis de Villette and Mademoiselle de Raucourt: representations of male and female sexual deviance in late eighteenth-century France,” in *Order and disorder under the Ancien Régime* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 344–67. Edmond de Goncourt echoed this sentiment in the 1902 edition of his and Jules’s biography of Arnould. Among the many additions in this edition are a number of anecdotes relating to the actress’s libertinage that had previously been suppressed, including an extended section on her activities as a *tribade*, which began: ‘The taste of singers for their sex—it really is very peculiar how one comes across it, this taste!’

taking on a masculine role—as aberrations of the gender binary not unlike the hermaphrodite. Arnould became increasingly notorious during the course of the 1770s for her relationships with women. She was most often linked in the press with her fellow actress, Françoise Raucourt (1768-1815), who was credited with introducing a taste for lesbianism to the actresses of Paris.<sup>19</sup> Although I have found no public references to Arnould’s liaisons with women until the mid-1770s, this would not be the only time that Saint-Aubin demonstrated his awareness of information not otherwise reported in the press (as in 1778, when he attended the auction of Arnould’s collection knowing that Arnould was the seller, despite the fact that her name was not listed anywhere in the catalogue or the press; see below). The two female figures in the drawing certainly permit multiple readings, their heads together, their bodies forming a single visual mass. Is this friendly intimacy, romantic intimacy, or some hybrid of the two?

The gossip circulating about Arnould’s love life as the decade wore on inevitably inflected the meanings of other artworks to which her name was attached. When Jean Massard completed his reproductive engraving of Greuze’s *Broken pitcher* in 1773, Greuze dedicated it to Sophie Arnould (fig. 10): ‘Dedicated to Mademoiselle Sophie Arnould, *pensionnaire* of the King and First Actress of the Royal Academy of Music, by her very

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To which is appended the following footnote: ‘In the novel *La Faustin* [1882], I have signalled the links, observed by medicine, of women’s vocal organs and genital organs, and the development of the latter in all female singers and actresses.’ (‘Le gout des chanteuses pour leur sexe, c’est vraiment très particulier comme on le rencontre, ce gout!’; ‘Dans le roman de la *Faustin*, j’ai signalé les rapports, constatés par la médecine, des organes vocaux avec les organes génitaux de la femme, et le développement des derniers chez toutes les chanteuses, déclamatrices, etc.’). Edmond de Goncourt and Jules de Goncourt, *Sophie Arnould d’après sa correspondance et ses mémoires inédits* (Paris: Charpentier, 1902), 86.

<sup>19</sup> Raucourt made her spectacular début at the Comédie Française at the age of sixteen in December 1772, nine months after the date inscribed on Saint-Aubin’s drawing. In both the libertine fiction and underground press of the Old Regimes, the motif of the libertine or *tribade* initiating others into a life of debauchery was ever-popular. In this reading, sexuality becomes yet another fashionable taste. Raucourt was more heavily censured for her ‘tribadism’ than any other actress in the contemporary press, largely because she played into—and seemingly revelled in—the image of the tribade-as-man, adopting masculine dress and behaviours in her relationships with women: Merrick, “The Marquis de Villette and Mademoiselle de Raucourt,” 356–57. Arnould distanced herself from this, establishing herself as a more ‘acceptable’/less deviant kind of *tribade* in the process. Part of staying on the right side of public opinion, even as an acknowledged deviant, was playing her part in policing the limits of acceptable deviance. Deville, *Arnoldiana*, 74–75.

humble and very obedient Servant, J. B. Greuze.’ This caption accompanied all of Massard’s prints out into the world, a permanent addendum to Greuze’s picture—which many, if not most, people would have known primarily or exclusively in its printed form. Usually, Greuze’s dedications were to collectors, their wives and immediate family members.<sup>20</sup> Though a collector, Arnould does not appear to have owned any paintings by Greuze; the original of *The broken pitcher* was in the collection of the king’s mistress, Madame Du Barry (see chapter four). But Arnould had played Aline in *La reine de Golconde* when it premiered in 1766, whose Greuzian breaking of a pitcher of milk leads to the loss of her virginity when she is fourteen and her seducer fifteen.<sup>21</sup> At the very least, the print’s association with a celebrity of Arnould’s standing could have been expected to help sales.<sup>22</sup>

The irony of her association with this print was surely not lost on eighteenth-century viewers. As an actress, Arnould was a spectacularly successful example of the gains to be had from the very loss of virtue at once mourned and romanticised in the painting. Onstage, actresses were as perfect as the maidens and goddesses they portrayed, full of ‘graces, truth, feeling, nobility of expression, beautiful attitudes, intelligence, and warmth’.<sup>23</sup> Arnould was a sensitive interpreter of the great tragic roles of the 1760s and 1770s, renowned for the subtlety and emotional power of her acting. Offstage, however, she was a source of endless gossip, with a string of high-profile lovers. Glamorous and sociable, she was morally regarded as little better than a prostitute. The link between sex and the stage was such that the Comédie Française could auction off the *pucelage*, or virginity, of its newest recruits. The result was that actresses in the eighteenth century often made their sexual début at a very

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<sup>20</sup> For example, Jacques-Claude Danzel’s 1765 engraving of Greuze’s *The laundress* was dedicated to Madame de La Live, wife of the painting’s owner La Live de Jully; Pierre-Étienne Moitte’s 1765 engraving of Greuze’s *Le donneur de sérénade* was dedicated to the brother of its owner, Boyer de Fonscolombe.

<sup>21</sup> On the link to *La Reine de Golconde*, see Mark Ledbury, “Greuze in limbo: being ‘betwixt and between,’” *Studies in the History of Art* 72 (2007): 190–91.

<sup>22</sup> Jones, “French crossings IV,” 23.

<sup>23</sup> The dramatist and diarist Charles Collé on Arnould, quoted in Legrand, “Les débuts de Sophie Arnould à l’Opéra,” 27.

young age—not unlike the adolescent figure so sensually depicted here. Arnould eloped from her bourgeois home with the comte de Lauraguais when she was a relatively respectable seventeen and he twenty-three; she later allowed their daughter Alexandrine, at the age of thirteen, to marry the twenty-seven-year old poet André de Murville (1754-1815), who had courted both mother and daughter.<sup>24</sup> Her own relationship with the actress Françoise Raucourt began when Raucourt was in her late teens and Arnould in her mid-thirties. Arnould lived her life—indeed, found her niche—within the same patriarchal culture that led Greuze to paint young girls as moralised, sentimentalised, and desired all at once. The addition of Arnould’s name performs two seemingly contradictory, but coexisting, functions: it allows the presumed-male viewer to conflate Arnould and the girl, but it also transforms the girl’s body into a site of female as well as male pleasure—another reminder that women like Arnould were not only looked *at* for the pleasure of others, but were viewers and desiring subjects themselves.<sup>25</sup>

### *At the Salon*

For Arnould as for most Parisian art lovers, the Salon would have been an unmissable affair. An artistic, social, fashionable and above all newsworthy occasion, it was also an opportunity to coin a *bon mot*. At the Salon of 1773, Arnould made a pun that, if the *Mémoires secrets* are to be believed, ‘desolate[d] the painters more than all the brochures’:

‘Never’, she said, ‘has the saying ‘poor as a painter’ been proven better than today, when ten of them have not been able to make five Louis.’<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See appendix one, anecdote ii. Alexandrine divorced the abusive Murville when this was legalised during the Revolution, having tried and failed to escape the marriage by joining the chorus of the Opéra in 1786. See Dumoulin, “Sophie Arnould, mère de famille,” 44–47; Goncourt and Goncourt, *Sophie Arnould*, 1902, 164–72. She apparently inherited her mother’s wit, and some of her *bons mots* are included in Deville, *Arnoldiana*, 90–92.

<sup>25</sup> See chapter four for a more detailed discussion of how this painting appealed to another female viewer.

<sup>26</sup> *Mémoires secrets*, vol. 7, pp. 56-57 (21 September 1773). See note 1 for the full passage in the original French.



Arnould's comment takes aim at one of the most resounding disappointments of that year's Salon: a cycle of history paintings depicting scenes from the life of the king's namesake, Saint Louis.<sup>27</sup> Her pun, playing on the identical pronunciation of *Saint Louis* and *cinq louis*, ridicules the artists as both poor painters (unable to paint Saint Louis) and as poor (unable to make five *louis*, the unit of currency). It is not difficult to see how it must have rankled that a soprano's pun should receive more attention than the artworks themselves. The paintings were as ambitious in their conception as they were underwhelming in their reception. Executed by some of the Académie's most respected members, they had been commissioned for the chapel of the École Royale Militaire in the hope of reviving history painting, and state patronage of it, to the heights they had attained under Louis XIV. Arnould's pun is doubly bruising, showing no deference to the artists either as artists or as Academicians. Portraying them as little more than starving hacks, she undercuts the attempt to revive the lucrative and prestigious alliance between history painters and the state, efficiently skewering an effort to evoke comparison between the ageing Louis XV and two of his most celebrated predecessors, Louis IX and Louis XIV.

This was not Arnould's only foray into Salon criticism. In 1785, evidently still a regular at the Salon and up to date with society gossip, she made a joke about a painting by Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun that made its way back to the artist herself. Persistent rumours were circulating that Vigée-Lebrun was having an affair with the finance minister Charles-Alexandre de Calonne, whose portrait she exhibited at the Salon of 1785.<sup>28</sup> The portrait shows Calonne seated with his legs crossed and his feet out of the frame. Referencing the

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<sup>27</sup> Hallé, *Saint Louis portant en procession de Vincennes à Paris, la sainte couronne d'épines*; Vien, *Saint Louis, à son avènement à la Couronne, remet à la Reine Blanche de Castille, sa mere, la Régence du Royaume, en présence du Cardinal Romain, Légat du Saint Siège*; La Grenée, *L'entrevue de Saint Louis et du Pape Innocent IV*; Amédée Vanloo, *Saint Louis, âgé de douze ans, présenté par la Reine Blanche, sa mere, pour être sacré*; Doyen, *Saint Louis est attaqué de la maladie épidémique*; Lépicié, *Saint Louis rendant la justice sous un chêne à Vincennes*.

<sup>28</sup> Vigée-Lebrun, *Charles-Alexandre de Calonne*, 1784 (London: Buckingham Palace, Royal Collection).

rumours, Arnould joked that ‘Madame Le Brun has cut off his legs so that he cannot escape.’<sup>29</sup> Vigée-Lebrun, hurt by accusations intended to discredit her, singled out Arnould’s remark in her memoirs as an illustration of the slander that she had been subject to. Later, in a separate passage describing the actresses she had seen perform, the artist returns to Arnould, writing that she ‘was not at all pretty. Her mouth spoiled her face; the eyes were her only saving feature and the famous spirit shone through them. Many of her words have been copied and published.’<sup>30</sup>

As an actress, Arnould worked in a sphere where the existence of criticism was taken for granted. Unlike art criticism, which in the 1770s still operated largely as an oppositional discourse, theatre criticism (like literary criticism) was a lawful and long-established part of the scene. Stage performers had a fundamentally different relationship to their audience than artists did: at the theatre, the public’s reaction was vocal and immediate, communicated in real time to the performers, who could be cheered on or hissed off the stage. Individual connoisseurship mattered less in a context where the collective right of the audience to voice its opinion was taken for granted, and performances would be extended, cut short, or otherwise altered to satisfy the expectations of the paying public. Theatre criticism was personal, factional, and often below the belt: Arnould, a self-professed *putain*, was no stranger to being hissed off stage for her own perceived indiscretions, and seamlessly applied the same mode of criticism in the context of the Salon in her joke about Vigée-Lebrun.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Vigée-Lebrun, *The memoirs of Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun*, 45. Art criticism was also capable of gossip, although the police backlash was swift against pamphlets that ventured into libellous territory. The *Avis important d’une femme* was promptly banned for its commentary on the same portrait of Calonne; according to this pamphlet, it was in this portrait that Lebrun ‘rendered herself most completely mistress of her subject’ (‘c’est dans cette occasion qu’elle s’est rendue le plus entièrement maîtresse de son sujet’). *Avis important d’une femme*. Wrigley, *The origins of French art criticism*, 148.

<sup>30</sup> Vigée-Lebrun, *The memoirs of Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun*, 53.

<sup>31</sup> For the *putain* comment, see Reuilly, *La Raucourt et ses amies*, 34. Woe betide the actress who was seen to bring her private life onto the stage. On 6 December 1775, the *Mémoires secrets* reported that Arnould, playing the titular role in *Adèle de Ponthieu*, had ‘smiled familiarly’ toward the comte d’Artois in his box, ‘as she might have done to one of her friends or to her lover; this offended the Public, which demonstrated its indignation in a way that was humiliating for her’ (‘comme elle auroit pu faire à un de ses camarades ou à son amant; ce qui a

*In the boudoir*

The world of the theatre, like the world of the press, revolved openly around personalities in a way that the art world deliberately sought to distance itself from. The private lives of actresses were the source of almost as much public fascination as their performances.<sup>32</sup>

Arnould's commentaries on art reflect this, abiding not by the conventions of art criticism but by those of the anecdote. If, by the standards of art history, her comments seem ephemeral or lacking in substance, by the standards of an underground newspaper or anthology of anecdotes they have everything that a good anecdote should: currency, celebrity, humour, and a little spice. They are less concerned with aesthetics than with relationships and personalities, focusing less on artists than on their patrons and sitters: the celebrities of Arnould's theatrical milieu and their lovers. As a result, in the world of Arnould's recorded quips, art consists almost exclusively of portraiture: portraits commissioned for self-promotion, for exchange between lovers, and for distribution to admirers (the distinction between these categories could be nebulous). Many serve as the simple backdrop for a pun, but together, they demonstrate the importance of commissions and exchanges of portraits in Paris's demi-monde. Sitting for a portrait could be a form of seduction; commissioning a portrait could play a key role in establishing a reputation; owning a portrait could signify 'possession' of its sitter; and Arnould had something to say about all of it.

There are too many of these anecdotes, forming by far the largest subset of Arnould's reported witticisms involving works of art, to be included here. Set in boudoirs rather than at the Salon, they cumulatively frame art as an integral part of the sexual economy of the Paris

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indigné le Public, qui l'a témoigné d'une façon humiliante pour elle'). *Mémoires secrets*, vol. 8, pp. 278-279 (6 December 1775).

<sup>32</sup> Caron, "L'Anecdote et l'actrice."

élite.<sup>33</sup> The anecdote that follows is one example of many; all others from this subset are compiled in appendix one. The anecdote excerpted here concerns Arnould's use of an artwork to rebuff a prospective lover:

A young lord, a great hunter and highly inconstant in love, addressed the most amorous propositions to [Sophie]. Sophie, who knew of his frivolity, sent him a painting by way of response. It showed a greyhound sleeping beside a hare, with these words as a motto: 'He neglects what he has caught.'<sup>34</sup>

The motto is drawn from Albert Flamen's *Devises et emblemes d'amour moralisez* ('Moralised devices and emblems of love'), an emblem book published in the mid-seventeenth century and reprinted several times.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the painting, too—if it existed—was based on Flamen's etched illustration (fig. 11). No artist's name is mentioned; in the context of the anecdote, it is not important. The focal point is Arnould's novel method of delivering a message of romantic rejection.

Arnould was apparently not the only actress to use an artwork in such a way—and her heraldic animal symbolism seems positively coy in comparison to the artistic substitution employed by Françoise Raucourt, her rival and sometime lover. A salacious anecdote made the rounds about Raucourt in February of 1775. The eminent *tribade* had supposedly been living in a state of shared debauchery with the marquis de Villette, a notorious homosexual. As reported in the *Correspondance secrète*,

they fell out some time ago, and the Marquis wrote the beautiful woman a very harsh letter. In response, he received a broom handle in a well-sealed parcel, addressed with verses written by Voltaire [as an inscription] for a statue of love:

*Whoever you are, here is your master,*

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<sup>33</sup> For analyses of the importance of portrait exchanges in the overlapping social, familial and professional networks of artists, see Jessica Lynn Fripp, "Portraits of artists and the social commerce of friendship in eighteenth-century France" (Ph.D., Ann Arbor, Mich., University of Michigan, 2012); Hannah Williams, "Academic intimacies: portraits of family, friendship, and rivalry at the Académie Royale," *Art History* 36, no. 2 (2013): 338–65.

<sup>34</sup> Deville, *Arnoldiana*, 187. See appendix one, anecdote iv, for the original French.

<sup>35</sup> Albert Flamen, *Devises et emblemes d'amour moralisez* (Paris: Samuel Margat, 1650), 32–33.

*It is, was, and must be so.*<sup>36</sup>

Voltaire's inscription was most famously associated with Falconet's widely reproduced sculpture of *Menacing Cupid* ('L'Amour menaçant'), commissioned by Madame de Pompadour. The sculpture, a symbol of the triumph of the mistress's soft power over the king, became a cultural icon of eighteenth-century France.<sup>37</sup> By exchanging Cupid for the bluntly phallic broom handle, Raucourt mocked Villette for the object of his sexual attraction—an object more 'menacing' to eighteenth-century heteropatriarchal values than any Cupid, or any Pompadour. Raucourt's crude artistic pun, like Arnould's best quips, reveals more layers on closer inspection than initially appear, melding high art and high literature with low humour and libertinage.

### *The bust of Clairon*

It is in auction catalogues that we have the most documentary evidence of Arnould's activity as a collector, and it was an auction that spawned one of the most famous anecdotes about Arnould. The auction in question was the posthumous sale of the financier and collector Randon de Boisset, where Arnould purchased a bust of the actress Hippolyte Clairon (lot 274) for 72 *livres*. Although a relatively modest purchase, the bust of Clairon soon became the stuff of anecdote. De Boisset's sale ran from 27 February until 25 March 1777, and on 20 March, the following account appeared in the *Mémoires secrets*:

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<sup>36</sup> *Correspondance secrète, politique & littéraire, ou mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des cours, des sociétés & de la littérature en France, depuis la mort de Louis XV* (London: John Adamson, 1787), vol. 1, 209 (25 February 1775). '[...] ils se sont brouillés, il y a quelque temps, & le Marquis écrivit à la belle une lettre fort dure. Il en a reçu pour toute réponse, un manche à balai dans un paquet bien cacheté, & pour suscription ces vers que Voltaire a faits pour une statue de l'amour: *Qui que tu sois, voici ton maître / Il le fut, il l'est et doit l'être.*' See also *Mémoires secrets*, vol. 7, p. 299 (26 February 1775).

Discussed in Merrick, "The Marquis de Villette and Mademoiselle de Raucourt," 348.

<sup>37</sup> On the cultural significance of Falconet's sculpture, see Satish Padiyar, "Menacing Cupid in the art of rococo," in *The triumph of Eros: art and seduction in 18th-century France*, ed. Frank Althaus and Mark Sutcliffe (London: Fontanka, 2006), 21–34.

