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‘PRÉCIOSITÉ’ AFTER ‘LES PRÉCIEUSES RIDICULES.’

I.

‘Molière,’ says M. Bourciez, ‘dealt a serious blow to *préciosité* in *Les Précieuses ridicules*, but he did not effect its downfall. Its spirit survived and its tradition continued without interruption throughout the whole century¹.’ The latter part of this statement, at any rate, is perfectly true. Molière’s attack on the more conspicuous manifestations of the *esprit précieux*—the exaggerated refinement, the misplaced prudery, the romantic sentimentality, the cult of Mlle de Scudéry’s novels, and, above all, the affected language—may have done something to diminish their absurdity. But the spirit itself survived, and one of its chief characteristics was the perpetual striving after *esprit*. Now this had been an important feature of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, but there was this difference between Mme de Rambouillet’s famous salon and that, for instance, of Mlle de Scudéry; that while in the one *esprit* was a more or less natural growth, the current coin of a society of well-bred and intelligent men and women, in the other it was largely the fruit of laborious cultivation. The *bourgeois* men of letters and the *précieuses* who frequented Mlle de Scudéry’s Saturdays were the pedants of *esprit* as well as the ‘Jansenists of love.’ We want no clearer proof of this than the fact that Conrart and Pellisson, Mlle de Scudéry’s two chief lieutenants, kept a written record of the proceedings. The *Chronique du Samedi*, consisting of the letters and the pieces of verse and prose that were read at the meetings, forms a more or less complete history of the doings of Sapho and her friends².

¹ *Hist. de la Langue et de la Littérature française*, iv, p. 133. Brunetière had practically said the same thing in *La société précieuse au XVII^e siècle (Études critiques, II, pp. 1 ff.)*.

² The manuscript, of which the greater part is in Conrart’s handwriting, but with corrections and additions by Pellisson, has never been published *in extenso*. Extracts are printed by L. Belmont in the *Rev. d’hist. littéraire*, ix (1902), pp. 646 ff.

In 1658 the Saturdays began to languish, and in the following year, the year of *Les Précieuses ridicules*, they ceased altogether. But Mlle de Scudéry still continued to see her friends in the Rue Vieille du Temple¹. Among these were two ladies who, like herself, remained constant to the single state, Mlle de La Vigne and Mlle Dupré. Anne de La Vigne² in the year 1660 was a young woman of twenty-six, good-looking and intelligent, and for all her serious studies fond of laughter. She knew Latin, was an enthusiastic Cartesian, and wrote after the fashion of the day occasional pieces of prose and light verse. From 1665 to 1668 she carried on a 'gallant' correspondence of the approved type with Conrart. The gentleman—in spite of sixty-five years and the gout—was ardent, and the lady was cruel. It was an idle game, but it was played with considerable skill on both sides. In spite of her learning Mlle de La Vigne did not aspire to be a *femme savante*. In answer to a poem, in which the shade of Descartes is represented as urging her to write an account of his philosophy, she replied in another poem, some lines of which are happily imitated from Molière's comedy :

Je sais que la plus belle et plus forte éloquence
 Bien souvent ne vaut pas un modeste silence ;
 Que pour nous la coutume a fait presque'un devoir
 De parler rarement et de ne rien savoir ;
 Et que si quelque dame a pris d'autres maximes
 Elle les doit cacher comme on cache les crimes³.

Her friend Marie Dupré had an even higher reputation for learning. A niece of the Abbé Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin and of Roland Desmarets, she had, under the latter's careful tuition, studied Latin, Greek, and philosophy, and when he died in 1653, she was already known as a *femme savante*. Later she acquired the honourable *soubriquet* of 'La Cartésienne.' She was on terms of close intimacy with Conrart, and in the summer of 1669, having made the acquaintance of Bussy-Rabutin at the baths of Alise-Sainte-Reine in Burgundy⁴, she established literary relations between her friend and the illustrious exile. She herself corresponded with Bussy during the next four years, interchanging with him *bouts-rimés* and other kinds of occasional verse.

¹ It was not till 1675 that she moved to the Rue de Beauce in the same quarter.

² 1634–1684. See A. Fabre (l'Abbé) *La jeunesse de Fléchier*, 2 vols. 1882, II, pp. 25–113; Vigneul de Marville, *Mélanges d'hist. et de litt.*, 4th ed., 1725, pp. 97–98; and for her verse, F. Lachèvre, *Bibliographie des Recueils collectifs de Poésies publiées de 1597–1700*, 3 vols., 1901–05, III, pp. 391–2.

³ *Recueil de vers choisies* par le R. P. Bouhours, 1693, p. 31. For the poem addressed to Mlle de La Vigne see *ib.*, pp. 27–30. It is often attributed to Mlle Descartes but a contemporary authority assigns it to Pierre de La Broue, Bishop of Mirepoix (see Lachèvre, *loc. cit.*).

⁴ The site of the ancient Alesia. Bussy's château is in the neighbourhood. Released from the Bastille in 1666 he had been ordered 'to take the air' on his estates.

Her personal attractions seem to have been inferior to those of her friend Mlle de La Vigne, for Somaize, who is never sparing with his compliments, can only say of her that 'he is sure that she is pretty rather than ugly¹.' She professed to despise love², and the words of Henriette to Armande in *Les Femmes savantes* might have been addressed to her:

Votre esprit à l'hymen renonce pour toujours,
Et la philosophie a toutes vos amours³.

There is nothing to lead one to suppose that she resembled Armande in any other respect, but it would be curious if Molière, having borrowed the character of Bélise from the uncle's play of *Les Visionnaires*, should have been indebted to the niece for the suggestion of that of Armande⁴.

It was natural that these two fair Cartesians should be on terms of intimacy with Catherine Descartes, the philosopher's niece, whose father was a councillor of the Breton *Parlement*. She was a friend of Mme de Sévigné and Mme de Grignan, another ardent Cartesian. 'J'aime passionnément Mlle Descartes; elle vous adore,' writes the mother to the daughter in 1689, and she sends her a *manière d'improvisu* which the lady had composed. For Mlle Descartes, like her friends, was addicted to writing verse. In the *Recueil* of le Père Bonhours will be found an interesting account from her pen, partly in verse and partly in prose, of her uncle's death⁵, and Rathery and Boutron print in their life of Mlle de Scudéry six letters interspersed with verse which passed between Mlle Descartes and Sapho on the inexhaustible subject of love—as they understood it. The tone of exaggerated compliment and the slightly stilted style make them extremely characteristic of the *préciosité* of the period⁶.

¹ *Dict. des Précieuses*: Diophanire, seconde du nom.

² 'L'amour est bien aveugle; n'ai-je pas raison de le mépriser? Ce qui m'aide encore à me sauver de ses pattes, c'est l'exemple de tous ceux et celles à qui il fait faire tant de sottises. À sa place, j'ai rempli mon cœur d'amitié.' (Letter to Bussy of June 22, 1671.)

³ *Les Femmes savantes* (1672), I, i.

⁴ For Mlle Dupré see Fabre, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 252-270; II, pp. 1-24; Moreri, *Dict. historique*; L'Abbé Lambert, *Hist. litt. du règne du Louis XIV*, 3 vols., 1751, III, p. 11; Lachèvre, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 524-5. Moreri and the Abbé Lambert say that she was born about the middle of the seventeenth century, but as she was already known as a *femme savante* in 1653, she must have been considerably older than this. Probably she was a year or two senior to Mlle de La Vigne, who was born in 1634.

⁵ *Recueil*, pp. 129-139. The account was written in 1690.

⁶ Rathery and Boutron, *Mlle de Scudéry, sa vie et sa correspondance avec un choix de ses poésies*, 1873, pp. 393-403. The letters are taken from a collection (*Essais de lettres familières*) made by the Abbé Cassagne and first printed in 1690. They are not dated, but were written after 1654, probably about 1660. Mlle Descartes was born in 1637 and died in 1706. A 'portrait' of her by her own hand is printed in *La Galerie des Portraits de Mlle de Montpensier*, ed. É. de Barthélemy, 1860, pp. 549 ff.

Much of the verse—*bouts-rimés*, *chansons*, *madrigals*, *epigrams*, *enigmas*, *sonnets*, *epistles*, *portraits*, *placets*—with which Mlle de Scudéry and her friends amused themselves was printed in the *Recueils* which were so popular at this time. Their greatest vogue was from 1652 to 1668, after which the production began to slacken and from 1673 to 1690 no *Recueil* of any note appeared. The earliest collection to achieve popularity was the *Recueil de diverses poésies*, published by Chamboudry in 1652, followed by a second part in the same year. By 1657 it had reached a ninth edition, but even with successive augmentations it was never more than a thin volume¹. It was surpassed in popularity and very greatly in size by the *Poésies choisies de Mm. Corneille, Benserade, &c.*, which the well-known bookseller, Charles de Sercy, brought out in 1653, and which, ultimately increased to five parts, found numerous readers down to 1666². 'Nous avons une amie particulière qui nous a promis d'amener ici tous ces Messieurs du *Recueil des pièces choisies*,' says one of the *précieuses* in Molière's farce. Another collection, which had a longer life, was that known as *La Suze-Pellisson*, which first appeared in 1663³ as a single volume, containing three pieces by Mlle de Scudéry, one by the Comtesse de La Suze⁴, one by Pellisson and seventeen by various writers. Reprinted with additions in 1666 and 1668, it was expanded in 1674 into four volumes in which form it frequently re-appeared down to 1725⁵. This fashion of publishing collections of occasional verse is laughed at by Furetière in *Le roman bourgeois* (1666):