Finding herself at the sale of Mr. Randon de Boisset the other day,  
Mademoiselle Arnoux of the Opéra doubled the starting price as soon as the  
bust of Mademoiselle Clairon was displayed. Nobody contested this  
acquisition with her, giving rise to the following Quatrain addressed to her:

While applauding you, Goddess of the Stage,  
All of Paris ceded to you the bust of Clairon,  
It recognised the rights of a Sister of Apollo  
To a portrait of Melpomene.<sup>38</sup>

Mademoiselle Clairon (1723-1803), often known simply as La Clairon, was the most famous French actress of the eighteenth century, and had trained Arnould in the art of acting at the start of her career almost two decades earlier.<sup>39</sup> An annotated auction catalogue held at the Bibliothèque Nationale confirms that a ‘bust of Mlle Clairon, life-sized, by an expert artist’ did indeed sell to ‘Mlle Arnould’ for 72 *livres*.<sup>40</sup> This was hardly an extravagant price, as testified the following day in the *Mémoires secrets*, which reported on the most expensive paintings sold at de Boisset’s auction: three Dutch works by Gerard Dou, Gerard de Lairesse and Adriaen van de Velde, which sold for 15,500, 13,000 and 20,000 *livres* respectively.<sup>41</sup> As a gesture, however, Arnould’s doubling of the starting price was a roaring success: a tribute from one great performer to another, a public acknowledgement of her teacher by a student at the height of her fame. The anonymous quatrain, penned by a friend or admirer, situates Arnould’s gesture not in the contemporary world of the theatre—associated in the press with sordid affairs and fierce rivalries—but in the world of Greek mythology, with its muses,

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<sup>38</sup> *Mémoires secrets*, vol. 10, p. 81 (20 March 1777). ‘Mlle. Arnoux de l’Opéra se trouvant l’autre jour à la vente de M. Randon [sic] de Boisset, au moment qu’on y avoit exposé le buste de Mlle. Clairon, a doublé la premiere enchere. Personne ne lui ayant contesté cette acquisition, cela a donné lieu au Quatrain suivant qu’on lui a adressé: Lorsqu’en t’applaudissant, Déesse de la Scene, / Tout Paris t’a cédé le buste de Clairon, / Il a connu les droits d’une Sœur d’Apollon / Sur un portrait de Melpomène.’ An almost identical version of the anecdote appeared in Friedrich Melchior Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique de Grimm et de Diderot depuis 1753 jusqu’en 1790*, ed. Jules-Antoine Taschereau and A. Chaudé (Paris: Furne, 1829), vol. 9, page 327 (March 1777), <https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/grimm/>; *Les Spectacles de Paris, ou calendrier historique & chronologique des théâtres*, vol. 27 (Paris: Veuve Duchesne, 1778), 49.

<sup>39</sup> Legrand, “Les débuts de Sophie Arnould à l’Opéra,” 22.

<sup>40</sup> Dacier, “La vente Sophie Arnould,” 53.

<sup>41</sup> *Mémoires secrets*, vol. 10, p. 81 (21 March 1777).

gods, and goddesses. For an actress like Arnould, never far from being decried as an *impure* or *catin* (trollop), the value of an anecdote such as this one is clear.<sup>42</sup>

Here, Arnould the performer and Arnould the collector collide. By doubling the starting price rather than bidding in the usual increments, Arnould turns the auction itself into a performance, making a personal acquisition do double duty as a public statement calculated for its *éclat*. The deliberateness of the gesture, and the likelihood that Arnould and her supporters took an active role in spreading the word about it, seems borne out in a more detailed version of the anecdote published in the *Courier de l'Europe*. More so than the version in the *Mémoires secrets*, this account stresses the merit of Arnould's action and the admiration of the crowd. Its lengthy prelude explicitly frames the anecdote in relation to Arnould's reputation:

To the Editor of the *Courier de l'Europe*,

One sees with pleasure, Sir, that among the immense variety of subjects that compose the collection of the *Courier de l'Europe*, it is with a marked repugnance that you admit pointed satire, and with distinctive readiness that you collect tales that honour humanity; you may also flatter yourself that the very people whom you perhaps fear you have offended (I am one of them) will willingly pardon you; one feels that these are sacrifices offered to *variety*, the idol of our times: one is pleased to note that if some item of harsh criticism appears in one paper, you will welcome its refutation in the following paper. It is this observation, sir, that leads me to write to you today, to give you the occasion to make a small reparation to a famous woman who was formerly treated a little lightly in one of your papers. The woman in question is Mademoiselle *Arnould*, who, finding herself at the sale of Mr. *Randon de Boisset*, doubled the auctioneer's starting price for the bust of Mademoiselle *Clairon* with her opening bid. Admiration silenced all the art lovers; one would have blushed to contest the price of sentiment with Mademoiselle Arnould; the bust was hers. It was a sort of crown awarded to her amid the applause of all those present. This moment has been commemorated by the pleasant quatrain that I send to you: [...].

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<sup>42</sup> *Mémoires secrets* vol. 9, pp. 93-94 (26 April 1776).

I am, etc.

a Debutant in the Courier.<sup>43</sup>

Extolling the virtues of Arnould's friendship and collegiality, the anonymous contributor portrays her as a woman of sentiment. The bust becomes a 'crown awarded to her amid the applause of all those present', a recognition of her own worthiness as a successor to Clairon. Arnould is explicitly not portrayed as one of the art lovers (*amateurs*), who fall respectfully silent in the recognition that her bid represents not the price of a collectible, but 'the price of sentiment'. Thus it is that even the anecdote most directly concerning Arnould's collecting depicts her not as a collector but, first and foremost, as an actress and a woman of sentiment. What makes this anecdote even more interesting is its evocation of the role that anecdote played in shaping reputations, the deliberateness with which people might seek to become the stuff of anecdote (*faire anecdote*), and the help they had in doing so. From Arnould's initial action, to the writing and circulation of the quatrain, and the writing of the letter to the editors of the *Courier de l'Europe*: the managing of a reputation through anecdote required supporters, the more the better.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> 28 March 1777, Sir Henry Bate Dudley et al., *Courier de l'Europe, gazette Anglo-Francoise*, vol. 1 (London: E. Cox, n.d.), 364–65. 'Au Rédacteur du Courier de l'Europe. *Paris 20 Mars*. Nous voyons avec plaisir, Monsieur, que dans la variété immense des objets qui composent la collection du *Courier de l'Europe*, c'est avec une répugnance marquée que vous admettez l'épigramme vive, & que c'est avec un empressement caractérisé que vous recueillez les traits qui honorent l'humanité; aussi pourrez-vous vous flatter que les personnes mêmes que vous craignez peut-être d'avoir offensées (je suis du nombre), vous pardonnent volontiers; on sent que ce sont des sacrifices offerts à la *variété*, l'idole de nos jours: on est flatté de remarquer que si quelqu'article de critique amère a paru dans une feuille, vous accueillez dans la feuille qui suit la réfutation. C'est cette remarque, monsieur, qui m'engage à vous écrire aujourd'hui, & à vous fournir l'occasion de faire une petite réparation à une femme célèbre qui jadis a été traitée un peu légèrement dans une de vos feuilles: il s'agit de Mlle. *Arnould*, qui se trouvant à la vente de Mr. *Randon de Boisset*, porta au double pour première enchère le prix mis par le crieur au buste de Mlle. *Clairon*; un sentiment d'admiration ferma la bouche à tous les amateurs; on eût rougi de disputer à Mlle. *Arnould* le prix du sentiment; le buste lui resta; ce fut une espèce de couronne qui lui fut décernée au milieu des applaudissements de toute l'assemblée. Ce moment a été consacré par l'agréable quatrain que je vous envoie: Lorsqu'en t'applaudissant, déesse de la scene, / Tout Paris t'a cédé le buste de Clairon, / Il a connu les droits d'une sœur d'Apollon / Sur un portrait de Melpomene. / Je suis, &c. Un Débutant dans le Courier.'

<sup>44</sup> The writer of *Le vol plus haut* in 1784, though by no means favourably disposed toward Arnould, did capture something of the active role of Arnould's supporters in promoting her *bons mots*: 'Dans la quantité des plaisanteries qu'elle se permet de débiter, il se rencontre quelques saillies heureuses qui font oublier les mauvaises. Les premières se recueillent par la cotterie qui se rassemble chez elles [sic], & sont publiées avec



The reasons why a woman like Arnould might go to such efforts to promote her good intentions were made abundantly clear as recently as 1964. In a catalogue entry on Houdon's portrait bust of Arnould, the art historian Louis Réau discusses Arnould's collecting and her purchase of Clairon's bust, and cannot help but speculate: 'But one has the right to ask with what intention? Perhaps to destroy it? In which case this so-called love of art would be an act of feminine vengeance.'<sup>45</sup> The power of gendered eighteenth-century narratives remained so strong in the mid-twentieth century that Arnould's femininity (together with her 'debauchery' in the form of her 'solidly established reputation as a lesbian or *tribade*') was enough to raise suspicion about her true motives for collecting. Perhaps a closer look at Arnould's collection will do more to clarify the nature of her 'so-called love of art'.<sup>46</sup>

### *Arnould the collector*

Arnould became a familiar face on the Paris auction scene. A collector of paintings, porcelain, and lacquerware, she acquired artworks at some of the century's most sensational sales. The late 1770s saw the deaths of two of the most famous collectors of the mid-eighteenth century: the financiers Blondel de Gagny (1695-1776) and Randon de Boisset (1708-1776). At their posthumous collection sales, paintings sold for astronomical prices that would not be matched again for the remainder of the century. Arnould attended and made purchases at both of these auctions. At the sale of Blondel de Gagny, which took place between December 1776 and January 1777, 'M<sup>lle</sup> Arnould de l'Opéra' purchased eight lots for a total of 3,429 *livres*: a painting of a black woman by Louis Boullogne the elder (lot 214,

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plus de complaisance que d'admiration.' François-Marie Mayeur de Saint-Paul, *Le vol plus haut, ou l'espion des principaux théâtres de la capitale* (Memphis [Paris]: Sincère, 1784), 45.

<sup>45</sup> Louis Réau, *Houdon: sa vie et son œuvre*, vol. 1 (Paris: F. de Nobele, 1964), 377 (cat. 81). 'Mais on est en droit de se demander dans quelle intention? Peut-être pour le détruire? Auquel cas ce prétendu amour de l'art serait un acte de vengeance féminine.' The vitriol in his treatment of Arnould is difficult to overstate. Réau's suggestion that Arnould purchased the bust in order to destroy it is repeated—cleansed of its less palatable overtones—in the excellent catalogue entry on Houdon's bust of Arnould in Poulet, *Jean-Antoine Houdon: Sculptor of the Enlightenment*, 100, note 20 (cat. 9).

<sup>46</sup> Réau, *Houdon*, 1:377: "ce prétendu amour d'art."

153 *livres*), two small genre pictures by a German artist named Urlaub (lots 329-30, 24.5 *livres*), a porcelain spittoon (lot 624, 8.12 *livres*), an annular dial urn clock on a gilt bronze mount (lot 722, 720 *livres*), a pair of small porcelain vases (lot 738, 18.19 *livres*), a pair of kingwood corner cabinets (lot 987, 95.19 *livres*), and most expensively at 2,410 *livres*, a Beauvais tapestry designed by Jean-Baptiste Oudry (lot 1,062).<sup>47</sup> At the sale of Randon de Boisset, as we have seen, she purchased the bust of Clairon for 72 *livres*.

By the end of 1778, on the eve of her retirement, it was Arnould's turn to sell part of her collection. As Dacier writes in his lively description of her sale catalogue,

Alas! In her relations with auction rooms, the *demoiselle* from the Opéra was to know only the pleasure of doubling a bid to the applause of onlookers. There came a time when she, in turn, had to surrender to the auctioneers, who dispersed a portion of the artworks with which she had ornamented her apartment in the rue des Petits-Champs. She had a sale—oh! a sale without publicity, a modest anonymous sale—and this small detail of her biography would doubtless remain unknown, had Gabriel de Saint-Aubin not been there once again.<sup>48</sup>

In a blurring of the boundaries that we might imagine existed between different types of collectors, her auction was double-billed with the posthumous auction of the history painter Claude-Joseph Natoire (1700-1777).<sup>49</sup> Natoire's was the working collection of an artist, testifying to his tenure as director of the French Academy in Rome with a profusion of Italian

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<sup>47</sup> See the annotated copy of the auction catalogue held by the Institut national d'histoire de l'art (INHA): Pierre Remy, *Catalogue de tableaux précieux, miniatures & gouaches, figures, bustes & vases de marbre & de bronze, armoires, commodes & effets précieux du célèbre Boule, un magnifique lustre de crystal de roche, & plusieurs autres de bronze doré, des porcelaines anciennes & modernes du plus grand choix, des pendules, feux & bras de cheminée de bronze doré, & autres objets curieux & rares qui composent le cabinet de feu M. Blondel de Gagny, trésorier-général de la Caisse des amortissements, par Pierre Remy* (Paris: Musier, 1776), <http://bibliotheque-numerique.inha.fr/idurl/1/18594>, available at <http://bibliotheque-numerique.inha.fr/idurl/1/18594>. The paintings by Urlaub are of a sailor and 'a bust of a man'. Although no buyer's name is listed for the latter (lot 330), a painting of the same subject by Urlaub appears at the sale of Arnould's collection less than two years later; it seems safe to assume that she did in fact purchase both lots at Gagny's sale. The INHA copy does not give a buyer's name for the Beauvais tapestry; Arnould's name can be found in another annotated copy held by the Philadelphia Museum of Art Library, available at <https://archive.org/details/catdeta00remy/>.

<sup>48</sup> Dacier, "La vente Sophie Arnould," 54–55.

<sup>49</sup> Alexandre-Joseph Paillet, *Catalogue des tableaux et dessins originaux des plus grands maîtres des différentes écoles; morceaux à gouasse, terres-cuites, pierres gravées & pâtes de composition, &c. qui composoient le cabinet de feu Charles Natoire, ancien Professeur & Directeur de l'Académie de France à Rome* (Paris, 1778).

works. He owned paintings by the likes of Guido Reni, Salvator Rosa, and Paolo Veronese, as well as hundreds of drawings by old masters, colleagues, and Natoire himself. Arnould's collection was appended to Natoire's forty-six-page catalogue as an anonymous fourteen-page supplement. It had been compiled by the art dealer Alexandre-Joseph Paillet, with whom Arnould might well have rubbed shoulders at previous auctions.<sup>50</sup> Like her, Paillet had attended the sale of Blondel de Gagny, as had the art dealers Mariette, Le Brun (husband of Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun), Remy, Basan, and Joullain, among others: at auction, Arnould and collectors like her mixed freely with the art establishment.

Natoire's sale had been due to take place on 14 December 1778 and the following days, immediately followed by Arnould's. However, this life event was interrupted by another when, on 19 December, Queen Marie-Antoinette gave birth to a daughter, Marie-Thérèse-Charlotte de France. The auction was pushed back and Saint-Aubin, who missed nothing, drew the auspicious birth 'on one of the flyleaves of the book he then had in his pocket': the Natoire/Arnould sale catalogue.<sup>51</sup> Whether drawn from memory or from Saint-Aubin's imagination, the sketch serves as a wonderful illustration of the interconnectedness of art-world events with the broader life of Paris. At the sale of Arnould's collection, Gabriel de Saint-Aubin was there once again to document the occasion, illustrating lots and recording the prices they fetched in the margins of his copy of the auction catalogue. Crucially, he noted down her name, pencilling in under the heading: 'de m<sup>elle</sup> arnoux remise au 30 & 31' ('of Mademoiselle Arnould, postponed until the 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>'). His inscription on the catalogue remains the unique contemporary document linking Arnould's name to the sale.

Although anonymous sales were not uncommon, we can only speculate as to the reasons for the anonymity of Arnould's sale, given the potential value of her name for

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<sup>50</sup> On Paillet's dealership, see JoLynn Edwards, "Alexandre Joseph Paillet (1743-1814): study of a Parisian art dealer" (Thesis, University of Washington, 1982).

<sup>51</sup> Dacier, "La vente Sophie Arnould," 58.

marketing purposes. Perhaps Natoire's collection was enough of a drawcard; perhaps the actress did not wish to advertise her impecunious state; perhaps everyone who was anyone knew the seller's identity already, without the need for it to appear in print—Saint-Aubin certainly knew well enough. Or perhaps Natoire's family did not want the distinguished Academician's name associated with that of such a notorious actress.

The catalogue is organised in an approximation of the usual eighteenth-century hierarchies, opening with works by sixteenth and seventeenth-century artists (a mix of history paintings, landscapes, tronies, and still lifes), followed by modern French works, modern German works, seventeenth-century Dutch works, gouaches, drawings, and prints, and finally porcelain, jasper, and lacquerware. Porcelain makes up the largest portion of the collection, followed by works on paper and paintings. Of 116 lots, fifty-four are porcelain, thirty-two are paintings, and nine are prints and drawings. Accounting for lots that include pairs or groups of works, this represents a total of thirty-six paintings and forty-seven drawings and prints. Sixteen lots are of lacquerware (including a desk and clock by Boulle), and five are of jasper.

Unfortunately, although he did sketch some of the lots, Saint-Aubin did not note any sale prices or purchasers' names for the first page and a half of the *Supplément*. This is a particular shame as these earliest-listed lots are likely to have fetched higher prices than the later the paintings lower down the hierarchy, which sold for relatively modest prices. Saint-Aubin did not start recording prices until lot 9, a large, anonymous landscape showing the flight into Egypt, which sold for 18 *livres* to Pierre-François Basan.<sup>52</sup> The highest known price—401 *livres*—was fetched by a large piece of imported lacquerware: a cabinet or *bas d'armoire* (lot 107). Made of ebony with two 'rich cartouches' of Japanese lacquer with designs of castles, leaves and birds, it was framed in gilt bronze with a top of veined white

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<sup>52</sup> Basan (1723-1797) was a print dealer, printmaker and author of the 1767 *Dictionnaire des graveurs anciens et modernes*.

marble, and friezes on the entablature, base and pilasters worked with marquetry rosettes and interlacing on a blue ground. A Japanese lacquer box (lot 101), previously in the collection of Louis-Jean Gaignat, went for 360 *livres*; in 1769, it had sold at Gaignat's posthumous sale for the princely sum of 1,100 *livres*.<sup>53</sup> By far the highest price for a painting went to a work by François Boucher, described as 'A picturesque and very pleasing landscape, with three women bathing in a river in the foreground' (lot 16) and sold to 'Champgrand' for 351 *livres*. Only a few other paintings fetched prices over 100 *livres*: A 'Negress' by Louis de Boullogne the Elder (lot 12) sold for 153 *livres*; a pair of pastoral paintings by a 'Le Clerc' (lot 15) sold for 200 *livres*; and a genre painting in the manner of Étienne Théaulon, depicting 'A young lady walking in a garden' (lot 21), sold for 100 *livres*.

Arnould's collection is fairly conventional. A mix of paintings, porcelain, and lacquerware, the sale combines a connoisseurially unobjectionable selection of paintings with large quantities of what might be written off as luxury consumption. Of course, the hierarchy between the fine and decorative arts is another gendered can of worms. But Arnould's relationship with Lauraguais suggests that this was not 'mere' consumption. Lauraguais had been the first person in France to produce hard-paste porcelain, publishing *Observations [...] sur la porcelaine* in 1766.<sup>54</sup> In this context, Arnould could hardly have avoided developing a technical and connoisseurial knowledge of porcelain. That this even needs to be said—that a

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<sup>53</sup> Pierre Remy and Simon-Philippe Poirier, *Catalogue raisonné des tableaux, groupes et figures de bronze, qui composent le Cabinet de Monsieur Gaignat, ancien secrétaire du Roi, & receveur des consignations, par Pierre Remy, et celui des porcelaines rares & anciennes, tant du Japon que de la Chine, de Saxe & de France, effets de laques, meubles précieux & bijoux, par S. Ph. Poirier, marchand* (Paris: Vente, 1762), <http://bibliotheque-numerique.inha.fr/idurl/1/18030> (lot 169). According to Dacier, Arnould is listed as the buyer of this object in an annotated copy of the catalogue ("La Vente Sophie Arnould," 53). I have been unable to identify which copy he was working from. The buyer is listed as 'Dubois' in the annotated catalogue held by the INHA, available at <https://bibliotheque-numerique.inha.fr/idurl/1/18030>. It is possible that Dubois was acting as an agent for Arnould; at Gagny's sale, a 'Dubois' is listed as purchasing lot 192 for 'Mlle St Germain ancienne danseuse à l'opéra'; see the annotated copy held by the INHA, at [http://portal.getty.edu/books/inha\\_18594](http://portal.getty.edu/books/inha_18594).