A propos (reprit Hippolyte) ne trouvez-vous pas que ces recueils fournissent une occasion de se faire connoître bien facilement et à peu de frais? Je vois beaucoup d'auteurs qui n'ont esté connus que par là.... Ce n'est pas tout (adjousta Charroselles) que de faire de petites pièces; il faut, pour les faire bien courir, que ce soient pièces du temps, c'est-à-dire à la mode, de sorte que ce sont tantost

¹ Lachèvre, II, pp. 33 ff.

² *Ib.*, II, pp. 52 ff.

³ *Recueil de Pièces galantes en prose et en vers des plus beaux esprits du temps*. Dedié à Mme la Comtesse de la Suze, 1663. See Lachèvre, III, pp. 41 ff.

⁴ Henriette de Coligny (1618–1673) married first Thomas Hamilton, Earl of Haddington, and secondly the Comte de La Suze, from whom she obtained a judicial separation in 1661. She had a salon and was celebrated as a poetess. A volume of her verses (*Poésies*) was published in 1666. In Titon du Tillet's monument representing *le Parnasse français* she figures as one of the three Graces with Mlle de Scudéry and Mme Deshoulières. In Somaize's dictionary she appears as Doralise, 'une pretieuse de qualité qui a autant fait parler d'elle que pas une femme de royaume,' for if she was a *précieuse* she was very much more of a *femme galante*. The notice concludes with the remark that 'sa ruelle est toujours une des plus considérables de l'empire des pretieuses.' For her poems see Lachèvre, II, pp. 227–9; see also E. Magne, *Mme de la Suze et la Société Précieuse*, 1908.

⁵ An edition was published at Trévoux in this year. The most complete edition is that of 1674, which contains 349 pieces.

sonnets, rondeaux, portraits, énigmes, métamorphoses, tantost triolets, ballades, chansons, et jusqu'à des bouts rimez. Encore, pour les faire courir plus viste, il faut choisir le sujet, et que ce soit sur la mort d'un petit chien ou d'un perroquet, ou de quelques grands aventures arrivées dans le monde galant et poétique. Quand à moi (reprit Hippolyte), j'ayme sur tout les bouts-rimez, parce que ce sont le plus souvent des impromptus, ce que j'estime la plus certaine marque de l'esprit d'un homme. Vous n'êtes pas seule de vostre advis (dit Angélique); j'ay veu plusieurs femmes tellement infatuées de cette sorte de galanterie d'impromptu, qu'elles les prefoient aux ouvrages les plus accomplis et aux plus belles méditations¹.

Of the interlocutors in this dialogue, Charroselles stands for Charles Sorel, against whom Furetière bore a particular grudge; Hippolyte is the 'name in romance' of a *bourgeoise* named Phylippote, who affected with insupportable pedantry to be a *femme savante*; while Angélique, the hostess of the salon where the conversation takes place, is Angélique Petit, who figures in Somaize's dictionary as Panthée, and is there described as a good linguist and mathematician. There is a portrait of her in verse by Lignières in Mlle de Montpensier's *Recueil des portraits*², which corresponds fairly well with Furetière's account of her. He describes her 'as a person of great merit, who had learnt several languages and read all sorts of good literature, but she concealed her knowledge as if it were a crime....' 'Every day a distinguished company met in her salon. Sometimes they discussed curious questions; at other times the topic was love ('on faisait des conversations galantes'); in fact they endeavoured to imitate everything that goes on in the best salons ('les belles ruelles') among *précieuses* of the first rank.'

This picture of a second-rate Paris salon in the sixties of the seventeenth century is no doubt a faithful one. For Furetière, who was an excellent observer, but a poor artist, was incapable of that exaggeration for comic purposes which is so effective in Molière's comedy, or rather, farce of *Les Précieuses ridicules*. Moreover, while Molière's play is professedly a satire on *deux pecques provinciales* newly arrived in Paris, Furetière represents a salon presided over by a lady 'of great merit,' learned and well read, who was opposed to the views of the majority of her guests. These include, besides the author, Charroselles, and the *précieuse* Hippolyte, two well-bred gentlemen named Philaëthe and Pancrace, who do not share the enthusiasm of the others for the fashionable verse-making of the day. But Pancrace, at

¹ A volume of these 'questions' for the use of society was compiled in 1671 under the title, *Questions d'amour ou conversations galantes*. (See T. F. Crane, *Les Héros de Roman*, 1902, p. 123.)

² First printed in 1659, and reprinted in 1663. When the fashion of 'portraits' descended to the *bourgeoise* it was abandoned by the aristocracy.

any rate, is a reader of the fashionable romances, and he lends the five volumes of *L'Astrée* to the little *bourgeoise* Javotte, who is ashamed at her ignorance, to enable her to become as learned as the other ladies. 'Je voudrais bien avoir le secret de ces demoiselles, qui causent si bien.'

It should be noticed that the only one of the company in whose language there is any trace of *préciosité* is Charroselles. Here again Furetière is true to nature. Apart from the *langage de galanterie*, there is very little that can be called *précieux* in the style either of Mlle de Scudéry's novels or of her letters. In dealing with ordinary topics true *précieuses* used the *style figuré* with discrimination¹. The inferior *précieuses* naturally improved on their models. Exaggerate their absurdities by means of accumulation, repetition, and the other methods of a master of the comic art, and the result is the immortal jargon of *Les Précieuses ridicules*². But in the language of gallantry the *style figuré* which Alceste so much detested continued to flourish, and we have an admirable parody of it from the pen of Mme de La Fayette:

Vous pouvez croire que cette manière de peindre m'a tiré de grands rideaux. Il est vrai que vous avez peut-être oublié qu'il y a des choses dont je ne tâte jamais, et que je suis une espèce d'homme que l'on ne tourne pas aisément sur un certain pied. Sûrement ce n'est pas mon caractère que d'être dupe et de donner tête baissée dans le panneau. Je me le tiens pour dit: j'entends le françois, à la vérité; je ne ferai point de fracas, j'en userai honnêtement; je n'afficherai point, je ne donnerai rien au public; je retirerai mes troupes, mais comptez que vous n'avez pas obligé un ingrat³.

Another feature which appears in Furetière's picture of Angélique's salon and which is still more apparent in that of Mlle de Scudéry is the growing importance attached by women to learning. If *Les Précieuses ridicules* is a farce, *Les Femmes savantes* is a true comedy. If the earlier play represents the *préciosité* of 1659 in its more ridiculous aspects, the later play is a more or less faithful picture of the *préciosité* of 1672 as exhibited in a well-to-do *bourgeois* family.

In the same quarter of Paris as the Rue Vieille du Temple, Mme de Caumartin and Mme Deshoulières, the former in her fine hôtel in the Rue Sainte-Avoye, the latter in her more humble abode in the Rue de l'Homme Armé, presided over salons which were frequented by the same guests as that of Mlle de Scudéry. Mme de Caumartin

¹ The language of Climène in *La Critique de l'École des Femmes* (1668) may be taken as a fair satire on that of the better sort of Parisian *précieuse*.

² See E. Roy, *La vie et les œuvres de Charles Sorel*, 1891, c. x, for an excellent and highly suggestive study of the language of *Les Précieuses ridicules*.

³ *Corr. de Bussy-Rabutin*, I, p. 466.

was the second wife of Louis-François de Caumartin, a Master of Requests, who was the devoted friend of Cardinal de Retz. In 1664, ten years after the death of his first wife, he married Catherine de Verthamon, sister of Mme de Sévigné's friend and correspondent, Mme de Guitaut. Twenty-two years of age, good looking, intelligent, well educated, free from pedantry, but fond of the society of men of letters, she had all the qualities of a good hostess. Her husband, a man of high character, fully shared her love of letters and brilliant conversation. Moreover the grave magistrate was in his leisure hours a *bel-esprit*, and a warm partisan of the literary school which flourished in his youth—he was born in 1624—and which was represented in his wife's salon by Chapelain, Conrart, and Pellisson¹.

If Mme de Caumartin made no pretensions to be either a *précieuse* or a *femme savante*, Mme Deshoulières was both. In her own day she was called the Tenth Muse, and though her fame as a poetess has greatly diminished, she still retains a modest place in histories of French literature. Her best poetry, the *Reflexions morales*, was mostly written during the last twelve years of her life (1682–1694), when she was suffering from mortal disease. The idylls, as she calls them, of her earlier days breathe the atmosphere, not of the country, but of the salon, and like her friends she was too much addicted to writing verse on the most trivial subjects. But it is with her salon and not with her poetry that we are now concerned. Born in 1638, Antoinette Du Ligier de La Garde was married at the age of thirteen to an officer in high favour with Condé, who followed the fortunes of that illustrious rebel when he entered the service of Spain. Restored to her parents, the young wife spent the next two or three years in quiet study at Paris, and it was not till after the Peace of the Pyrenees (1659), followed by some years of privation and adventure, that having separated from her husband—owing, we are told, to money difficulties—she set up her salon in the Rue de l'Homme Armé².