<sup>54</sup> Louis-Léon-Félicité Lauraguais, *Observations sur le mémoire de M. Guettard concernant la porcelaine: lues à l'Académie des sciences* (Paris, 1766). On Lauraguais' experiments with porcelain, see Odile Chardon, "Louis-Léon de Brancas, comte de Lauraguais et la porcelaine dure," *Revue de la Société des Amis du Musée National de Céramique* 17 (2008): 66–79.

collector might have understood what she collected (thanks to one of the men in her life, no less)—testifies to the success of the narrative constructed by eighteenth-century commentators, who established a lasting association between femininity and mindless consumption.

### *Marat / Sophie*

The Revolution found Arnould, now retired, in comparatively reduced financial circumstances.<sup>55</sup> The full extent of what remained to her at this point is unknown, but although her collecting days appear to have been over, not all of her artworks had been sold: neither the Beauvais tapestry purchased from Gagny nor the bust of Clairon purchased from Boisset were included in the auction of her collection. While it is possible that Arnould sold these off by some other means, it is equally possible that they remained in her possession. Thanks to the following anecdote, however, we can be fairly certain that as of the early 1790s she still possessed the portrait bust she had commissioned from Houdon in 1775 (fig. 12) and exhibited at the Salon that same year.<sup>56</sup>

One day, agents of the revolutionary committee of Luzarches came to her home for a visit; some called her an anti-revolutionary. ‘My friends,’ she said to them, ‘I have always been a very active citizen, and I know the rights of man by heart.’ One of the members then noticed a marble bust on a console, representing her in the role of Iphigénie; he thought that it was a bust of Marat, and, taking the priestess’s scarf for that of their leader, they left, thoroughly enlightened about the actress’s patriotism.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> According to *Arnoldiana* (which unfortunately does not cite its sources), Arnould purchased a former Franciscan monastery in Luzarches in 1790—perhaps one of the properties that the Revolutionary government had confiscated from the king and clergy. In 1795, evidently in some financial difficulty, she wrote to Belanger: ‘I am in a charming retreat which would have become a delight if I had been able to finish the renovations I had begun, but they have *demonetised* me... Citizen Cambon has, by his algebraic operations, cut my legs out from under me, so that I have a house which is only a carcase, and which awaits doors and windows until it pleases God to return me the means’; reproduced in Goncourt and Goncourt, *Sophie Arnould*, 1902, 173.

<sup>56</sup> See Poulet, *Jean-Antoine Houdon: Sculptor of the Enlightenment*, 97–100 (cat. 8). Réau, *Houdon*, 1:377, reproduces the full text of the contract between Houdon and Arnould, a rare example of a surviving document of this kind.

<sup>57</sup> Deville, *Arnoldiana*, 93–94. See appendix one, anecdote iii for the original French. A more elaborate retelling of the story can be found in Jones, “French crossings IV,” 17.

While Arnould's innuendos go right over the heads of the revolutionary agents, the sculpted bust puts on a performance of its own. The portrait (allegedly not a very good likeness) represents the actress in one of her most recognisable roles as the priestess Iphigénie about to be sacrificed, her eyes cast to the heavens in prayer.<sup>58</sup> Her hair is twisted and piled atop her head, adorned with flowers; several long curls cascade over her left shoulder, and one of her breasts is exposed by the classical drape of her garments. At a glance, the facial expression could well read as the expression of inspiration or genius so often used in portraits of writers, and very little differentiates Iphigénie's classical draperies from those worn in portrait busts of great political and literary men. On closer viewing, however, it would take a considerable degree of single-mindedness to mistake this for an image of Marat.

The revolutionary agents, seeing only what relates to revolution, see Marat where he is not, all while missing Arnould's very present image and verbal mockery. They are so intent on establishing transparency of meaning that they miss the inherent ambiguity of things. The anecdote presents them as incapable of participating fully either in speech or in art. It is not surprising that the anecdote should stress precisely this point of difference. Arnould, the actress and queen of double entendres, was fluent in the multivalence of signs and identities, capable of subtlety in the face of bluntness as well as bluntness where subtlety was expected. Acting, language, and art: these are the tools with which Arnould navigated her existence, building her reputation and influencing the perceptions of those around her. But crucially, they were playthings as well as tools, sources of enjoyment in and of themselves as well as utilitarian means to an end.

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<sup>58</sup> The bust was not widely noted when it was exhibited at the Salon of 1775 (at least in the art-critical pamphlet literature). One evaluation was voiced by the Abbé and Fanfale in *Entretiens sur l'exposition des tableaux*, 44: 'ABBÉ: [...] beautiful expression, excellent choice, a superb head. FANFALE: A bit flattering, Abbé, admit it; it's not much of a resemblance.' ('ABBÉ: [...] belle expression, excellent choix, tête superbe. FANFALE: Un peu flattée, l'Abbé, convenez-en; elle n'est pas trop ressemblante.')

The Revolution saw actors and actresses under scrutiny. The artifice of their trade, their loose morals, and their association with aristocratic lovers rendered them potentially subversive agents. Arnould was neither a zealous revolutionary nor a counter-revolutionary: like so many citizens, she adapted, describing herself as a patriot and sending two sons to fight in the Revolutionary armed forces.<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, the bust anecdote displays a certain contempt for the revolutionary agents, demonstrating Arnould's desire (and ability) to get the better of them. It toys with words and images, layering meanings and playing with ambiguity in a way that runs directly counter to the transparency demanded by the new public sphere of the Revolution. Arnould, in a typical display of wit, uses perfectly patriotic terms that nonetheless manage to double as allusions to her relationships with aristocratic men ('I know the rights of man by heart').<sup>60</sup> These were, of course, the very relationships that presumably contributed to rendering her suspect in the first place.

Up to thirty plaster copies of the bust of 'Marat' were dispersed among Arnould's admirers, many of whom who likely did not fit the mould of the virtuous revolutionary citizen.<sup>61</sup> Houdon's marble original had once played the starring role in a priapic prank by Arnould's lover, the architect François-Joseph Belanger (1744-1818). We have a single piece of marginalia to thank for the survival of this anecdote, noted down by another acquaintance coincidentally bearing the name Aubin—this time, Aubin-Louis Millin de Grandmaison (1759-1818), a writer, antiquarian, medievalist and naturalist. Millin, evidently acquainted with Arnould during her lifetime, purchased and annotated a copy of Albéric Deville's

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<sup>59</sup> See Dumoulin, "Sophie Arnould, mère de famille."

<sup>60</sup> In a testament to the malleability of anecdotes, an earlier version of this joke—not attributed to Arnould—can be found in Albéric Deville's anthology of Revolutionary anecdotes, where it relates to 'certain women' who had been reproached for not wearing cockades (see appendix one, anecdote iii, note 5). Whether or not Arnould was one of these women, the joke's reappearance in the context of Arnould's bust shows the ease with which anecdotes can be reattributed and recombined in different contexts.

<sup>61</sup> Only two copies survive today; see Poulet, *Jean-Antoine Houdon: Sculptor of the Enlightenment*, 101–3 (cat. 9).



*Arnoldiana*, a collection of Arnould's witticisms published in 1813, eleven years after her death.<sup>62</sup> As Millin recalls,

Her name day was always celebrated on the feast of Saint Mary Magdalene.<sup>63</sup> I remember having addressed verses to her in this name at one of these celebrations. Belanger had a magician come who boasted that he could make the marble bust of Sophie disappear. In fact, he diverted attention for a moment, and the bust found itself, at a certain point, replaced by a large, winged phallus on two legs, which had been taken, he said, from the Museum of Florence.<sup>64</sup>

Millin's anecdote provides a diverting glimpse into the life of a portrait after its transition from the public exhibition space of the Salon to a position in pride of place in the home of its sitter. Perhaps Belanger, like the members of the Revolutionary committee, thought the portrait a rather mannish likeness. Perhaps, replacing a symbol of Arnould's success as an actress with one of her success as a courtesan, he was making a rather more pointed joke at her expense. Perhaps, at an occasion in celebration of Arnould, he simply felt that a party trick substituting a phallus for a prized portrait of the hostess would be the most effective source of comic shock value. If nothing else, Belanger's joke suggests a certain libertine compatibility of spirit between himself and his mistress and friend. The sculpture's serial identities (Arnould / Iphigénie / Marat / phallus), as recounted in some of the many anecdotes swirling around Arnould, point to the multiplicity of roles the artwork played, at different times and in different contexts, in the life of its sitter, owner, and primary viewer.

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<sup>62</sup> His annotated copy was acquired by the Goncourt brothers, who quote from his marginalia in the 1902 re-edition of their monograph on Arnould. Goncourt and Goncourt, *Sophie Arnould*, 1902, 137.

<sup>63</sup> This feast takes place on 22 July. Arnould's full name was Madeleine-Sophie, hence the connection to Mary Magdalene.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Goncourt and Goncourt, *Sophie Arnould*, 1902, 81–82. 'Sa fête se faisait cependant toujours le jour de la Madeleine. Je me rappelle lui avoir adressé des vers, sous ce nom, à une de ces fêtes. Belanger fit venir un escamoteur qui se vanta d'escamoter le buste en marbre de Sophie. En effet, il détourna un moment l'attention, et le buste se trouva, à un moment, remplacé par un grand priape à deux pattes, et ailé, qu'on avait, disait-il, tiré du Musée de Florence.' Millin's birthday verses do not appear to have survived; see appendix 1, anecdote ii for a quatrain dedicated to Arnould's bust portrait by André de Murville.

*From anecdote to history*

There can be few things more tantalising (and more fanciful) for a historian than the prospect of listening in on past conversations. However futile it may be, the urge to know what was really said, what really happened—what people were really *like*—was as powerful in the eighteenth century as it is today. No literary form caters more completely to these desires than the anecdote. Characterised above all by their pursuit of the *piquant*, anecdotes purport to open closed doors, permitting glimpses of a different, glittering reality in which human vice, goodness, and wit all appear in heightened form.

Of course, anecdotes are not the windows onto human nature that they often claim to be. The events and conversations they recount have uncertain moorings in reality. In some cases, the events recounted in an anecdote will be no more real than the fictive conversations ‘reported’ by Salon critics in part one of this thesis. They are nonetheless valuable historical resources, if not as repositories of facts, then as repositories of values—how else to explain the tendency of even the most rigorously debunked anecdotes to persist? As Pierre Rétat puts it in his study of anecdote in the *Mémoires secrets*, ‘two essential traits distinguish anecdote from simple fact: it must be striking and rare, [and] it supposes news gleaned among connoisseurs, in the exclusive circles of court and city.’<sup>65</sup> It is ‘the liberty, the ambiguity of the genre of the anecdote which make up its success, at the limits of a noncanonical history, surrendered to the dangerous excesses of the unverifiable and of fiction, but also finding there its powers of seduction.’<sup>66</sup> To borrow, slightly out of context, from Jeffrey Merrick, ‘These sources do not tell us the whole truth and nothing but the truth about these people, but they do allow us to hear voices that have been largely ignored since the eighteenth century.’<sup>67</sup> The product of a complex chain of authorship involving actual speech, eyewitness accounts,

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<sup>65</sup> Rétat, “L’anecdote dans les Mémoires secrets,” 62.

<sup>66</sup> Rétat, “L’anecdote dans les Mémoires secrets,” 67.

<sup>67</sup> Jeffrey Merrick, *Order and disorder under the Ancien Régime* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), x.

hearsay, and outright fabrication, anecdotes belong to the realm of the unverifiable in which the voice of the raconteur is inextricable from the speech and self-fashioning of the subject. Blurring the lines between public and private speech, and between the written and spoken word, anecdotes represent a mode of public reception that lay outside the bounds of art criticism, and which operated according to very different notions of what was and was not worthy of committing to posterity.<sup>68</sup>

By all the standards of eighteenth-century connoisseurship, Arnould's jibes are clear examples of the *wrong* way to talk about art, privileging notoriety over propriety, performativity over authenticity, personality over artistry, and *esprit* over gravitas. In the eyes of art critics and other defenders of public taste, anyone speaking publicly in this way demonstrated their lack of both scruples and understanding. Women were among the most frequently invoked transgressors in the debates on taste and luxury of the Old Regime. Their collecting was often characterised as shallow fashion-following or blind consumption, and their taste as a weakening influence on the production and appreciation of art. But Arnould was, by all accounts, well-educated and highly intelligent. Her collecting testifies to an interest in art that was rendered no less genuine by her enthusiasm for jokes—however indecorous—at others' expense. Arnould, who navigated her existence at once at the centre of public attention and at the margins of respectable society, and whose collection and utterances are better documented than most, provides us with a fascinating glimpse of one woman's navigation of difference in genre, gender, and sexuality in a way that resists categorisation in the neat moral binaries constructed by eighteenth-century commentators.

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<sup>68</sup> Nies, "Zeit-Zeichen: Gattungsbildung in der Revolutionsperiode und ihre Konsequenzen für die Literatur- und Geschichtswissenschaft"; Lüsebrink, "Semi-Oralität: zur literaturwissenschaftlichen Tragweite einer provokativen Kategorie"; Lüsebrink, "L'espace public semi-oral dans les Mémoires secrets."

Chapter four:  
Henriette-Louise Dionis (1751-1835): in conversation with the Greuze girl

Early in 1777, a young woman identifying herself only as Mademoiselle D\*\*\*\*\* published a slim but luxurious volume of pastoral works, titled *Origine des Grâces* ('Origin of the Graces').<sup>1</sup> According to the 'Avis de l'éditeur', the author was just eighteen years old when she composed the title poem.<sup>2</sup> The book's one hundred and twenty-odd pages contain a dozen works of prose poetry: the title poem, in five cantos, accounts for half the length of the volume, followed by a selection of shorter works. All are set in an idyllic pastoral world, populated by Venus, Cupid, Graces, doves, nymphs, shepherds, and shepherdesses, described with a deceptive, jewel-like simplicity. Most interestingly for the purposes of this thesis, two of the short works in the collection respond to individual works of art. 'La cruche cassée, conte sur un tableau de M. Greuze' ('The broken pitcher, story about a painting by Mr. Greuze') reimagines Greuze's famed allegory of lost virginity in a tender and melancholy fable, while the final poem in the collection, 'À Monsieur C[ochin]', narrativises the frontispiece designed by Charles-Nicolas Cochin, representing the author on Mount Parnassus.<sup>3</sup> These responses reveal an imaginative viewer steeped in the mythology of Antiquity and the culture of *sensibilité*. I would like to consider them as examples of an alternative and acceptably 'feminine' mode of writing about art: a mode that is literary rather than an art-critical, spanning poetry, fable, and allegory.

Though Mademoiselle D\*\*\*\*\* attached her gender, youth, and civil status to the *Origine des Grâces*, she withheld her name—at least in public. Her authorship seems to have been well known in her extended social circle, for she was named twice in the

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<sup>1</sup> Dionis, *Origine des Grâces*.

<sup>2</sup> Dionis, *Origine des Grâces*, iii.

<sup>3</sup> A third poem, 'À Émilie, fille de M. \*\*\*, Peintre de l'Académie' ('To Émilie, daughter of M. \*\*\*, Painter of the Académie'), heralds the beautiful young Émilie as a future painter and breaker of hearts. See appendix two, excerpt i.

*Correspondance littéraire* as ‘Mademoiselle Dionis’: first in a congratulatory letter from Voltaire, to whom she had sent a copy of her book, and later in a literary anecdote set in her garden.<sup>4</sup> It was simply as ‘Mademoiselle Dionis’ that she entered biographical dictionaries and library catalogues in the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the author’s full name was Henriette-Louise Dionis (30 August 1751-17 November 1835), daughter of Charles Dionis, *docteur régent* at the Faculté de Médecine de Paris, and his second wife, Henriette-Magdeleine Besnier.<sup>6</sup> Charles Dionis died just months before the publication of *Origine des*

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<sup>4</sup> The *Correspondance littéraire* mentions ‘Mademoiselle Dionis’ twice in 1778, both times as the author of *Origine des Grâces*. In April 1778, the *Correspondance* reproduced a letter from Voltaire ‘to mademoiselle Dionis, who had sent him her work titled: *L’Origine des Grâces*’. In June 1778, Dionis appears in a rather charming anecdote: ‘There is, in the garden of Mademoiselle Dionis, the author of the poem on the *Origin of the Graces*, a little raised copse on a hill that she calls her Parnassus. Having shown this lately to Monsieur Lemierre, people pressed him to make an inscription for it, without giving him a moment to think about it. He immediately composed the two verses that follow: Graces and talents live in this enclosure / And Parnassus here belongs to Paphos.’ (‘Il y a dans le jardin de mademoiselle Dionis, l’auteur du poëme sur l’*Origine des Grâces*, un petit bosquet élevé sur une monticule qu’elle appelle son Parnasse. L’ayant montré ces jours passés à M. Lemierre, on le pressa d’en faire l’inscription, sans lui laisser une minute pour y rêver. Il fit sur-le-champ les deux vers que voici. Les grâces, les talens habitent cet enclos, / Et le Parnasse ici relève de Paphos.’) Parnassus was Apollo’s dominion; Paphos was Aphrodite’s. See Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique de Grimm et de Diderot depuis 1753 jusqu’en 1790*, vol. 10, p. 31 (Voltaire’s letter), 57 (Lemierre’s anecdote).

<sup>5</sup> Fortunée Briquet, “Mademoiselle Dionis,” in *Dictionnaire historique, littéraire et bibliographique des Françaises, et des étrangères naturalisées en France: connues par leurs écrits ou par la protection qu’elles ont accordée aux gens de lettres, depuis l’établissement de la monarchie jusqu’à nos jours* (Paris: Treuttel & Würtz, 1804); Rabbe, Vieilh de Boisjolin, and Sainte-Preuve, eds., “Mlle Dionis,” in *Biographie universelle et portative des contemporains: ou dictionnaire historique des hommes vivants et des hommes morts depuis 1788 jusqu’à nos jours, qui se sont fait remarquer par leurs écrits, leurs actions, leurs talent, leurs vertus ou leurs crimes* (Chez l’éditeur, rue du colombier, 21, 1836), vol. 2, 1381–1382.