Though the salons of Mlle de Scudéry and Mme Deshoulières were frequented by more or less the same guests, there was this difference between them, that while Mlle de Scudéry was a peacemaker and loved to compose quarrels, Mme Deshoulières was a strong partisan, and her salon became the headquarters of the opposition to Boileau and his

¹ For M. and Mme Caumartin, see Fabre, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 129–153.

² Probably in 1671, when her husband was sent to Bayonne and was employed for ten years in the fortifications of Guyenne (Fabre, *Correspondance de Fléchier*, p. 143 n. (2)).

friends. Boileau's attack on her in his Tenth Satire, written in 1692, is well known :

C'est une précieuse,
 Reste de ces esprits jadis si renommés
 Que d'un coup de son art Molière a diffamés.
 De tous leurs sentiments cette noble héritière,
 Maintient encore ici leur secte façonnée :
 Là, du faux bel-esprit, se tiennent les bureaux ;
 Là, tous les vers sont bons pourvu qu'ils soient nouveaux¹.

Another hostess who belonged to the same party was Mme de Scudéry, the widow of Georges de Scudéry², whose enmity to Boileau was due to his criticisms of her husband's writings and not to any attachment to the *précieux* school. She disclaimed both learning and *esprit*—'C'est ma belle-sœur qui est savante'—and though she was visited by Chapelain, Ménage, Cotin, and Mascarón, she also counted among her friends the Duc de Saint-Aignan³, a writer of occasional verse and a member of the Academy, to whom Racine dedicated his first play, the Duc de Noailles, and the Père Rapin. From her correspondence with Bussy-Rabutin we gather that she was of a serious and even melancholy temperament, but her letters are marked by good sense, good feeling, and transparent candour, and they are admirably written⁴. She was a great friend of Mlle Dupré⁵.

Of the older men who frequented the salons of Mlle de Scudéry and her friends, Chapelain, Conrart, and Pellisson have already been mentioned. To the same generation belonged Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin⁶, the uncle of Mlle Dupré, who, if he can hardly be claimed for the *précieux* school, was a strong opponent of Boileau; Isaac de Benserade⁷, that veteran of light verse, who turned the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid into *rondeaux*⁸, and for twenty years was responsible for the *ballets de cour*; the Abbé Cotin⁹, and Gilles Ménage, the Trissotin and

¹ *Sat.* x, ll. 437-447.

² 1637-1711. She was left a widow in 1667.

³ 1607-1687; elected to the Academy in 1663. He was father of the Duc de Beauvilliers, the governor of the Duc de Bourgogne.

⁴ The correspondence began in 1670 and was continued with regularity till 1680, after which it slackened considerably.

⁵ 'Nous sommes inséparables; c'est la meilleure amie que j'aie au monde' (Mme de S. to Bussy, Sept. 8, 1670. *Corr. de Bussy-Rabutin*, I, p. 312).

⁶ 1595-1676.

⁷ 1612-1694. See *L'hist. de l'Académie française* by Pellisson and Olivet, ed. Livet, 2 vols., 1858, II, pp. 236 ff.

⁸ The Abbé d'Olivet thus accounts for the complete failure of this work, whereas the author's earlier verses had been very successful: 'Quand ses Rondeaux parurent (1676), le goût avoit bien changé. Corneille, Molière, Racine, et Despréaux, par leurs ouvrages excellents, avoient fait détester le mauvais, et mépriser le médiocre. Si bien que les Rondeaux de M. de Benserade, qui trente ou quarante ans plus tôt eussent trouvé des admirateurs, ne trouvèrent pas même des lecteurs' (*op. cit.*, p. 247).

⁹ 1604-1682.

Vadius of *Les Femmes savantes*. Ménage, indeed, was a man of solid learning, but he also aspired to be a *bel-esprit*, a rôle in which he comported himself after the manner of a playful bear. His Wednesday gatherings, or *Mercuriales*, as he called them, had considerable *éclat* and formed another centre of opposition to the 'insolent clique' of Boileau.

Of the younger generation, contemporaries of Boileau and Racine, Ménage's friend and correspondent, Pierre-Daniel Huet, may be regarded on the whole as belonging to the same school¹. In his earlier days, before he was appointed assistant-tutor to the Dauphin or had thought of taking Orders², he wrote occasional verse, chiefly in Latin, but sometimes in French³. He was the friend and correspondent of Mlle de Scudéry for forty years and a welcome visitor in the Rue Sainte-Avoye. Another frequenter of the same salons was Charles Perrault. He is chiefly known now-a-days for his fairy tales and his agreeable memoirs, but his reputation was made as a writer of light verse, especially of a celebrated *Portrait d'Iris*⁴, and he was one of the most active opponents of Boileau and his friends. Perrault's friend, Philippe Quinault⁵, was also a strong partisan of the *précieux* school, and Boileau found their names, as well as those of Boursault and Hesnault, conveniently interchangeable in his verse. When he became reconciled with one, he had only to substitute the name of another, without having to rack his brains for a new rhyme⁶.

Quinault represents in a special degree the influence of Mlle de Scudéry's novels on the drama. From 1656 till 1666 he produced several tragedies and tragi-comedies, which had great success and which led a contemporary dramatist to praise him as one 'qui sait parfaitement la carte de Tendre et qui touche si bien les passions amoureuses⁷.' However, about this time he abandoned the regular

¹ His literary tastes are indicated with his usual insight by Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du Lundi*, II, pp. 163 ff., see also *Portraits Contemporains*, II, pp. 243 ff.

² He was appointed *sous-précepteur* to the Dauphin in 1670, took Orders in 1676, and was made Bishop of Avranches in 1685.

³ The Abbé Fabre prints three interesting letters written to Huet by Mme de La Fayette à propos of his verses. In one of them she says, perhaps not without a touch of malice, 'Vous devenez poète françois; il me semble que vous devriez tenir à la muse latine; c'est trop d'être à la fois et latin et françois.' (*La Jeunesse de Fléchier*, II, pp. 347-351.)

⁴ Printed in *Portraits de Mlle de Montpensier*, pp. 173 ff. For Perrault (1628-1703) see P. Bonnefon, *Charles Perrault, Essai sur sa vie et ses ouvrages* in *Rev. d'hist. litt.* 1904, pp. 365 ff.

⁵ 1635-1688.

⁶ In *Sat.* ix, 97, the name of Boursault was replaced first by that of Perrault and then by that of Quinault. In *Le Lutrin*, III, 48, Perrault was substituted for Boursault, and finally altered to Hesnault.

⁷ Gabriel Chappuzeau in *L'Europe vivante* (1667) ap. E. Despois, *Le théâtre français sous Louis XIV*, 1894, p. 380 n.

drama, and in 1672 he produced the first of those operas in which he so skilfully wedded his lyrical measures to the music of Lulli. Thomas Corneille's¹ supple genius lent itself to any type of drama that promised popularity, and, like Quinault, he produced romanesque tragi-comedies down to 1672. The influence of Quinault is also visible in the great Corneille's *Agésilas* (1666) and in the *Germanicus* (1679) of Edmé Boursault², the exaggerated praise of which by Corneille at the Académie française gave offence to Racine. His *Portrait du peintre* or *Contre-critique de l'École des femmes* brought him into collision with Molière, who amply avenged himself in *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, and he also had a quarrel with Boileau.

If *préciosité* influenced the stage in the persons of Quinault and Thomas Corneille, it was represented in the pulpit by Mascaron and Fléchier. The former was a life-long friend and admirer of Mlle de Scudéry. Writing to her in 1672, the year after he was made Bishop of Tulle, he says, 'My occupation this autumn is the reading of *Cyrus*, *Clélie*, and *Ibrahim*. These works always have for me the charm of novelty, and I find in them so much that is useful for the reformation of the world that I have no difficulty in declaring that when I am preparing my sermons for the Court you are very often by the side of St Augustine and St Bernard³.' After this frank avowal one is not surprised to find that his first funeral oration, that for Anne of Austria (1666), abounds in points and metaphors. His brother prelate, Esprit Fléchier, is one of the most interesting examples of the *préciosité* of the period⁴. Coming to Paris in 1659 at the malleable age of seventeen, with his way to make in the world, he found a protector in Conrart, who introduced him to the circle of Mlle de Scudéry and brought him to the particular notice of the Duc de Montausier. On the latter's recommendation he entered the family of M. de Caumartin (*circ.* 1662) as tutor to his son, and accompanied him to Clermont when he went there in 1665 as a member of the royal commission of Les Grands-Jours. Fléchier's well-known account of the proceedings appeared in the following year. It contains several interesting stories and is agreeably written, but the *précieux* element reveals itself, partly in the abuse of antithesis, and partly in the perpetual

¹ 1625-1709.

² 1638-1701.

³ Rathery and Boutron, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-8.