<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to Guillaume Pot and Maryse Calbet for sharing their research on the Dionis family, whose members have researched their genealogy since the nineteenth century. In particular, I must thank Pot and Calbet for sharing a copy of a two-page manuscript in Calbet’s possession, written by Emmanuel Dionis du Séjour (1839-1912), laying out the case for Henriette-Louise Dionis’s authorship of *Origine des Grâces*. According to the document, titled ‘Louise Henriette Dionis, fille de Charles Dionis et de Madeleine Besnier, épouse de Louis Antoine Mousset de Laboulet, auteur de *l’Origine des Grâces*’: ‘In 1777 there were no living members of the Dionis family except the six daughters of Charles Dionis’ (‘Il n’y avait de vivantes en 1777 dans les deux branches de la famille Dionis que les six filles de Charles Dionis’). The author must therefore be one of these six women. Charles Dionis (1710-1776) had two daughters by his first wife, Marie-Françoise Andry (1709-c.1748): Marie-Françoise (1736-1821) and Marie-Jeanne (1739-1819), and four daughters by his second wife, Henriette-Magdeleine Besnier (1730-1810): Henriette-Louise (1751-1835), Marie-Anne-Rose (c. 1761-1778), Charlotte-Louise-Félicité (1757-1807), and Marie-Sophie (d. 1774). Of the six daughters—one of whom, Marie-Sophie, had in fact died before 1777—Henriette-Louise emerges as the author thanks to a passage transcribed from the genealogical papers of Emmanuel’s uncle, colonel Adolphe Dionis, which refers to ‘M<sup>elle</sup> Dionis, my cousin, author of a prose poem titled *L’Origine des Grâces*, died at an advanced age on 19 November 1835’ (‘M<sup>elle</sup> Dionis ma cousine, auteur d’un poëme en prose intitulé *L’Origine des Grâces*, morte dans un âge avancé le 19 novembre 1835’). The date of death given here points to Henriette-Louise Dionis, who died on 17 November 1835 at the age of eighty-four. For the Dionis family tree, see Guillaume Pot, “Henriette Louise Dionis,” Geneanet, accessed February 1, 2021, <https://gw.geneanet.org/potpaul?lang=fr&pz=guillaume+marie+claud&nz=pot&p=henriette+louise&n=dionis>.

*Grâces* in 1777, survived by his wife and five daughters, including Henriette-Louise. Though not a high-profile figure, she was seemingly well connected in literary circles: the two references to her in the *Correspondance littéraire* suggest social links to the playwright Jean-François de La Harpe and the poet and playwright Antoine-Marin Lemierre.<sup>7</sup> Despite this, and despite the positive reception of *Origine des Grâces*, Dionis appears never to have published again, and she and her writing slipped into obscurity.

Insofar as Dionis's book has been remembered by bibliophiles, its poems have been largely overshadowed by Cochin's illustrations. One 1888 re-edition opens with a biographical note, not on Dionis—of whom 'Nothing appears to be known'—but on Cochin, to whose illustrations 'this clever little imitation of the Greek pastorals owes much of its interest.'<sup>8</sup> Christian Michel, in a 1987 catalogue of Cochin's illustrations for the book trade, confidently dismissed the *Origine des Grâces* in a single sentence: 'This insipid, mythological-gallant idyll of a young girl of eighteen draws its value from Cochin's illustrations'.<sup>9</sup> Michel posits a relationship between text and illustration that is parasitic rather than mutually sustaining, with the hand of the male artist giving life to the young girl's words with no possibility of reciprocation. The reference here to authorship by 'a young girl of eighteen' serves both as a curiosity and as evidence for the work's lack of substance. I question whether such a one-sided premise can be sustained. Rather than treating Dionis's writing as a passive muse for the creative powers of a male artist (Cochin), I ask instead how Dionis, an artist in her own right, reworked both Cochin and Greuze.

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<sup>7</sup> See note 4 above.

<sup>8</sup> Henriette-Louise Dionis, *The origin of the Graces by Mlle Dionis Duséjour, with illustrations by Cochin* (London: Vizetelly & Co., 1888), 5. Numerous re-editions and library catalogues list the author's name as Mademoiselle Dionis du Séjour or Duséjour. Maryse Calbet, genealogist and archivist of the Dionis family, has clarified that this is an error: the Dionis du Séjours were cousins of Henriette-Louise Dionis's branch of the family, which had not been ennobled and did not bear the additional name 'du Séjour'. Email to the author, February 5, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Christian Michel, *Charles-Nicolas Cochin et le livre illustré au XVIIIe siècle* (Geneva & Paris: Droz, Champion, 1987), no. 164: 'la fade idylle mythologico-galante d'une jeune fille de 18 ans.'

Dionis's book was positively received at the time of publication, earning praise from both Voltaire and La Harpe.<sup>10</sup> The *Journal des dames*, following their tradition of promoting the work of women, heralded the collection as follows:

This pleasing collection of erotic pieces is enriched with charming prints, designed by Monsieur Cochin the Younger and engraved by Monsieur de Saint-Aubin, two artists distinguished by their talents and their successes. I do not doubt that the public will welcome a production which all the arts have clamoured to embellish, and which unites the warmth of sentiment with the charm of sensuality.<sup>11</sup>

The book gained its author small but appreciative entries in some of the many biographical dictionaries published after the turn of the nineteenth century. In 1804, Dionis was among the 564 women included in Fortunée Briquet's *Dictionnaire historique, littéraire et bibliographique des Françaises* ('Historical, literary, and bibliographical dictionary of Frenchwomen'). Briquet, born five years after the publication of the *Origine des Grâces* and celebrated, like Dionis, as a girl prodigy, wrote of Dionis's prose poems: 'One may regard some as Anacreontic odes, and others as idylls that Gessner would not disavow. They are all characterised by their delicacy of expression and freshness of colour'.<sup>12</sup>

Dionis's writing has received little attention from either literary historians or art historians. Its art-historical relevance was first brought to attention in 2012 in the invaluable *Plumes et pinceaux* anthology, which reproduces the full text of 'La cruche cassée' as excerpted in the *Journal des dames*.<sup>13</sup> A footnote to Emma Barker's 2012 essay, 'Reading the Greuze girl', cites 'La cruche cassée' as 'a further example of a female response' to the trope

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<sup>10</sup> For Voltaire's praise, see note 4. Jean-François de La Harpe, *Œuvres de La Harpe, de l'Académie Française, accompagnées d'une notice sur sa vie et sur ses ouvrages*, vol. 11 (Paris: Verdrière, 1820), 17.

<sup>11</sup> Reproduced in Lafont et al., *Plumes et pinceaux — anthologie*, "Mme de Montanclos, Journal des dames, 1774-1777 [extraits choisis]: 'La cruche cassée'", 17-19. 'Cette agréable collection de pièces érotiques est enrichie d'estampes charmantes, dessinées par M. Cochin le fils et gravées par M. de Saint-Aubin, deux artistes distingués par leurs talents et leurs succès. Je ne doute pas que le public n'accueille une production que tous les arts se sont empressés d'embellir et qui réunit la chaleur du sentiment au charme de la volupté.'

<sup>12</sup> Briquet, "Dictionnaire historique, littéraire et bibliographique des Françaises," 119–20.

<sup>13</sup> See note 426.

of the Greuze girl.<sup>14</sup> Picking up where these references left off, I consider Dionis's responses to artworks in detail, asking how these texts approach the vexed questions of female pleasure, female viewership, and female authorship.

The book treads a complex path around the subject of pleasure, sensuality, and eroticism. The mythological pastoral, with its fixation on ideal love, its simultaneous evocation and evasion of the pleasures of the flesh—especially when rendered in the printed words rather than in the alluring palette of a Boucher—is easily dismissed today as no more than bloodless artifice (not unlike Marie-Antoinette play-acting at being a shepherdess at the Hameau de la Reine). But for Dionis, a young woman from a respectable family, the very act of writing about love, and especially of publishing that writing, represented a potential threat to her virtue. The introduction to *Origine des Grâces* grapples with these issues:

This little Work is the first attempt of a young person who was only eighteen when she composed it. A Man of Letters, having read the 'Idylle des Colombes', dedicated the 'Épître à Péristère' to her, to which the 'Origine des Grâces' was the response. I have found in it a delicacy, a meticulousness of expression which are nonetheless always natural; a singular resourcefulness of invention, which never comes at the expense of the intelligence of its organisation; & I thought it would be an act of theft to deprive the public of this charming production. The Author would never have thought to publish it: all her Writings were devoted to friendship and gratitude. The colour of Voluptuousness, the language of Love, that were impossible to avoid in speaking of Venus and the Graces, at first made the Author hesitate to give free reign to her genius. But doesn't the reading of poets, and plays, suffice to teach a lively spirit, a sensitive soul, the theory of a passion of which a virtuous heart recognises the danger? This was the objection that was made to the young Author of the *Origine des Grâces*; & this is what determined her to allow me to have her Work published.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Barker, "Reading the Greuze girl," 119, note 94. *Origine des Grâces* is also mentioned in a footnote in Fabienne Moore's study of eighteenth-century prose poetry, as an example of 'Pastoral narratives in prose, at the crossroads between poetry and the novel'. See Moore, *Prose poems of the French Enlightenment: delimiting genre* (Ashgate, 2009), 120, note 47.

<sup>15</sup> Dionis, *Origine des Grâces*, iii–iv. 'Ce petit Ouvrage est le coup d'essai d'une jeune personne, qui n'avait que dix huit ans lorsqu'elle le composa. Un Homme de Lettres ayant lu l'Idylle des Colombes, lui dédia l'Épître à Peristere, dont l'Origine des Graces fut la réponse. J'y ai trouvé une délicatesse, une recherche d'expressions qui sont cependant toujours naturelles; une ressource singuliere dans l'invention, qui n'est jamais aux dépens de la sagesse du plan: & j'ai pensé que ce serait faire un larcin au Public, de le priver de cette charmante production. L'Auteur n'aurait jamais pensé à la faire paraître: tous ses Ecrits furent consacrés à l'amitié & à la reconnaissance. Le coloris de la Volupté, le langage de l'Amour, qu'il était impossible d'éviter en parlant de Vénus & des Graces, firent d'abord balancer l'Auteur à donner carrière à son génie. Mais la lecture des poètes, & les pieces de théâtre ne suffisent-elles pas pour donner à un esprit vif, à une ame sensible, la théorie d'une



The author must justify her writing at every stage: her purpose in writing at all (for the sake of ‘friendship and gratitude’), her subject matter (the sensuality which it was ‘impossible to avoid’), and the eventual publication of her work. In the name of modesty, she must not desire renown, publishing only out of a sense of duty so as not to commit ‘an act of theft’ against the public. In the name of decency, she must be reluctant to publish, acting not of her own volition but giving in to the will of another—persuaded by the anonymous, male-coded editor to overcome her qualms and share her work with a public in need of it (just as in love, the role of the virtuous woman was to resist while that of the man was to overcome resistance).<sup>16</sup> The writer of the ‘Avis de l’éditeur’ portrays Dionis as relenting only when persuaded that poetry is simply ‘the theory of a passion of which a virtuous heart recognises the danger’—a form of mastery over passion (forewarned is forearmed) rather than an enticement to it. As if to stress the importance of this interpretation, *culs-de-lampe* at the end of some chapters bear the attributes of geometry, with the legend: ‘TEORIE’ (fig. 13). Theory without the possibility of practice was, it would seem, the only suitable approach for the young woman writer of love poems.

It is impossible to know the extent to which this foreword represents Dionis’s feelings on the subject. The decision to publish had evidently been made by 1774, when Cochin began work on the illustrations.<sup>17</sup> Assuming the editor is correct in stating that Dionis was eighteen when she composed the title poem, that would date its composition to between 1769 and 1770—leaving a four-year wait between the date of writing and the move to publish. Was this

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passion dont un cœur vertueux reconnaît le danger? Ce fut l’objection que l’on fit à la jeune Auteur de l’Origine des Grâces; & c’est ce qui l’a déterminée à me permettre de faire paraître son Ouvrage.

<sup>16</sup> Some library catalogues attribute the ‘Avis de l’éditeur’ to the writer Jean-François Marmontel (1723-1799). I have been unable to trace the source of this attribution. Marmontel is, however, referenced in Dionis’s response to Cochin’s frontispiece; see appendix 2, excerpt i.

<sup>17</sup> The first of the book’s five illustrations (not counting the frontispiece) is signed and dated 1774; the rest are dated 1776. The shorter texts in the collection are not discussed in the preface and are undated. The only securely dateable short text is an allegory presented to the comte d’Artois (the future Charles X) on the occasion of his marriage, which took place in November of 1773, when Dionis was twenty-two. She was twenty-five at the start of 1777, when *Origine des Grâces* was published.

a sign of hesitancy? The fact that Dionis seemingly never published again lends credence to this possibility. However, the very existence of Voltaire's letter to Dionis, thanking her for her poems—a correspondence that she had initiated—suggests a willingness to promote herself and a desire to be recognised for her work. One thing is certain: it was important above all that she *appear* modestly reluctant to publish.

Such was the necessity of this qualification that it seeped into the telling of Dionis's very biography. One anonymous early-nineteenth-century biographer, praising her work for its 'freshness, delicacy and naturalness', picked up her editor's words verbatim:

One would have difficulty imagining that a young person could so well have expressed the language of love, so well have drawn voluptuous pictures, if the reading of poets and the attendance of performances were not enough to give to a lively spirit, to a sensitive soul, the theory of a passion of which a virtuous heart recognises the danger.<sup>18</sup>

Having reprised this apparently indispensable explanation, the biographer continues:

It would have been quite singular if, after the encouragements and accolades given to her by the journals of the time, M<sup>lle</sup> Dionis had ended the career in which she had débüté in such a brilliant manner. We have in truth been unable to discover the title of any [other] works by her; but since she remained unmarried all her life, and since she has always spent, and still spends (as of August 1827), her nights reading and writing, and since she is almost invisible by day, we cannot but believe that so many available moments have been usefully employed in [writing] diverse compositions which the modesty of the author has not permitted her to publish, or perhaps in writing memoirs which will appear only after her death. Although we have waited in vain for the information we requested from her in writing on this matter, we nonetheless felt a duty to repair an oversight of our predecessors, in devoting an article to her in this *Biography*.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Rabbe, Boisjolin, and Sainte-Preuve, "Biographie universelle et portative des contemporains," 1382. 'On aurait peine à s'imaginer qu'une jeune personne ait si bien exprimé le langage de l'amour, si bien dessiné des tableaux voluptueux, si la lecture des poètes et la fréquentation des spectacles ne suffisaient pas pour donner à un esprit vif, à une ame sensible, la théorie d'une passion dont un cœur vertueux reconnaît le danger.'

<sup>19</sup> Rabbe, Boisjolin, and Sainte-Preuve, "Biographie universelle et portative des contemporains." 'Il serait assez singulier qu'après les encouragements et les éloges que lui donnèrent les journaux du temps, M<sup>lle</sup> Dionis se fût arrêtée dans la carrière où elle avait débuté d'une manière si brillante. Nous n'avons pu découvrir véritablement les titres d'aucun de ses ouvrages; mais comme elle a gardé le célibat toute sa vie, qu'elle a toujours passé, et qu'elle passe encore (août 1827), les nuits à lire et à écrire, et qu'elle est presque invisible le jour, nous ne pouvons croire que tant de moments disponibles n'aient été utilement employés à diverses compositions, que la modestie de l'auteur ne lui a pas permis de publier, ou peut-être à écrire des mémoires qui ne paraîtront qu'après sa mort. Quoique nous ayons vainement attendu les renseignements que nous lui avons demandés par écrit à ce

Dionis had in fact been married on 17 September 1793 to Louis-Antoine Mousset de la Boulaye, and just as quickly divorced on 28 November 1794.<sup>20</sup> If it is easy to see how such a brief marriage might have escaped the notice of a biographer (even one writing while their subject was still alive), it is also interesting to note the narrative use to which they put the author's supposed spinsterhood. The picture they paint is of a woman writer married to her work, permanently eschewing the reality of love in exchange for a hermit-like, 'almost invisible' existence, and the freedom to write about ideal love. The 'Avis de l'éditeur', the 1827 biography, and Dionis's writing itself all testify to the fact that, for a woman writer, it was acceptable to write about the theoretical, the universal, and the classical aspects of love, but not the practical, specific, or contemporary. This was the context in which Dionis composed 'La cruche cassée' and 'À M. C[ochin]', as an author seemingly acutely aware of the way her gender shaped what, and how, she could rightly write.

### *The broken pitcher*

[David's *The oath of the Horatii*] is truly a painting 'purified of pleasure', having 'wipe[d] out all trace of dependence on the mother's body'.<sup>21</sup> Jean-Baptiste Greuze's *The broken pitcher* is ideological kin to the David. In a shallow space a girl gazes vaguely out at someone to whom she makes appeal. She is presented in what seems like calculated disarray. Her soft, half-exposed breast beckons; her nervous fingers curl around cut blossoms which she clutches to her genitals; her damaged pitcher exposes its gaping hole; a sculpted lion spits out an uninterrupted stream of water. The viewer is a very specifically gendered man.

—Eunice Lipton, "Women, pleasure, and painting (e.g., Boucher)"<sup>22</sup>

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sujet, nous avons cru devoir toutefois réparer un oubli de nos devanciers, en lui consacrant un article dans cette *Biographie*.'

<sup>20</sup> See Pot, "Henriette Louise Dionis."

<sup>21</sup> Lipton is citing from Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), "About Chinese women," 149, 150.

<sup>22</sup> Lipton, "Women, pleasure, and painting (e.g., Boucher)," 77–79.

... the cultural significance of the Greuze girl resides in the implied relationship with a quasi-paternal spectator, who disavows his own desire for the girl while nevertheless enjoying an eroticized intimacy with her.

—Emma Barker, ‘Reading the Greuze girl: the daughter’s  
seduction’,<sup>23</sup>

Few paintings of the eighteenth century have been more discussed as objects of the male gaze than Jean-Baptiste Greuze’s notoriously eroticised paintings of adolescent girls. The precise nature of the relationship of between the Greuze girl and her spectator has been intensively discussed, always assuming that the spectator is male—and often, more specifically, that he is Diderot, conversing at the Salon of 1765 with Greuze’s *Girl with a dead canary* to elicit the true cause of her sadness.<sup>24</sup> Diderot’s description of the *Girl with a dead canary* is a masterpiece of art criticism and sentimental literature alike. Diderot’s standing as an art critic, combined with the passage’s quality as a work of literature, and its particularly analytical attention to the painting—looking through its ostensible subject (the loss of a bird) to its ‘true’ subject (the loss of virginity)—have turned his text into a ‘key’ of sorts to the interpretation of all Greuze girls.

However, as Emma Barker has noted, not all of Diderot’s contemporaries saw the Greuze girl in quite the same way. Even Diderot wrote that the meaning of the painting as he saw it was ‘so subtle that many people didn’t understand it; they thought the young girl was only mourning her canary’.<sup>25</sup> If, for Diderot, the girl and her bird served a symbolic purpose, for many others it was ‘a transparent sign’, a touching representation of an emotion. In the words of Diderot’s contemporary, Mathon de la Cour: ‘Connoisseurs, women, fops, pedants, the learned, the ignorant and the foolish, all the spectators are in agreement over this painting.

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<sup>23</sup> Barker, “Reading the Greuze girl,” 89.

<sup>24</sup> Greuze, *Girl with a dead canary*, 1765 (Edinburgh: National Gallery of Scotland); see Diderot, *Salons*, vol. 2, pp. 145–149.

<sup>25</sup> Diderot, *Salons*, vol. 2, p. 147. ‘Le sujet de ce petit poëme est si fin, que beaucoup de personnes ne l’ont pas entendu; ils ont cru que cette jeune fille ne pleuroit que son serin.’