⁴ Besides L'Abbé Fabre's three works (*De la correspondance de Fléchier avec Mme Des Houlières et sa fille*, 1871; *La Jeunesse de Fléchier*; and *Fléchier orateur*, 2nd ed. 1886), see Saint-Beuve, *Caus. du Lundi*, xv, pp. 383 ff.; and F. Brunetière, *La société précieuse au XVII^e siècle* (on Fabre's *La Jeunesse de Fléchier*).

badinage with which he enlivens his narrative, even of the most sombre crimes¹. He brought with him to Auvergne the reputation of a poet as well as a *bel-esprit*. The greater part of his verse, which was no better and no worse than that of the other members of his circle, was produced between 1663 and 1668, and found its way into various *Recueils*². In 1668, thanks again to M. de Montausier, he was transferred to the higher sphere of the Court, being appointed reader to the Dauphin. From Versailles, where his time seems to have hung rather heavily on his hands, he carried on for two years a correspondence of the usual *précieux* type with Mlle de La Vigne. About the same time he began to frequent the salon of Mme Deshoulières, and struck up a friendship with her daughter—she shared her mother's poetical talents—which lasted till the end of his life. In 1672 he preached his first funeral oration, that on Mme de Montausier, the famous Julie, and having made his mark as an orator was elected to the Academy in the following year. His long and assiduous correspondence with Mlle Deshoulières began about the year 1677. It is conducted at first in the same tone and with the same adherence to the rules of the game as that with Mlle de La Vigne. Fléchier is perfectly conscious that he is writing for effect, and that his letters, like those of Balzac and Voiture, will be read aloud in more than one salon and passed round to the *habitués*. But he is also alive to the humorous aspect of this *commerce de galanterie*, of these amorous sighs which exist only on paper, of this holding of the fort against a mock siege³. 'Perhaps what I write is *galimatias*.' He realised, in fact, that he was playing a game, and he played it with skill and tact. But after he became a Bishop (1685)⁴ the tone of his letters changes, and *galanterie* gives place to the sincere expression of real friendship.

In 1681 Fléchier sent Mlle Deshoulières a 'portrait' of himself drawn with his usual tact and urbanity⁵. This fashion of written 'portraits' was of all the *précieux* fashions the one which made the deepest mark on French literature, and which lasted the longest.

¹ Both these faults were due to the example of Balzac and Voiture. The Abbé Trublet says of Balzac, 'Il prodigue l'antithèse et l'hyperbole; c'est son défaut essentiel'; of Voiture, 'Son tour d'esprit le porte au badinage,' and of the two together, 'L'antithèse et même l'hyperbole sont également leurs figures favorites.' *Essais sur divers sujets de littérature et de morale*, I (1735).

² See Lachèvre, III, pp. 333–8.

³ In *Les Grands-Jours d'Auvergne* he draws satirical portraits of two *précieuses languissantes* of Clermont.

⁴ Bishop of Lavaur; he was transferred to Nîmes in 1687.

⁵ Part of it is quoted by Sainte-Beuve (*Port. Cont.* v, pp. 108–9); see also Fabre, *Correspondance de Fléchier*, p. 243.

In the second quarter of the next century it was much in vogue in the salon of Mme Du Deffand, and she herself and her friend, the Président d'Hénault, were adepts at it. It may be said that Fléchier's funeral oration on the Duchesse de Montausier was a 'portrait' writ large. The Duke's choice of Fléchier to deliver the oration was not only natural but appropriate, for the *Guirlande de Julie* was the first outward symptom of *préciosité* that showed itself in the Hôtel de Rambouillet. Julie herself, however, suffered less from the disease than her husband, who, in spite of his *vertu hérissée* and *mœurs antiques* (Saint-Simon), had a considerable touch of it. The friend of Godeau, Conrart and Chapelain, he wrote verses in his youth, including the lion's share of the *Guirlande*, with the best of them. After the Fronde he tried, though with little success, to revive the glories of the Blue Chamber, and he was a regular attendant at Mlle de Scudéry's Saturdays¹. It was doubtless in her salon that Conrart presented to him Fléchier and Huet—to their great advantage, for he was a loyal friend and an active patron. His loyalty to Chapelain, indeed, carried him so far as to regard *La Pucelle* as a masterpiece, and Boileau as a monster of malignity. But a flattering reference to him in the *Épître à Racine* (1677) charmed away his wrath, and after an interchange of compliments in the gallery of Versailles, followed by an invitation to dinner, the satirist found 'in the most virtuous and respectable noble of the Court'—the phrase is Boileau's—a generous friend and a severe critic².

Other frequenters of the *précieus* salons were the three Abbés, Jacques Cassagne³, Jean Testu de Mauroy⁴, and Paul Tallemant⁵, all of whom had a reputation as writers of light verse. In fact the last-named was elected to the Academy (1666) at the age of twenty-four on the strength of his *poésies galantes*. His cousin, François Tallemant⁶, brother of Tallemant des Réaux, attained to the same distinction in 1651 without having written a line. Later he earned a

¹ 'Il fait trop le métier de bel-esprit pour un homme de qualité, ou du moins, il le fait trop sérieusement. Il va au samedi fort souvent' (Tallemant Des Réaux).

² A. Roux, *Montausier, sa vie et son temps*, 1860, pp. 203–205. Montausier was appointed governor to the Dauphin in 1668; it was doubtless not his fault that his charge did not do more credit to him, but his methods, it must be confessed, were sometimes brutal and sometimes pedantic. He was created a *duc et pair* in 1664.