One thinks that one is seeing nature, one shares the grief of this girl, one wishes to console her'.<sup>26</sup> In other words, the sexual symbolism of the Greuze girl was more or less present, and meant subtly different things, to different viewers. '[R]ather than taking for granted that *Girl with a dead canary* is "about" the loss of virginity', Barker argues for 'a more nuanced and better historicized interpretation [...], one that attends to the different ways in which contemporary spectators [...] made sense of the painting and appropriated it to their own purposes.'<sup>27</sup>

Barker's reading of the painting as encouraging an eroticised 'quasi-paternal' relationship between viewer and painting is persuasive. But among all this discussion of male viewers, I would like to pause to consider how women 'made sense of' the Greuze girl. For these paintings did appeal to women, who looked at, collected, and wrote about them. What could female spectators see in paintings that may now appear to hold charms only for the most prurient male eyes? Diderot's imagined conversation with the *Girl with a dead canary* brings the painting to life in so striking a manner that he continues to dominate our perception of what the archetypal Greuze viewer looks like: an older man motivated at once by voyeurism and sentiment, desire and paternal concern, both pitying the poor girl's state and half-wishing he were the cause of it. If, as both Barker and Lipton suggest, this is the primary viewing relationship suggested by the painting, how did women in the eighteenth century access the trope of the Greuze girl?

In her fable 'La cruche cassée', Dionis chose to address the most famous of all Greuze girls, that sweetly suggestive allegory of lost virginity: *La cruche cassée* (the painting will henceforth be referred to by its English title, *The broken pitcher*, to distinguish it from

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<sup>26</sup> Charles-Joseph Mathon de La Cour, *Troisième lettre à Monsieur \*\* sur les peintures, les sculptures, & les gravures, exposées au Sallon du Louvre en 1765* (Paris: Houry, 1765), 5. 'Les connoisseurs, les femmes, les petits-maîtres, les pédans, les gens d'esprit, les ignorans & les sots, tous les spectateurs sont d'accord sur ce Tableau. On croit voir la nature: on partage la douleur de cette fille: on voudroit la consoler.' Quoted in Barker, "Reading the Greuze girl," 94.

<sup>27</sup> Barker, "Reading the Greuze girl," 111, 87–88.

Dionis's text).<sup>28</sup> This painting had in fact been purchased (and possibly commissioned) by a woman: Louis XV's mistress, Madame Du Barry. During her time as *maîtresse-en-titre*, Du Barry hung her private apartments at Louveciennes with works by Drouais and Greuze depicting children and adolescents. Alongside *The broken pitcher*, her collection of Greuzes included the *Garçon en habit rayé jouant avec un chien* ('Boy in a striped suit playing with a dog'), the *Jeune enfant qui joue avec un chien* ('Child playing with a dog'), and a reduced version of *L'Offrande à l'amour* ('Votive offering to Cupid')—depictions of childhood and youth without the paedophilic undertone that renders works like *The broken pitcher* so unpalatable to modern eyes.<sup>29</sup> And yet when Du Barry sold her Greuzes to pay off her debts in 1777, she kept only one: *The broken pitcher*. Why keep the one painting seemingly most explicitly geared toward the male gaze? We cannot know what exactly Du Barry saw in *The broken pitcher*, but the simple fact of her choice suggests the possibility of finding other ways into the picture—another kind of relationship with the Greuze girl.

*The broken pitcher* was not publicly exhibited in painted form, for Greuze completed it in 1771, during his long period of self-imposed exile from the Salon which lasted from 1769 to 1800.<sup>30</sup> It is not impossible (though it must remain entirely speculative) that Dionis saw the painting in Greuze's studio before it was sent to Du Barry. However, it seems more likely that her *conte* was based not on the original painting, but on the printed reproduction executed by Jean Massard in 1773 (fig. 10), and dedicated, as we have seen, to Sophie Arnould.

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<sup>28</sup> Greuze, *La cruche cassée*, 1771, Paris: Louvre.

<sup>29</sup> On Du Barry's collection of paintings, see Marie-Catherine Sahut, "Le goût de Madame Du Barry pour la peinture," in *Madame Du Barry de Versailles à Louveciennes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), 106–16, and catalogue no. 27, 175–76. Interestingly, as Sahut notes, Du Barry owned none of Greuze's wildly popular multi-figure genre paintings (107). For a fuller discussion of Greuze's *Child playing with a dog*, see Emma Barker, "Imaging childhood in eighteenth-century France: Greuze's *Little girl with a dog*," *The Art Bulletin* 91, no. 4 (2009): 426–45.

<sup>30</sup> Greuze held a public exhibition to compete with the official Salon in October and September of 1777, during which a copy of *The broken pitcher* (executed for the marquis de Véri) was displayed in his studio. Given the publication date of the *Origine des Grâces* in early 1777, this rules out the possibility that Dionis's account was based on this later version of the painting. See *Madame Du Barry*, 177.

Dionis's 'La cruche cassée'—except in its full title—is not interested in the artwork as an artwork. The text does not concern itself with its qualities of brushwork or engraving, composition, modelling, or the fall of light, exploring instead the picture's moral and emotional implications. In this sense, as in many others, Dionis's text serves as a remarkable counterpoint to Diderot's conversation with the *Girl with a dead canary*, its differences of both genre and gender providing us with an alternative way of reading at the figure of the Greuze girl. The 'conversation' in this chapter's title describes two different things. First, it refers to the textual 'conversation' I establish between the writings of Dionis and Diderot. Second, it refers to conversations within the narratives they construct, taking different forms in each writer's work. I will examine the very different ways in which conversation and narrative voice function in these two texts to position the reader/viewer in relation to the Greuze girl. What role did gendered differences play in the ways that Diderot and Dionis wrote—in different genres and for different purposes—about two very similar paintings by the same artist? Ultimately, I wish to consider 'La cruche cassée', quite simply, as Emma Barker has suggested: as an 'example of a female response' to the pictorial type of the Greuze girl. At just three hundred words in length, the fable bears quoting in full:

'Young girl, learn not to swear to anything; and above all do not say: I will never break my pitcher. You make me tremble,' said mother Jeanne to the young Alix, 'you make me tremble every time I see you leave with your pitcher: take great care, my daughter, nothing is so fragile.' 'Do not fear, my good mother,' said Alix naïvely, 'I will not break my pitcher'; and off she went.

'If only the young knew!' the old woman continued ... 'I still remember the day when I broke mine, although it was so many years ago. On that day, Thérèse broke hers and Simonette too. How many broken pitchers there are in the world! And this child thinks to preserve her own; always dancing, always jumping, now on one foot, now on the other. See how she runs. Alix, Alix, look after the pitcher.' And indeed, Alix in the meadow was leaping like a young lamb. Having arrived at the fountain, she filled her pitcher, and, placing it on her head, walked gaily to the tune of a song. The sound of her voice brought a thousand birds rushing to her, for Alix was entering a wood: but if there are birds in the woods, there are also Shepherds. Lucas knew that Alix would be passing this way; and as she frolicked, there he appeared. Alix

wanted to flee, lost her footing. ‘Alix, Alix’, mother Jeanne cried from afar, ‘the pitcher, the fool! [*la cruche, le cruche!*] Ah! cruel Lucas!’ ... Alix gets up, but her bodice, flexible to the beating of her heart, betrays its agitation. A crumpled bouquet, a disarrayed fichu, dishevelled hair, and above all Alix’s astonishment: all would announce that the pitcher is broken, even if the cracked vase that she holds in her arms did not prove her misfortune.<sup>31</sup>

From its opening lines, Dionis’s text evokes the ambivalence of Greuze’s paintings, their state of simultaneous innocence and loss of innocence. Whereas Diderot begins with a lingering physical description of the girl in the painting, Dionis opens straight away with a line of dialogue which serves as both a moral and a warning: ‘Young girl, learn not to swear to anything; and above all do not say: I will never break my pitcher’. Jeanne’s spoken warning launches us into a present where the pitcher has not yet broken, while at the same time binding us to a future where its breaking is inevitable. Like the oracles of classical mythology, she presents a present moving inexorably toward a predestined fate, so that the breaking of the pitcher has, in a sense, already happened. Nothing can stop it. But the fatal flaw of the usual classical hero—hubris—is here replaced with the naivety of the young Alix, who earnestly but futilely reassures her mother of the possibility of a different outcome. The story thus begins in the same state of tension in which the Greuze girl exists, caught between present and future, naivety and understanding, innocence and loss of

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<sup>31</sup> Dionis, ‘La cruche cassée’, in *Origine des Grâces*, 103-104. The following text, taken from the original book, differs slightly in places from the version excerpted the *Journal des dames* and subsequently in *Plumes et pinceaux*: ‘Jeune fillette, apprenez à ne jurer de rien; & sur-tout ne dites point: Je ne casserai jamais ma cruche. Tu me fais trembler, disoit mere Jeanne à la jeune Alix, tu me fais trembler toutes les fois que je te vois partir avec ta cruche: prens bien garde ma fille, rien n’est si fragile. Ne craignez rien, ma bonne mere, dit naïvement Alix, je ne casserai point ma cruche; & la voilà partie. Si jeunesse savoit! continue la vielle.... Je me souviens encore du jour que je cassai la mienne, il y a pourtant bien des années. Ce jour-là, Thérèse cassa la sienne & Simonette aussi. Que de cruches cassées dans le monde! & cet enfant croit conserver la sienne; toujours dansant, toujours sautant, tantôt sur un pied, puis sur l’autre. Voyez comme elle court. Alix, Alix, gare la cruche. Effectivement Alix dans la prairie bondissait comme un jeune agneau. Arrivée à la fontaine, elle remplit sa cruche, & la posant sur sa tête, elle marche gaiement en suivant la mesure d’une chanson. Les accens de sa voix font accourir mille oiseaux, car Alix entrait dans un bois: mais s’il est des oiseaux dans les bois, il est aussi des Bergers. Lucas savait qu’Alix devait passer par-là; & tandis qu’elle folâtre, le voici qui paraît. Alix veut fuir, le pied lui manque. Alix, Alix, criait de loin mere Jeanne, la cruche, le cruche. Ah! le méchant Lucas! ... Alix se relève, mais un corset flexible au battement de son cœur, en trahit l’agitation. Un bouquet effeuillé, un fichu dérangé, des cheveux en désordre, & sur-tout l’étonnement d’Alix, tout dirait que la cruche est cassée, quand le vase fêlé qu’elle tient à son bras ne prouverait pas son malheur.’



innocence. As the narrative unfolds, we are led through time to the final image of the artwork, rather than being led across its painted or printed surface. As a work of ekphrasis, Dionis's text is nonetheless sensitive, evoking the mood of the painting through a narrative culminating in a devastatingly efficient verbal sketch. In this final vignette, time and narrative come to a halt. The mood of Greuze's painting is evoked through a few significant details, leaving the reader steeped in its unresolved sense of loss.

Diderot's approach to the painting is quite different, paying lavish attention to the pictorial qualities of the girl's depiction—though interestingly, he begins his description with a reference to the very poet Dionis was most often compared to: 'The pretty elegy! The pretty poem! The beautiful idyll that Gessner would make of it! It's a vignette from one of his poems.'<sup>32</sup> After an extended description of the painting, Diderot pays tribute to its painterly and emotional realism by entering into conversation with the Greuze girl in an effort to console her, working backwards and forwards in time to construct the events leading up to, and following, the girl's current troubled state. He describes her seduction by a tender young lover while her mother was out, the lover's departure when her mother returned, his happiness, the girl's grief and fear of betrayal, her distracted neglect of the bird, its death. But Diderot is certain that all is not lost: her lover will prove faithful, returning to restore the respectability and self-respect that have been put at risk by the loss of her virginity, and all will be well. He responds to the painting—or rather, to the scenario he has imagined—by seeking to resolve its tensions. Dionis, on the other hand, resolves nothing, situating the young Alix in an endlessly repeating struggle between the preservation and loss of virginity.

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<sup>32</sup> Diderot, *Salons*, vol. 2, p. 145. 'La jolie élégie! le joli poème! la belle idylle que Gessner en feroit! C'est la vignette d'un morceau de ce poète.'

Both Dionis's and Diderot's girls, once they have 'fallen', cannot speak for themselves but must be 'read' by the author, who decodes her face, clothing, and body for evidence of what has happened. In subtly different ways, the girl's silence—her inability to utter what has happened to her—is central to both texts. Dionis's Alix speaks only once, to her mother, uttering an earnest statement that we already know will be proved untrue: 'Do not fear, my good mother, I will not break my pitcher'. It is only her mother who speaks later ('Ah! cruel Lucas!'); in our final image of Alix, she says nothing: her bouquet, her fichu, her hair, her expression 'announce' what has befallen her. Diderot, faced with the silence of the 1765 painting, tells the Greuze girl her own story, speaking for her—probing, speculating, reassuring: 'There, little one, open your heart to me: tell me the truth; is it really the death of this bird that withdraws you so deeply and so sadly into yourself?... You lower your eyes; you do not answer me.'<sup>33</sup> He alternates between talking to her and describing her for the reader's enjoyment: '*délicieux! délicieux!*'<sup>34</sup> The girl speaks directly only three times, each time to ask the narrator a question: 'And my bird?' 'And my mother?' 'And what if the death of the bird was only an omen? What would I do? What would become of me? If he were ungrateful...'.<sup>35</sup> Her uncertainty about her experience is such that she must seek explanation from her viewer and interlocutor. Faced with the ambiguity of Greuze's painting, any certainty rests with the viewer, who holds the key to unlocking its meaning. The narrator serves as an intermediary between the reader and the girl—a stranger relaying her story to more strangers. The young girl's sadness remains external to us. Though emotionally implicated, we remain observers and interpreters; her fall is a spectacle.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Diderot, *Salons*, 145. 'Ça, petite, ouvrez-moi votre cœur: parlez-moi vrai; est-ce bien la mort de cet oiseau qui vous retire si fortement et si tristement en vous-même?... Vous baissez les yeux; vous ne me répondez pas.'

<sup>34</sup> Diderot, *Salons*, 145.

<sup>35</sup> Diderot, *Salons*, 146–47. 'Et mon oiseau?' 'Et ma mère?' 'Et si la mort de cet oiseau n'étoit que le présage! que ferois-je? que deviendrois-je? S'il étoit ingrat...'

<sup>36</sup> This runs counter to Fried's interpretation of Diderot's text as emblematic of the theme of absorption in eighteenth-century painting. Compared to Dionis's text, the theatrical elements of Diderot's treatment of the Greuze girl become more apparent. Michael Fried, *Absorption and theatricality: painting and beholder in the age of Diderot* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1980), 59.

By contrast, in ‘La cruche cassée’, Jeanne’s opening appeal to her daughter—‘Young girl’—also reads as a direct appeal to the reader, placing us in the position of the daughter. We are to read the text with, or as, Alix: her fate and ours become interchangeable, with the moral of her tale assumed to apply equally to us. Dionis centres a network of women: its two speaking characters, Jeanne and Alix, its author, and its reader. In anticipation of her daughter’s impending misfortune, Jeanne turns to the past, remembering the day when she, Thérèse, and Simonette all (as if interchangeable) broke their pitchers. This is not only the story of her and Alix, but the endlessly repeating story of women always and everywhere: ‘How many broken pitchers there are in the world!’ Jeanne does not intervene because it would be pointless, watching from a distance while Alix, ‘leaping like a young lamb’, singing without a care, remains oblivious to what awaits her. The intergenerational conflict between mothers and daughters in so many tales of lost virginity—the failure of moral guidance, the sneaking around, the scolding—has no place here, for it is not lack of virtue but the simple innocence of youth that dooms girls to the eternal breaking of pitchers. Indeed, the fable assigns no blame whatsoever to any of the women it names. In Diderot’s account, the absent mother is held almost as responsible as the seducer for her daughter’s situation, for by leaving her daughter alone in the house she created the conditions under which seduction was possible.<sup>37</sup> For Dionis, on the other hand, women lack agency of any kind. However Jeanne may have tried to warn Alix, there was never a chance of its having any effect. However much Alix may have wanted to flee, there was never any chance of escape. Her women are the helpless victims of fate and men (‘Ah! cruel Lucas!’), unable to intervene in their moral downfall, and by the same token absolved of responsibility for it.

This rather nightmarish scenario is presented with the same simple clarity as every other text in Dionis’s book, lending it an air of sweet, elegiac melancholy. Ultimately, the

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<sup>37</sup> Diderot, *Salons*, vol. 2, p. 146.

body of poor Alix becomes the monument to its own loss, as the author lingers over the signs of her misfortune: the beating of her heart, her bouquet, her fichu, her hair, and ‘above all’ her look of astonishment. The tightly focused verbal sketch of Greuze’s *Broken pitcher* presents the girl for our enjoyment, just as the painting does, with the prettiness of the picture providing some consolation for the loss it represents. Only here, after the worst has already happened, do we really see Alix. In this final moment, the description of Alix’s body—a catalogue of brokenness—provides an affecting personification of both the grief and the voluptuousness to be found in the impossibility of preserving innocence. Dionis, a young woman and an author, balancing the desire to publish with the requirements of modesty, the desire for anonymity with the desire for recognition, and the desire to write about love with the desire to write about virtue, was navigating territory analogous, though not identical, to that of the Greuze girl, perched eternally and precariously on the threshold of innocence and knowledge (or, paradoxically, embodying both qualities at once).

‘La cruche cassée’ is strikingly different in tone from the other texts in *Origine des Grâces*. Its setting and plot recall others in the book, but the way it is framed sets it apart from any other one of Dionis’s poems. The rest of the collection presents seduction as both a source of danger and a source of pleasure; it is the tension between these two extremes that provides much of the book’s eroticism. The prose poem ‘Le lever de l’Aurore’ (‘The rising of Aurora’) describes incidents almost identical to what happened to Alix—but instead of grief and alarm, its tone is one of pure voluptuousness:

[H]ow to express the ravishment of the Universe at the return of the kind Aurora? The little birds celebrate her with their songs, waking the shepherds.... a moment favourable to voluptuousness. Corine had braved Hilas under the heat of the Sun, she fled from him in the evening.... He surprises her gathering flowers at the rising of Aurora.... it is done, Hilas is victorious.

Timid Lise dared not go alone into the meadow. ‘The shepherds are asleep’, she says. ‘Let us pay tribute to Aurora.’ She follows a path through the greenery, a fountain stops her.... the silvery water invites her to bathe. Lise in the fountain

looks like one of Diana's nymphs; she delights in considering her features repeated in the limpid crystal, and has not seen Mizire who has followed her from afar. He approaches—where to flee? There is not even a reed in the fountain.

Aurora smiles at the pleasures of the shepherdesses [...].<sup>38</sup>

'Le lever de l'Aurore' shares the emphasis of 'La cruche cassée' on female passivity: the shepherdesses, like Alix, are caught unawares, unable to flee. But in this case, their futile resistance is simply part of the game of love: a way to avoid moral culpability for their seduction while heightening the pleasure of anticipation. The shepherds may be portrayed as 'victorious', but the 'pleasures' of seduction belong to the shepherdesses.

It is thus in the tone of 'La cruche cassée' that we can locate the effect of the painting on Dionis as a viewer, for this aspect of her writing is specific to her response to Greuze. In the end Dionis, like Greuze, leaves us with a representation of the female body as an entirely passive object, not unlike the pitcher: an empty vessel carried blindly towards its fate by the actions of others. The text evokes a fatalistic acceptance of women's lot without offering any hope of, or wish for, either pleasure or change. A meditation on the poignancy of adolescence, it grieves not only for the loss of virginity but also for the loss of childhood. For the carefree young Alix ('always dancing, always jumping'), having known only her mother and the birds, the discovery of sexual difference (to her 'astonishment' and 'misfortune') presents as a traumatic rupture.

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<sup>38</sup> Dionis, *Origine des Grâces*, 96. 'Mais comment exprimer le ravissement de l'Univers au retour de l'aimable Aurore ? Les petits oiseaux le célébrant par leurs chants, éveillent les bergers..... moment favorable à la volupté. Corine a bravé Hilas pendant la chaleur du Soleil, elle l'a fui le soir.... Il la surprend cueillant des fleurs au lever de l'Aurore.... c'en est fait, Hilas est vainqueur.

La timide Lise n'osait aller seule dans la prairie. Les bergers dorment, dit-elle; allons rendre hommage à l'Aurore; elle suit un sentier de verdure, une fontaine l'arrête.... l'eau argentée l'engage à se baigner. Lise dans la fontaine a l'air d'une Nymphé de Diane; elle se plaît à considérer ses traits répétés dans le crystal limpide, & n'a point vu Mizire qui l'a suivi de loin. Il approche, où fuir? Il n'est pas même un roseau dans la fontaine. L'Aurore sourit aux plaisirs des bergeres [...].'

*'À Monsieur Cochin'*

*Origine des Grâces* both opens and closes with Cochin's frontispiece (fig. 14). With a pleasing symmetry, the collection begins with Cochin's illustrated interpretation of Dionis's writing and ends with Dionis's written interpretation of Cochin's illustration. Cochin's allegorical frontispiece for *Origine des Grâces*, engraved by Augustin de Saint-Aubin, was exhibited at the Salon of 1777.<sup>39</sup> It depicts the young author in classical dress, playing the lyre on Mount Parnassus under the benevolent gaze of Apollo and Venus, whose draperies are possessed of their own skyward gravitational pull. She is surrounded by the nine Muses and the three Graces, who reach out adoringly to crown her with flowers while Cupid drapes a garland across her skirt. Loose curls fall down her shoulders; a simple tunic leaves her breast bare, covered only, as if by chance, by her arm bending to pluck the lyre. While her lovely, sandalled feet stand on firm ground, all about her is divine light, pillowy flesh, and voluptuous cloud. Even by Cochin's standards, the frontispiece is exceptionally fine, perfectly capturing the gentle eroticism of Dionis's writing.

Dionis's response pays tribute to Cochin as his frontispiece pays tribute to her: 'À M. C...., Secrétaire de l'Académie Royale de Peinture & Sculpture, à l'occasion d'un dessin servant de frontispice à cet ouvrage, qu'il a dédié à l'auteur représenté sur le Parnasse' ('To Mr. C[ochin], secretary of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, on the occasion of a drawing serving as frontispiece to this work, which he has dedicated to the author represented on Mount Parnassus').<sup>40</sup> Like 'La cruche cassée', the text approaches the image that inspired it not through a physical description, but through a description of the events leading up to it. Like 'La cruche cassée', it opens with an imperative statement addressed

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<sup>39</sup> It was listed simply as 'An allegorical frontispiece' in the Guiffrey, *Collection des livrets des anciennes expositions depuis 1673 jusqu'en 1800*, vol. 5, no. 303. Cochin also designed five illustrations for the title poem, engraved by Jean-Baptiste Simonet, François-Denis Née, Louis-Joseph Masquelier, Nicolas Delaunay and Jacques Aliamet. See Michel, *Charles-Nicolas Cochin et le livre illustré*, no. 164.

<sup>40</sup> Dionis, *Origine des Grâces*, 108–11. The text is reproduced and translated in full in appendix two, excerpt i.

both to the reader and to the characters in the story: ‘While our flocks graze the flowery grass, let us sit, Shepherdesses, in the shade of these willows: I will tell you how I was taken to Parnassus.’ But there the similarities end. Whereas ‘La cruche cassée’ describes a feminine coming of age in claustrophobic, inescapable terms, ‘À M. C[ochin]’ celebrates the author’s poetic coming of age as a joyous process.

Gone is the modest hesitancy of the ‘Avis de l’éditeur’: in celebrating Cochin’s celebration of herself, the author, in the guise of a shepherdess, now readily lays claim to the poetic distinction afforded her in the frontispiece. As if granted permission by Cochin’s allegorical depiction of her, Dionis’s ‘homage to [Cochin’s] talents’ does double duty as an homage to her own talents. ‘I have always loved poetry’, she writes, describing her progression from honouring religion to nature to love. ‘I praised Cupid to protect myself from his arrows [...] yes, I fear Cupid, but I know nonetheless that he can make us happy.’ She sings of Dibutades (likewise inspired by Cupid), and of Cochin, when her song is interrupted by the arrival of Cochin himself ‘coming out of the woods [...]: the fire that shone in his eyes, and the simplicity of his dress, told me that he was an Artist.’ Praising Dionis’s ‘taste for the Arts’, Cochin leads her to the top of Mount Parnassus via the path of Nature, where they are greeted by the Muses. Cochin himself removes ‘the crown he had received from the Graces’ to give instead to Dionis. ‘[Y]ou may cede it to her’, cry the Muses: ‘your pencil suffices to engrave your name in the Temple of Memory.’

‘À M. C[ochin]’ typifies a view of the arts common under the Old Regime. The prose poem was not needed to clarify the meaning of Cochin’s frontispiece, which is a relatively straightforward allegory composed of common and easily identifiable motifs. Rather, Dionis’s response suggests the motivation of ‘friendship and gratitude’ referred to in the ‘Avis de l’éditeur’. Having been paid homage to by a fellow artist, she accepts and returns the favour, accepting the crown from Cochin in return for inscribing his name ‘in the Temple of

Memory.’ Almost all the works in the *Origine des Grâces* are dedicated to friends and patrons, evincing the centrality of social and professional connections to Dionis’s writing. The title poem was a response to a ‘Letter to Péristère’ addressed to Dionis by an anonymous ‘man of letters’, which was in turn a response to Dionis’s earlier work, ‘Doves, to Madame de \*\*\*, canoness’; only three texts in the collection are not dedicated to somebody.<sup>41</sup> The exchange of engraved and textual ‘portraits’ between Dionis and Cochin calls to mind Hannah Williams’s research on the exchange of portraits among artists of the Académie.<sup>42</sup> Contrary to Christian Michel’s contention that *Origine des Grâces* ‘draws its value from Cochin’s illustrations’, Dionis’s closing text asserts its place in an economy of reciprocity, where both personal connections and artistic reputations are strengthened by the arts’ mutual support of each other.

What hope I have signalled here is that there is much more at stake in writing about art than connoisseurship, formal analysis, or proto-modernist attention to the specificities of paint and canvas. This seems an uncontroversial statement—a truism even, given the number of studies of the eighteenth century alone that address art criticism as an explicitly social and political

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<sup>41</sup> ‘M. de \*\*\* à l’auteur. A Peristere, redevenue la plus belle des nymphes, après avoir été la plus belle des colombes’ (‘Mr. de \*\*\* to the author. To Péristère, turned back into the most beautiful of nymphs after having been the most beautiful of doves’, ix-xi), an anonymous response to Dionis’s ‘Les Colombes, à Madame de \*\*\*, chanoinesse’ (v-viii). A complete list of the dedicated texts in *Origine des Grâces*: ‘Mars, allégorie présentée à Monseigneur le comte d’Artois, à son mariage’ (‘Mars, allegory presented to His Highness the comte d’Artois, on his marriage’), 71-76; ‘Le bienfait rendu, conte moral, à Madame la Comtesse de C\*\*\*’ (‘The good deed returned, moral story, to Madame the comtesse de C\*\*\*’), 77-87; ‘Au filet d’Elise, dédié à Madame de \*\*\*, chanoinesse’ (‘To Élise’s net, dedicated to Madame de \*\*\*, canoness’), 88-90; ‘À Emilie, fille de M. \*\*\*, Peintre de l’Académie’ (‘To Émilie, daughter of Mr. \*\*\*, painter of the Académie’, 98-99), ‘Sacrifice d’une nymphe à Vénus, à M. de \*\*\*’ (‘Sacrifice of a nymph to Venus, to Mr. de \*\*\*’), 100-102; ‘Rose & Zéphir, à Rosette, sur la naissance de son fils’ (‘Rose and Zéphir, to Rosette, on the birth of her son’), 105-107; ‘À M. C[ochin], Secrétaire de l’Académie Royale de Peinture & Sculpture, à l’occasion d’un dessin servant de frontispice à cet ouvrage, qu’il a dédié à l’auteur représenté sur le Parnasse’ (‘To Mr. C[ochin], secretary of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, on the occasion of a drawing serving as frontispiece to this work, which he has dedicated to the author represented on Mount Parnassus’), 108-111. The undedicated texts are ‘Les souvenirs d’Aline’ (‘The memories of Aline’), 91-94; ‘Le lever de l’Aurore’ (‘The waking of Aurora’), 95-97; and ‘La cruche cassée’.

<sup>42</sup> Williams, ‘Academic intimacies’; Hannah Williams, *Académie Royale: a history in portraits* (Routledge, 2017).



form. Nevertheless, the mark of quality in art writing often remains the degree to which it treats art *as art*. Writing that does not satisfy this requirement is presumed to stray too far from the pictorial source material to be of much use: this goes for the serious efforts of writers like Dionis as well as for the lighter works of the satirical critics. For women like Dionis, who published only once, and what is more, in a genre almost totally foreign to the modern reader, interest is less forthcoming, in some ways more so now that her genre of poetry is so profoundly out of fashion than in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Yet her adoption of the classicising pastoral mode, and her self-allegorising as a shepherdess, can be interpreted as a retreat from the criticisms levelled at modern women into the comparative safety of ideal womanhood. In order to write as a woman, Dionis fashioned a literary persona exemplifying the feminine paradigm laid out by her contemporaries; her work attests to the space for expression that existed for women writers even with in the restrictions of this paradigm.

## Conclusion

Women played a far greater role in the development of the Old Regime art public than has previously been recognised. The rehabilitation of pamphlet art criticism as a worthwhile object of study has rested largely on its role in the development of the masculine bourgeois public sphere. While it is taken for granted that women made up a substantial proportion of the physical Salon public, they are little more than an afterthought in histories of that public's emergence as a discursive entity. In fact, women were an active part of the discursive art public, and their participation was one of the most urgent issues to which the art-critical literature addressed itself.

The 1770s and 1780s were a prolific, formative, and polarised time in the history of art criticism: a time when the Salon had cemented itself as a landmark of the Parisian calendar, and when art criticism, still unsure of itself but rapidly gaining momentum, sought legitimacy in the delegitimisation of modern women, who were attaining unprecedented levels of prominence as both artists and members of the viewing public. Their visibility piqued pre-existing angst about the undue influence of female patrons of the arts, and as art critics continued to yearn for the masculine greatness of Antiquity and Louis XIV, the anti-rococo and anti-feminine backlash that had begun in the 1740s flourished anew in the narrative art criticism of the prerevolutionary decades. The genre's conventions of connoisseurship were by this time ripe for subversion: after years of character assassination by the Académie and other critics, art-critical authority was difficult to establish. Rather than open themselves up to attack by laying claim to authority, art critics began to efface themselves from their work, replacing themselves with a flood of fictional proxies: women, foreigners, members of the middle and working classes, and non-experts of all kinds. These characters became the mouthpieces of art criticism, onto whom its anxieties about connoisseurship and cultural authority could be displaced.

Interestingly, in a convergence of marginal voices, art critics also adopted for themselves some of the conventions associated with the female authorial voice. In the prefaces to their pamphlets, critics drew on many of the strategies of self-minimisation often found in the work of women authors. With a mixture of genuine and affected concern, they emphasise the inconsequentiality of what they have written, the modesty of their aims, their ineptness to the task at hand, and their reluctance to publish. Art criticism sought to minimise the threat it posed as an expression of public opinion by claiming to be less than it was—in a context where ‘less than’ often meant ‘feminine’.

In some respects, the arts were regarded as a natural domain of women, whose feminine virtues—beauty, grace, emotion, imagination—were thought to grant them an affinity for aesthetic matters. This made the female voice, when properly mediated, an ideal art-critical tool. The virtuous, fictional female Salon-goer was uniquely positioned to soften the perceived indelicacy of public criticism: her innate, intuitive taste and kind-heartedness made for an ingratiating contrast with the stereotype of the arrogant and pedantic art critic. The words *mediated* and *fictional* are key. The ideal woman was, by definition, fictional: the very act of taking up the pen and seeking to narrate her own story would open her up to even more accusations of arrogance than those that dogged other art critics. Her usefulness lay in the fact that she was not really an art critic at all. She was a conversationalist, an interested participant in dialogue with her friends and companions, a social rather than a public figure whose words come to be published through no choice of her own. The personal, social setting of her critiques renders appropriate what would be indecorous in a public setting and sidesteps the need for female characters to impinge on the masculine prerogative to consciously command public authority.

Art criticism served its rhetorical needs by satirical as well as ideal means. The blame that could be diffused through the use of ideal female voices was attracted to satirical

characters like flies to honey. The most outrageous insults could be rationalised if put into the mouths of women of whom a text explicitly disapproved; in these cases, the joke was on the speaker as much as on the artist whose work was being maligned. Where idealised female characters were appealing, fair, and modest, satirical ones were laughable, brash, and out of place. The decorous sociability that forms one of the ideal woman's chief virtues transforms into an *indecorous* obtrusion in the hands of the satirised woman. Her friends, far from serving as intermediaries between her and the public, are proof of her vanity as she uses the Salon as yet another opportunity to show off to them; her commentaries drip with ignorance and gossip. History painting is entirely beyond her comprehension.

Ideal and satirical depictions of women at the Salon were two sides of the same coin. It was in large part through them that prerevolutionary art critics built sexual difference into the foundations of the genre, defining their work through and in opposition to 'female' voices. By insisting on fictional women's conformity to uniquely feminine virtues and vices, and by privileging the ventriloquised voices of fictional women over those of women themselves, art critics reinforced powerful archetypes that real women would have to contend with, whether as artists, art critics, viewers, or *amateurs* of art.

Although the sheer quantity of the pamphlet literature has meant that masculine voices predominate in this thesis, I thought it vital to outline the conventions that women discussed art within, despite, and against. In part two, focused on female authorship, I have deliberately chosen to focus on two women who were *not* art critics in any traditional sense, but whose responses to art are no less interesting and no less deserving of study as a result. Nor are they merely marginal to the history of art criticism, for just as members of the Salon audience consumed art criticism, art critics consumed other forms of art commentary produced by and about women. Critics were exposed to the words and works of women both as readers and as members of Paris's extended social, literary, and artistic networks—from

the prestigious salons of Madame Geoffrin to the anonymous precariat of the literary underground. This was, among other things, how Henriette-Louise Dionis's response to Greuze came to be excerpted in the *Journal des dames* under the editorship of Mathon de La Cour, who had published two works of art criticism in the 1760s; how a *bon mot* from Sophie Arnould made its way into a Salon review in the *Mémoires secrets*; and how gossip about Arnould's love life came to feature in the correspondence of Diderot.<sup>1</sup> I do not stress these examples to exaggerate the individual impact of either of these two women on the art-critical literature, nor to suggest that their importance rests on their links to art criticism 'proper'. Both Arnould's anecdotes and Dionis's prose—two individual instances of what are doubtless broader historical phenomena—stand on their own as singular contributions to the history of the reception of art. But they are also emblematic of art criticism's implication in a wider economy of artistic commentary, in which women participated more publicly than has been recognised.

I was drawn to Sophie Arnould precisely because she appeared, at first glance, to embody all the worst masculine imaginings about the female art viewer: a libertine whose *bons mots* contravened all the rules of art-critical and feminine decency, implicating art in the Parisian economy of sex and gossip while lacking any meaningful engagement with aesthetics. Yet analysis of Arnould's art collection reveals an interest in art that extended far beyond the jokes and cursory judgements reported in the anecdotes about her. Far from demarcating the full extent of Arnould's capacity to appreciate art, the anecdotes indicate a reality ignored by Old Regime art critics: the possibility of the coexistence of different modes of art viewership that were context-dependent: in this case, one private and poorly

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<sup>1</sup> It is also how, by happy coincidence, I found that the names of the two women at the heart of this thesis were already linked in history, with Arnould's name inscribed on the engraved reproduction of the very artwork Dionis had chosen to write about.

documented, except in the surviving inventory of Arnould's collection, and one public and well-documented, serving as a strategy of sociability, self-promotion, and sheer amusement.

By contrast, Henriette-Louise Dionis all too easily fell from public view precisely because she *did* write in accordance with the feminine ideals of her time. Her prose does not engage with artworks critically but imaginatively, sentimentally, and panegyrically, rendering her work respectable (unlike Arnould's) but nonetheless marginal to 'real' artistic discourse. Her writing eschews politics and modernity for Antiquity and the timeless pastoral setting of the 'agreeable subjects'. But her short prose pieces stand as superbly crafted responses to the works of Greuze and Cochin, giving insight into eighteenth-century *sensibilité* and spectatorial pleasure from a perspective that is acutely aware of its own difference.

Both Arnould and Dionis can help us reimagine the contexts in which art was received and commented upon. I am confident that more women's voices remain to be discovered in the vast artistic literature of the Old Regime, from masculine imaginings of the female voice in any number of histories, biographies, and compilations, to the more dispersed, but nonetheless present, traces of women's words in the periodical and manuscript press and in poems, novels, correspondences, moral, educational, and religious works. Our understanding of women's history, and of art history, can only benefit from the continued expansion of the range of voices that we bring within its purview. Throughout the prerevolutionary decades, women played a vital part both in public artistic discourse and in art-critical imaginings of the public. This thesis looks to the margins of an already marginal literature, centring female voices in a genre where they have too long been muted. Not only does this permit us a better view of the history of women's art viewership, but it also reframes the Salon as a locus of Old Regime sociability as well as of the emerging modern public sphere—two spheres of reception that were deeply implicated with one another, and whose attempted separation remained contested and incomplete.

## Appendix one: Arnould on art in *Arnoldiana*

This appendix translates and reproduces the *bons mots* about art attributed to Sophie Arnould in Albéric Deville's compilation *Arnoldiana*, published in 1813 (eleven years after the actress's death). The anecdotes present some difficulties: apart from the problems of attribution they raise and their slipperiness as sources of historical evidence, Deville provides no citations and only occasionally gives dates. I have, however, been able to trace a small number of the anecdotes below to contemporary textual sources. Nevertheless, when treated with care, the texts that follow form a valuable corpus. Edited and compiled during the First French Empire, and drawn from, or at the very least set in, the Parisian demi-monde of the 1760s, 1770s, 1780s, and 1790s, these anecdotes have much to tell us about the circulation and reception of artworks in theatrical and libertine circles, and about how these circles were remembered in the post-revolutionary period.

Page numbers in parentheses refer to Albéric Deville, *Arnoldiana, ou Sophie Arnould et ses contemporaines: recueil choisi d'anecdotes piquantes, de réparties et de bons mots de Mlle. Arnould* (Paris: Gerard, 1813), 194–95. Anecdotes are reproduced in the order in which they appear in that text. I have carried on Deville's use of the upper case to signal puns. Deville's sources are indicated in footnotes wherever known, as are glosses on the text. See chapter three of this thesis for anecdotes not included in *Arnoldiana*.

- i. Finding herself at the sale of Mr. Randon de Boisset, she [Arnould] doubled the auctioneer's starting price for the bust of Mademoiselle Clairon with her opening bid. Admiration silenced all the art lovers; one would have blushed to contest the price of sentiment with Mademoiselle Arnould; the bust was hers. It was a sort of crown awarded to her amid the applause of all those present, and this moment has been

commemorated by the following quatrain sent to her immediately afterward by an anonymous writer:

While applauding you, Goddess of the Stage,  
All of Paris ceded to you the bust of Clairon,  
It recognised the rights of a Sister of Apollo  
To a portrait of Melpomene.<sup>1</sup>

*Se trouvant à la vente de M. Randon de Boisset, elle porta au double pour première enchère le prix mis par le crieur au buste de M<sup>lle</sup> Clairon. L'admiration ferma la bouche à tous les amateurs; on eût rougi de disputer à M<sup>lle</sup> Arnould le prix du sentiment; le buste lui resta. Ce fut une espèce de couronne qui lui fut décernée au milieu des applaudissemens de toute l'assemblée, et ce moment a été consacré par le quatrain suivant, qu'un anonime lui envoya sur-le-champ:*

*Lorsqu'en t'applaudissant, déesse de la scène,  
Tout Paris t'a cédé le buste de Clairon,  
Il a connu les droits d'une sœur d'Apollon  
Sur un portrait de Melpomène. (83)*

- ii. A. M. [André de Murville], while vying for the Academic prize,<sup>2</sup> ceaselessly produced madrigals in honour of Mesdemoiselles Arnould, mother and daughter; here are some verses he intended for the base of the bust of Sophie:

This bust enchants us; ah, flee, my friends,  
Flee! What perils one faces near its model!  
I have never seen a man admitted into her presence  
Who did not enter inconstant and leave faithful.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This anecdote spread widely: contemporary versions of the anecdote appeared in the *Mémoires secrets*, vol. 10, p. 81 (20 March 1777); Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire*, vol. 9, p. 327 (March 1777); *Les Spectacles de Paris*, vol. 27, p. 49 (1778); and Dudley et al., *Courier de l'Europe*, vol. 1, pp. 364–65 (28 March 1777). See chapter three ('The bust of Clairon') for the full text(s) of the anecdote as reported in the *Mémoires secrets* and the *Courier de l'Europe*. The versions in the *Correspondance littéraire* and *Les Spectacles de Paris* hew closely to the text of the *Mémoires secrets*.

<sup>2</sup> The poetry prize of the Académie française, which he eventually won in 1776. See chapter three for more on Murville's relationship to Sophie Arnould and her daughter.

<sup>3</sup> This anecdote is drawn almost word for word from the *Mémoires secrets*, vol. 15, p. 246 (5 August 1780). The *Mémoires secrets* add that Murville was an 'assiduous courtier of Mademoiselle Arnould' ('toujours assidu courtisan de Mlle. Arnoux'), and that the quatrain was 'greatly enjoyed in her circle' ('un quatrain [...] qui a été fort goûté de sa société').



A. M. [André de Murville], *tout en parcourant la lice académique, ne cessait d'enfanter des madrigaux en l'honneur de Mesdemoiselles Arnould, mère et fille; voici des vers qu'il destinait à être mis au bas du buste de Sophie:*

*Ce buste nous enchante; ah, fuyez, mes amis,  
Fuyez! Que de perils on court près du modèle!  
Je n'ai jamais vu d'homme en sa présence admis  
Qui n'entrât inconstant et ne sortît fidèle. (89)*

- iii. One day, agents of the revolutionary committee of Luzarches came to her home for a visit; some called her an anti-revolutionary. 'My friends,' she said to them, 'I have always been a very active citizen, and I know the rights of man by heart.'<sup>4</sup> One of the members then noticed a marble bust on a console, representing her in the role of Iphigénie; he thought that it was a bust of Marat, and, taking the priestess's scarf for that of their leader, they left, thoroughly enlightened about the actress's patriotism.

*Des agens du comité révolutionnaire de Luzarches vinrent un jour chez elle faire une visite domiciliaire; quelques frères la traitant de suspecte: "Mes amis, leur dit-elle, j'ai toujours été une citoyenne très-active, et je connais par cœur les droits de l'homme." Un des membres aperçut alors sur une console un buste de marbre qui la représentait dans le rôle d'Iphigénie; il crut que c'était le buste de Marat, et, prenant l'écharpe de la prêtresse pour celle de leur patron, ils se retirèrent très édifiés du patriotisme de l'actrice. (93-94)*

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<sup>4</sup> A lengthier, earlier version of this double entendre, in which Arnould is replaced by an unnamed 'someone', appears in an earlier anthology of Deville's *Révolutionniana, ou Anecdotes, épigrammes et saillies relatives à la Révolution* (Paris: Maradan, 1802), 100. 'People reproached certain women for not wearing cockades. Someone, wanting to defend them, said: That these ladies had pre-empted the revolution in being *constitutional*; that one could call them *very active citizens*, knowing the rights of man by heart, with *command of speech* and a permanent *central committee*.' ('On reprochoit à certaines femmes de ne pas porter de cocardes. Quelqu'un voulut les justifier en disant: Que ces dames avoient dévancé la revolution pour être *constitutionnelles*; qu'on pouvoit les qualifier de *citoyennes très actives*, connoissant par cœur les droits de l'homme, ayant la *parole en main* et un *comité central* en permanence.')

- iv. A young lord, a great hunter and highly inconstant in love, addressed the most amorous propositions to her [Arnould]. Sophie, who knew of his frivolity, sent him a painting by way of response. It showed a greyhound sleeping beside a hare, with these words as a motto: 'He neglects what he has caught.' (fig. 11)

*Un jeune seigneur, grand chasseur et fort inconstant dans ses amours, lui adressa les propositions les plus galantes. Sophie, qui connaissait sa légèreté, lui envoya pour réponse un tableau qui représentait un lévrier dormant auprès d'un lièvre, avec ces mots pour devise: Il néglige ce qu'il a pris. (187)*

- v. A young man, well-bred but more extravagant than wise, having eaten through his inheritance with a dancer from the Opéra by the name of Martigny, found himself reduced to living from a talent that he had hitherto cultivated for his leisure, and became a painter in miniature. Some time after this, Sophie said to her friend: 'Congratulations, my dear Martigny, I had thought your lover ruined, and I've just learnt that he's making a FINE FIGURE in the world.

*Un jeune homme bien né, mais plus fastueux que sage, après avoir mangé sa légitime avec une danseuse de l'Opéra, nommée Martigny, se trouva réduit à vivre d'un talent qu'il avait jusque-là cultivé pour son agrément, et il se fit peintre en miniature.*

*Quelque temps après Sophie dit à sa camarade: 'Reçois mon compliment, ma chère Martigny, je croyais ton amant ruiné, et je viens d'apprendre qu'il fait FIGURE dans le monde.' (194-95)*

- vi. The marquis de Lettore, an officer in the guards, was said to be the prettiest man in Paris; he had had his portrait painted in order to give it to an actress known for being more ambitious than she was tender. Mademoiselle Arnould, to whom he showed the

portrait, said to him: 'You're as handsome as Amor, but your Danaë would prefer the king's effigy to yours.'

*Le marquis de Lettore, officier aux gardes, passait pour le plus joli homme de Paris; il avait fait faire son portrait pour le donner à une actrice connue pour être moins tendre qu'intéressée. M<sup>lle</sup> Arnould, à laquelle il le montra, lui dit: 'Vous êtes beau comme l'Amour, mais votre Danaé aimerait mieux l'effigie du roi que la vôtre.'*

(206)

- vii. Mademoiselle Allard was mistress of the duc de Chartres, the prince de Guimenée, the duc de Mazarin and a regiment of commoners. She had her portrait painted by Leloir in the state in which Venus appeared in front of the shepherd Paris; somebody said that it was a poor resemblance. 'What does it matter?' replied Sophie. 'Allard could be headless and all of Paris would recognise her.'

*M<sup>lle</sup> Allard fut la maîtresse du duc de Chartres, du prince de Guimenée, du duc de Mazarin et d'un régiment de roturiers. S'étant fait peindre par Leloir dans l'état où parut Vénus devant le berger Pâris, quelqu'un dit que la tête de cette figure n'était pas ressemblante. 'Qu'est-ce que cela fait,' reprit Sophie; 'Allard serait sans tête que tout Paris la reconnaîtrait.'* (207)

- viii. Mademoiselle Cléophile left Audinot's theatre to become a dancer at the Opéra. In 1775, she belonged to the comte d'Aranda, who gave her a salary of three hundred louis a month, which put her in a position to make a decent impression. This nymph, who had a somewhat formidable look, had her portrait painted and took Mademoiselle Arnould to see her painter. The artist said to Arnould: 'Would you believe,

mademoiselle, that I am in love with my model?’ –‘If you are,’ replied Sophie, ‘then  
MAKE HER EYES LOOK KIND/MAKE EYES AT HER.’

*Mlle Cléophile sortit de chez Audinot pour entrer danseuse à l’Opéra; elle appartenait en 1775 au comte d’Aranda, qui lui donnait trois cents louis de fixe par mois; ce qui la mit dans le cas de représenter convenablement. Cette nymphe, qui avait le regard un peu rude, ayant fait faire son portrait, conduisit Mlle Arnould chez son peintre. L’artiste dit à celle-ci: ‘Croiriez-vous, mademoiselle, que je suis amoureux de mon modèle?’ –‘En ce cas, répondit Sophie, faites-lui donc les yeux DOUX.’ (228)*

- ix. Mademoiselle Duthé, originally a chorus girl in the Opéra, then in the nocturnal promenades of the Palais-Royal, was the first mistress of the duc de Chartres, and subsequently of the comte d’Artois. A painter by the name of Perrin wished to make himself known, in 1775, by painting the portrait of this famous courtesan. He painted two, which he showed to admirers: one very large, representing her standing up, attired in the full luxury of fashionable dress; the other smaller, showing her in the nude, with the detail of all her charms. Someone cried out on seeing this painting: ‘What a charming Danaë!’ –‘Say, rather,’ replied Sophie, ‘the barrel of the Danaids.’<sup>5</sup>

*M<sup>lle</sup> Duthé, originellement figurante à l’Opéra, puis aux promenades nocturnes du Palais-Royal, fut la première maîtresse du duc de Chartres, et elle devint ensuite celle du comte d’Artois. Un peintre nommé Perrin voulut se signaler, en 1775, par le portrait de cette célèbre courtisane; il en avait fait deux qu’il montrait aux amateurs; l’un très-grand, où il la représentait en pied, parée de tout le luxe des vetemens à la*

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<sup>5</sup> In Greek mythology, the Danaids, in punishment for killing their husbands, were condemned to spend eternity carrying water to fill an ever-leaking vessel.

*mode; l'autre plus petit, où il la montrait nue, avec le détail de tous ses charmes.*

*Quelqu'un s'écria en voyant ce dernier tableau: 'Voici une charmante Danaé.' 'Dites plutôt,' reprit Sophie, 'le tonneau des Danaïdes.' (255-56)*

- x. Monsieur P. was madly in love with Mademoiselle Dorival; but the pretty dancer could not stand him. He had her portrait painted and placed on a snuffbox. One day he said to some actresses: 'Well, Mesdemoiselles, I possess Dorival at last, and I have her in my pocket.' 'It would be much better', Sophie retorted, 'if you had her up your sleeve.'<sup>6</sup>

*M. P. était amoureux fou de M<sup>lle</sup> Dorival; mais cette jolie danseuse ne pouvait le souffrir. Il en fit faire le portrait qu'il plaça sur une tabatière. Un jour il dit à quelques actrices: 'Hé bien, Mesdemoiselles, je possède enfin Dorival, et je la tiens dans ma poche.' 'Il vaudrait bien mieux, répartit Sophie, que vous l'eussiez dans votre manche.' (314)*

- xi. In 1778 Monvel débuted Mademoiselle Mars at the Théâtre Français, who for a moment drew the crowds that Mademoiselle Raucourt once had. The actress was gifted with a tall and beautiful figure and a good voice, but did not have enough talents to sustain herself on the French stage. An admirer, infatuated with the debutante, had her portrait painted by an artist who rendered her extremely pale. 'Oh heavens!' Sophie cried upon seeing it, 'has he painted MARS [March] during Lent?'

*En 1778 Monvel fit débiter au Théâtre Français une demoiselle Mars, qui pour un moment produisit le concours occasionné précédemment par M<sup>lle</sup> Raucourt. Cette*

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<sup>6</sup> In French, to have someone up one's sleeve is to have them at one's disposal.

*actrice était douée d'une belle figure, d'une taille haute et d'un bel organe, mais elle n'avait pas assez de talents pour se soutenir sur la scène française. Un amateur engoué de la débutante, fit faire son portrait par un artiste qui la peignit extrêmement pâle. 'O ciel!' s'écria Sophie en le voyant, 'est-ce qu'on a peint MARS en carême?'*  
(318-19)

- xii. Many painters had worked on a portrait of Saint Louis destined for the Hôtel des Invalides, and had not been entirely successful. During the exhibition, Mademoiselle Arnould said: 'Never has the saying 'poor as a painter' been proven better than today, when ten of them have not been able to make FIVE LOUIS.'<sup>7</sup>

*Plusieurs peintres avaient travaillé à un portrait de saint Louis destiné pour les Invalides, et n'avaient pu y réussir complètement. Lors de l'exposition, M<sup>lle</sup> Arnould dit: 'Jamais le proverbe 'gueux comme peintre' [sic] ne s'est mieux vérifié qu'aujourd'hui, car à dix ils n'ont pu faire CINQ LOUIS (saint Louis.)' (330)*

- xiii. In 1780, a large number of admirers, wishing to conserve the memory of the five most perfect dancers at the Opéra of the day, asked the sculptor Mr. Machy to immortalise their features. As a result, he opened a subscription. Mademoiselle Guimard was to be represented as Terpsichore; Mademoiselle Heynel as a nymph; Mesdemoiselles Allard and Peslin as bacchantes, and Mademoiselle Théodore as a shepherdess. The sculptures, primarily destined for boudoirs and little nooks, were to be in biscuit porcelain eight inches high. A lover of Mademoiselle Heynel was about to return to

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<sup>7</sup> Drawn from the *Mémoires secrets*, vol. 7, pp. 56-57 (21 September 1773). See the epigraph to chapter 3 for this version of the anecdote.

England. Sophie said to him, laughing: 'I hope, Monsieur, that you won't be embarking without a BISCUIT [ship's biscuit/biscuit porcelain].'

*En 1780 un grand nombre d'amateurs désirant conserver la mémoire des cinq plus parfaites danseuses de l'Opéra qui existaient alors, sollicitèrent le sieur Machy, sculpteur, d'en perpétuer les traits. En conséquence il ouvrit une souscription. M<sup>lle</sup> Guimard devait être représentée en Terpsichore; M<sup>lle</sup> Heynel en nymphe; M<sup>lles</sup> Allard et Peslin en bacchantes, et M<sup>lle</sup> Théodore en bergère. Ces statues étant principalement destinées aux boudoirs et aux petits réduits, devaient être en biscuit de huit pouces de hauteur. Un amant de M<sup>lle</sup> Heynel étant sur le point de retourner en Angleterre, Sophie lui dit en riant: 'J'espère, Monsieur, que vous ne vous embarquerez pas sans BISCUIT.' (340-41)*

## Appendix two: Dionis on art in *Origine des Grâces*

‘La cruche cassée’ is reproduced in full in chapter four; this appendix reproduces the remaining two texts in Dionis’s *Origine des Grâces* that take art as their subject. Page numbers in parentheses refer to the original 1777 edition.

i. ‘To Émilie, daughter of Monsieur \*\*\*, Painter from the Académie’ (98-99)

Tell me, dear Cupid, who is the child who was playing with you yesterday by the fountain?  
... You do not answer me: try as you might, jealous little one, I can see through you: you are angry because the Nymphs said Émilie is as pretty as you are. Yes, her childlike graces surpass your own. Cupid, break your bow—Émilie’s eyes will serve you better than your arrows; her skin resembles the gauze of your blindfold; and her vermilion lips resemble a rosebud that Zephyr has not yet opened. Alas for the Shepherds who see Émilie in her third age; for she has only one heart. Little Cherubs, make chains of violets; bind Émilie with them, while she frolics with you. There will come a time when she fears your caresses; now, she smiles at the arrow that must wound her. But will Cupid always be angry with Émilie? No, no; and to serve her better, the cunning boy will give her her father’s brush.

*‘A Emilie, fille de M. \*\*\*, Peintre de l’Académie’*

*Dis-moi, cher Cupidon, quel est cet enfant qui jouait hier avec toi au bord de la fontaine? ...  
Tu ne me réponds pas: tu as beau faire, petit jaloux, je te devine, tu es fâché de ce que les Nymphes ont dit qu’Emilie est aussi jolie que toi. Oui, ses grâces enfantines effacent les tiennes. Cupidon, brise ton arc, les yeux d’Emilie te serviront mieux que tes traits; sa peau ressemble à la gaze de ton bandeau; & ses lèvres vermeilles ressemblent à un bouton de roses que Zéphir n’a pas encore ouvert. Malheur aux Bergers qui verront Emilie à son*



*troisieme lustre; car elle n'a qu'un cœur. Petits Amours, formez des chaînes de violettes; liezen Emilie, tandis qu'elle folâtre avec vous. Il viendra un tems où elle craindra vos caresses; maintenant elle sourit au trait qui doit la blesser. Mais Cupidon sera-t-il toujours fâché contre Emilie? Non, non; & pour la mieux servir, le rusé lui donnera le pinceau de son pere.*

- ii. 'To Monsieur C...., secretary of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, on the occasion of a Drawing serving as frontispiece to this Work, which he has dedicated to the Author, represented on Parnassus' (108-11)

While our flocks graze the flowery grass, let us sit, Shepherdesses, in the shade of these willows: I will tell you how I was taken to Parnassus. Playful Lise, go and catch butterflies further on; and you, Misire, put down your flute, my accents are sweeter: they will celebrate an Artist comparable to the favourite Poets of Apollo. May your hearts hear me, and your eyes follow me, [for] I am rendering homage to talents that have charmed them a thousand times.

You know, Shepherdesses, I have always loved poetry; and, from my childhood, I made hymns in honour of the Gods. Then, I expressed my thoughts on the bark of trees, and often I have spent whole days in the shadow of the forests. There, I sang of the sweetness of Zephyrs, the murmur of streams, the fragrance of violets; sometimes, raising an altar of moss, I offered gifts to the Muses, and prayed that these maidens from Heaven would set my soul ablaze. Soon I sang no longer of flowers, nor greenery; a child became the object of my verses, and I praised Cupid to protect myself from his arrows... I see you smile, young Shepherdesses... yes, I fear Cupid, but I know nonetheless that he can make us happy.

One summer evening, my goats having strayed into a wood, I continued my songs later; tuning my lyre, I made the echoes repeat how a young girl discovered the

divine art of painting, by drawing the shadow of her lover to possess his image.

‘Ingenious Cupid,’ I said, ‘it is to you that we owe the most charming of the Arts, but if you invented drawing, how many hearts has it not won you? Oh! who would not sigh upon seeing Venus smiling at Voluptuousness, being born from the fingers of C....! One would say that Cupid guided his pencil in order to draw his mother.’

I was about to continue when a man coming out of the woods interrupted me: the fire that shone in his eyes, and the simplicity of his dress, told me that he was an Artist. ‘Follow me,’ he said to me, ‘your taste for the Arts makes you treasured by the Muses.’ Suddenly Parnassus, which borders our meadowland and seems so steep, appeared to me to be easy to approach. Two paths, however, left a sense of uncertainty: one was spread with brilliant sand and decorated with trees formed into archways; the other was bordered only with a row of vines supported by several elms. My guide took the latter: ‘This is the path of Nature,’ he said to me, ‘I have always followed it; never stray from it. It was here that the Graces passed when they climbed to Parnassus; Voltaire followed in their footsteps, and the Bard of Belisaire discovered the loves of Annette here.’<sup>1</sup> Speaking thus, we arrived at the top of the mountain: it is here that Castalie, once a Nymph, was metamorphosed into a fountain and received from Apollo the power to inspire those who drink from her waters; precious fountain, inaccessible to so many Poets, your sweet murmur seems to reproach the god of Pindus for his cruelty; and despite his beneficence, you still ask him for your former charms! Soon we caught sight of the Muses. ‘Here,’ my guide said to them, ‘is a Shepherdess I have brought to Parnassus.’ As he said these words, he gave me the crown he had received from the Graces. ‘C....,’ cried the Muses, ‘you may cede it to her: your pencil suffices to engrave your name in the Temple of Memory.’

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<sup>1</sup> The ‘Bard’ is Jean-François Marmontel, author of *Annette et Lubin* and *Bélisaire*.

*'A Monsieur C...., Secrétaire de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et Sculpture, à l'occasion d'un Dessin servant de frontispice à cet Ouvrage, qu'il a dédié à l'Auteur, représenté sur le Parnasse'*

*Tandis que nos troupeaux paissent l'herbe fleurie, assayons-nous, Bergeres, à l'ombre de ces saules: je vais vous conter comment je fus conduite au Parnasse. Folâtre Lise, va plus loin attraper des papillons; & toi, Misire, quitte ta flûte, mes accents sont plus doux: ils vont célébrer un Artiste semblable aux Poètes favoris d'Apollon. Que les cœurs m'écoutent, que les yeux me suivent, je rends hommage à des talents qui les ont charmés mille fois.*

*Vous le savez, Bergeres, j'ai toujours aimé la poésie; &, dès mon enfance, je faisais des hymnes en l'honneur des Dieux. Depuis, j'exprimai mes pensées sur l'écorce des arbres, & souvent j'ai passé des jours entiers à l'ombre des forêts. Là je chantais la douceur des Zéphirs, le murmure des ruisseaux, le parfum des violettes; quelquefois élevant un autel de mousse, j'offrais des dons aux Muses, & priais ces filles du Ciel d'embraser mon ame. Bientôt je ne chantai plus les fleurs, ni la verdure; un enfant devint l'objet de mes vers, & je vantai l'Amour pour me garantir de ses flèches.... Je vous vois sourire, jeunes Bergeres.... oui, je crains l'Amour, mais je n'en sçais pas moins qu'il peut nous rendre heureuses.*

*Un soir d'été, mes chèvres s'étant écartées dans un bocage, je continuai mes chants plus tard; accordant ma lyre, je fis répéter aux échos comment une jeune fille a découvert l'Art divin de la peinture, en dessinant l'ombre de son amant pour en posséder l'image. 'Ingénieux Amour', disais-je, 'c'est à toi que nous devons le plus charmant des Arts, mais si tu inventa le dessin, combien de cœurs ne t'a-t-il pas*

*gagnés? Hé! qui ne soupirerait pas en voyant Vénus souriant à la volupté, naître sous les doigts de C....! On dirait qu'Amour a conduit son crayon pour dessiner sa mere'.*

*J'allais continuer, lorsqu'un homme sortant du bocage m'interrompit: le feu qui brillait dans ses yeux, & la simplicité de son habillement me firent connaître que c'était un Artiste. 'Suis-moi', me dit-il, 'ton goût pour les Arts te fait chérir des Muses'.*

*Aussitôt le Parnasse qui borne notre prairie, & qui semble si escarpé, me parut d'un facile accès. Deux routes cependant laissaient dans l'incertitude, l'une était semée d'un sable brillant & décorée d'arbres taillés en portiques; l'autre bordée seulement d'une haie de pampre soutenue de quelques ormeaux. Mon guide prit cette dernière: 'C'est celle de la Nature', me dit-il, 'je l'ai toujours suivie; ne t'en écarter jamais. C'est ici que les Grâces passerent, lorsqu'elles monterent au Parnasse: Voltaire a marché sur leurs traces, & le Chantre de Bélisaire y découvrit les amours d'Annete [sic]'. En parlant ainsi, nous arrivâmes au haut de la montagne: c'est-là que Castalie, Nymphé autrefois, fut métamorphosée en fontaine, & reçut d'Apollon le pouvoir d'inspirer ceux qui boiraient de ses eaux; fontaine précieuse, mais inaccessible à tant de Poètes, ton doux murmure semble reprocher au dieu du Pinde sa cruauté; & malgré son bienfait, tu lui demandes encore tes premiers charmes! bientôt nous aperçumes les Muses.*

*'Voilà', leur dit mon guide, 'une Bergere que j'ai conduite au Parnasse'. En disant ces mots, il me donna la couronne qu'il avait reçue des Grâces. 'C...', s'écrierent les Muses, 'tu peux la lui céder: ton crayon suffit pour graver ton nom au Temple de Mémoire.'*

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Illustrations



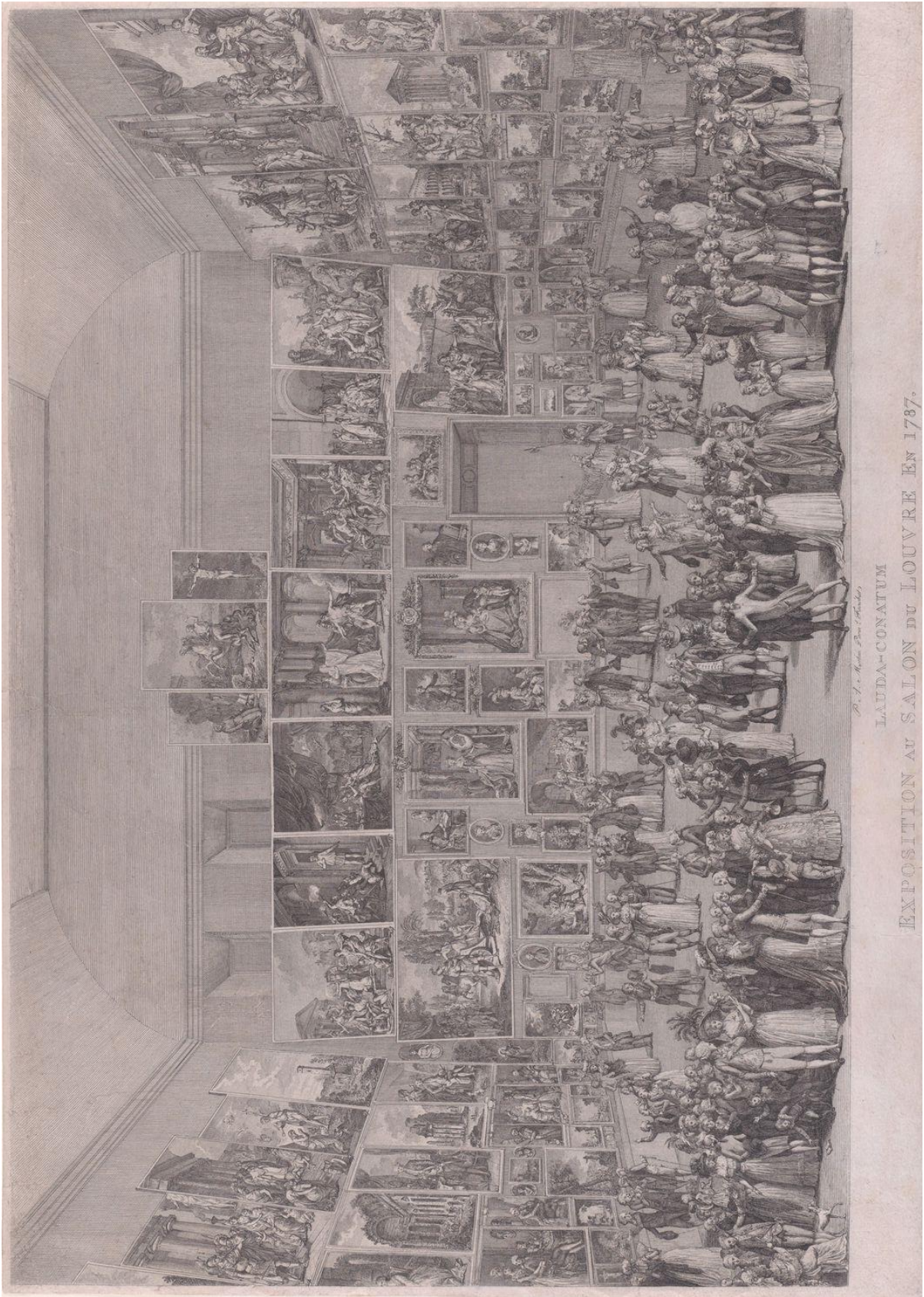
Figure 1. Claude-Henri Watelet, *La Font de Saint-Yenne en critique d'art aveugle*, c. 1750-1754 (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France).



Figure 2. Gabriel de Saint-Aubin, *Vue du Salon du Louvre en l'année 1753*, 1753 (NY: Metropolitan Museum of Art).



Figure 3. Pietro Antonio Martini, *Coup d'œil exact de l'arrangement des peintures au Salon du Louvre, en 1785*, 1785 (NY: Metropolitan Museum of Art).



LAUDA-CONATUM  
EXPOSITION AU SALON DU LOUVRE EN 1787.

Figure 4. Pietro Antonio Martini, *Lauda-conatum: exposition au Salon du Louvre en 1787, 1787* (NY: Metropolitan Museum of Art).

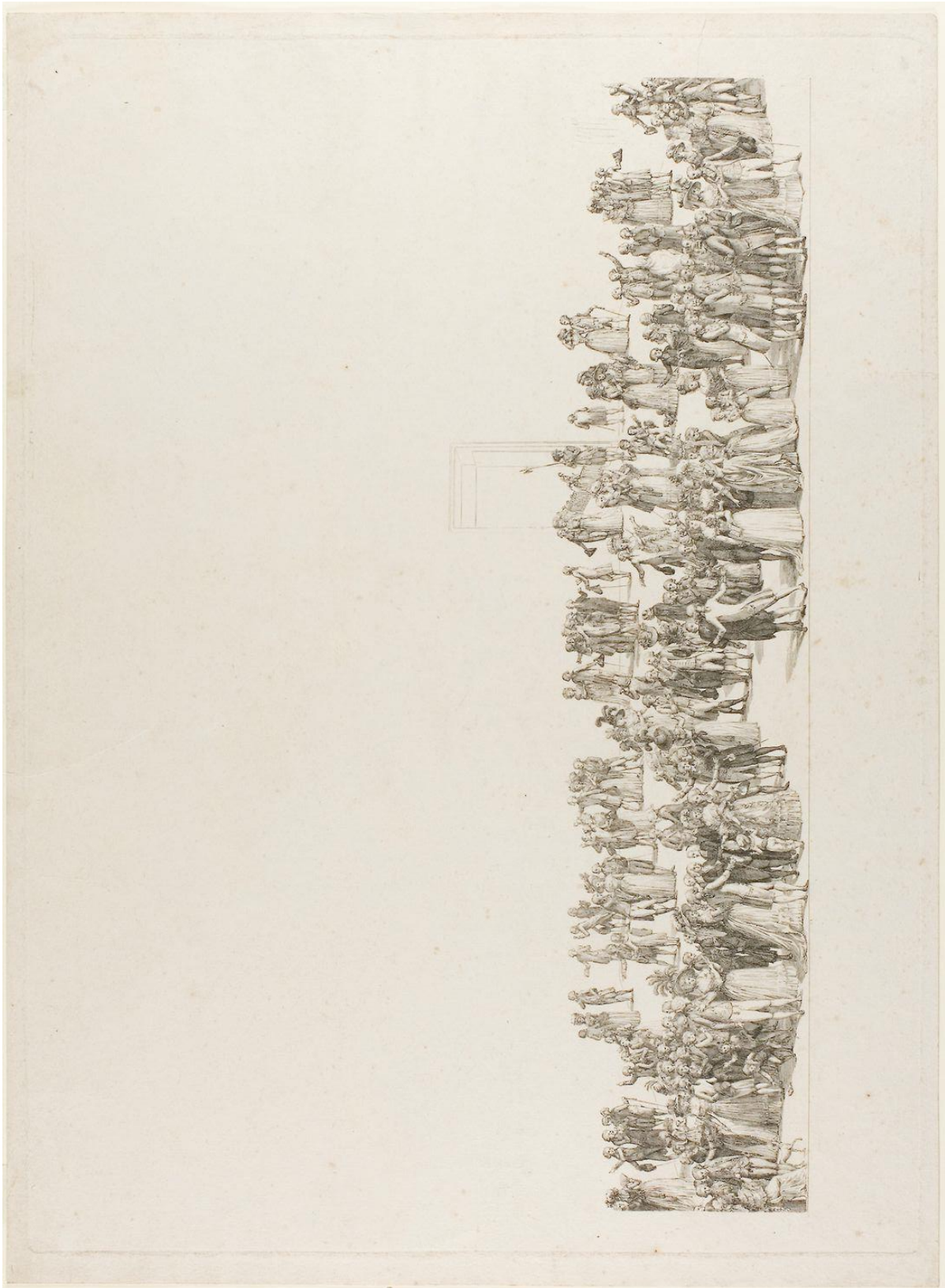


Figure 5. Pietro Antonio Martini, *Lauda-conatum: exposition au Salon du Louvre en 1787*, proof before addition of paintings, 1787 (NY: Metropolitan Museum of Art).



Figure 6. Claude Dejoux, *L'enlèvement de Cassandre par Ajax*, n.d., p.c. Terra cotta model of the sculpture shown in plaster at the Salon of 1787.



Figure 7. Isidore-Stanislas Helman after Jean-Baptiste Le Prince, *Le Marchand de lunettes*, 1776 (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France).



Figure 8. Jacques-Louis David, *Andromache mourning Hector*, 1783 (Paris: Louvre).





Figure 9. Gabriel de Saint-Aubin, *Souvenir de Mlle Arnou aux augustins le 12 mars 1772*, 1772 (Paris: Louvre). Glued onto folio 73 *Livre des Saint-Aubin*, RF 52287.



Figure 10. Jean Massard after Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *La cruche cassée*, 1773 (London: British Museum). The caption reads: ‘Dedicated to Mademoiselle Sophie Arnould, Pensionnaire of the King and First Actress of the Académie Royale de Musique. By her very humble and very obedient servant, J.B. Greuze.’

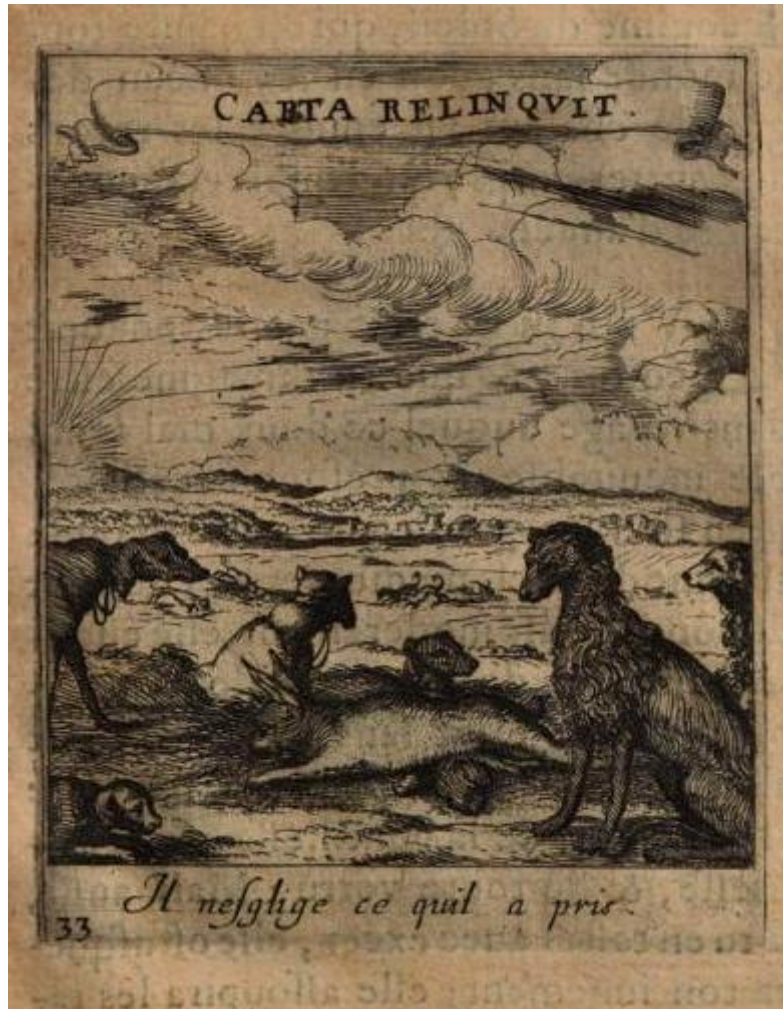


Figure 11. Albert Flamen, 'Il nesglige ce quil a pris', *Devises et emblesmes d'amour moralisez* (Paris: Samuel Margat, 1650), 33.



Figure 12. Jean-Antoine Houdon, *Sophie Arnould as Iphigénie*, 1775 (Paris: Louvre).

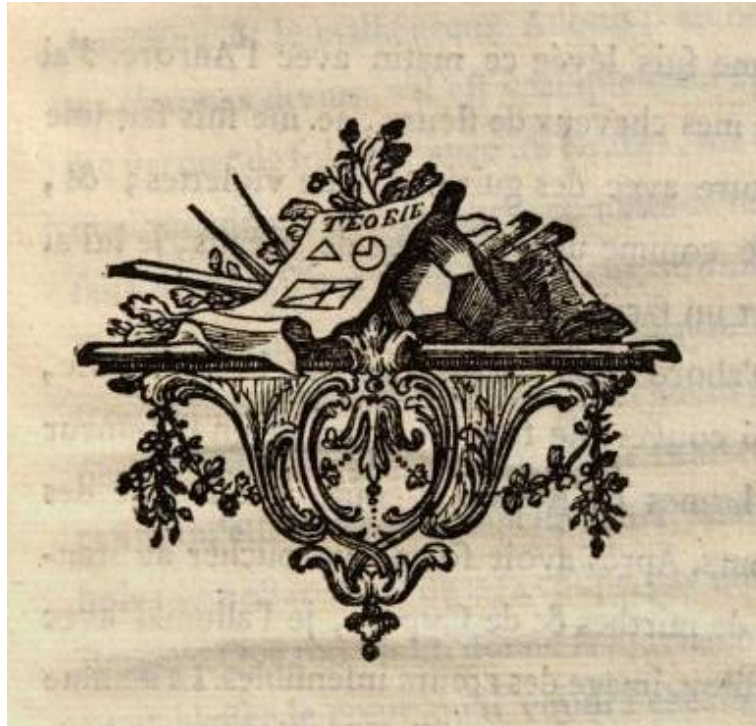


Figure 123. *Cul-de-lampe* with the attributes of geometry on pages 76 and 99 of *Origine des Graces* (1777) by Henriette-Louise Dionis.



Figure 14. Augustin de Saint-Aubin after Charles-Nicolas Cochin, frontispiece to *Origine des Graces* (1777) by Henriette-Louise Dionis, showing the author surrounded by the Muses, the Graces, Cupid, Apollo and Venus. Dated 1776.