³ 1635–1679; also of repute as a preacher; mentioned by Boileau, *Sat.* II, 60. See also Chapelain, *Mémoire de quelques Gens de Lettres vivans en 1632*, ap. J. E. Fidaou-Justinian, *L'esprit classique et la préciosité, au xvii^e siècle*, 1914, p. 220.

⁴ 1626–1706; he figures in Somaize as Tiridate II de Memnon; he was tutor to Monsieur's daughters (see D'Alembert, *Hist. des membres de l'Académie française*, 6 vols., 1785–7, II, 307 ff.). His name appeared in the earlier editions of Boileau's *Satires* (VII, p. 45), but Boileau afterwards put Pradon in his place.

⁵ 1642–1712.

⁶ 1620–1693. See Chapelain, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

place in Boileau's *Seventh Epistle* by his translation of the Lives of Plutarch. He, too, was an Abbé and an *alcoriste*. Lastly, to complete the list, we have François Charpentier¹, who was reputed to have a profound knowledge of antiquity, and Claude Boyer² and Michel Le Clerc³, both natives of Albi, and both writers of unsuccessful tragedies.

These *ruelles* of the Marais were the headquarters of *préciosité*. But there were a few others, more aristocratic in character, which were more or less imbued with the same spirit, and in which the writers of the same school found a welcome. First, there was the salon of Mlle de Montpensier in the Luxembourg, where according to her secretary, Segrais, 'tout ce qu'il y avait de beaux esprits y trouvaient leur place comme chez Mécénas⁴.' Cotin was one of her *protégés*, and according to the Abbé d'Olivet the scene between him and Ménage which Molière has immortalised in *Les Femmes savantes* took place in her salon. Huet occasionally acted as her reader. She herself had written portraits and romances; in fact this romantic and sentimental princess might have stepped straight out of *Le grand Cyrus* or *Clélie*. In the words of Sainte-Beuve 'she belongs to the literature of the Regency.' Jean Regnault de Segrais⁵, who was her secretary till 1671, when she dismissed him for opposing her marriage with Lauzun, was a violent partisan of the old school. A friend of Chapelain, an admirer of his *Pucelle* and of Mlle de Scudéry's 'natural and tender verse,' he deeply resented Boileau's attacks on them, and he was an ardent champion of Corneille against the upstart Racine. Unlike Montausier, he was in no wise mollified by the praise which Boileau bestowed on his eclogues in the *Art poétique*⁶. However, in 1676 he retired to his native Caen, where he married an heiress, translated Virgil, reconstituted its Academy, and became the leader of its literary society.

Marie-Anne Mancini, the youngest of Mazarin's five nieces of that name, married the Duc de Bouillon in 1662, and soon afterwards made her hôtel a social and literary centre. Her most distinguished client was La Fontaine, whose acquaintance she had made at Château-Thierry, but most of her *habitués* were drawn from the opposite faction, and included Segrais, Ménage, Boyer, and Benserade. She was also on intimate terms with Mme Deshoulières.

¹ 1620–1703. See D. Alembert, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 127 ff.

² 1618–1698.

³ 1622–1691.

⁴ She was established there in 1657, but from 1662 to 1664 she was in exile.

⁵ 1624–1701. See D'Alembert, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 73 ff.

⁶ 'Que Segrais, dans l'élogue, en charme les forêts.' Segrais was at least an artist in verse, and in a more poetical age he might have been a poet.

At Paris, says Saint-Simon, 'she was a sort of queen,' and her house was open from morning to night. Like the rest of her family she had charm in abundance; she was well-read and a good talker; and she was a sure and constant friend. But she had an imperious temper and could not bear opposition¹. Her brother, Philippe Mancini, Duc de Nevers, aspired to be a *bel-esprit*, wrote verses, and frequented the salon of Mme Deshoulières. Lastly, there were the two allied salons of the Duchesse de Richelieu and Mme d'Albret, which, according to Mme de Caylus, the beautiful and lively cousin of Mme de Maintenon², were a continuation and a copy of the Hôtel de Rambouillet³. At both Mme Scarron was an ornament, and her cousin tells us that it was on this account that Louis XIV was at first prejudiced against her, for he suspected her of being a *précieuse*. He was wrong; she had far too much good sense. It is very probable, however, that her coldness, her reserve, and her dignified bearing, which made it impossible for any man to attempt a liberty with her, led to the epithet being applied to her by Louis's courtiers. It was at the Hôtel d'Albret that she met Mme de Montespan, who was a relation of the hostess.

Madeleine Guénégaud, wife of Maréchal d'Albret was, says Mme de Caylus, 'une femme de mérite sans esprit,' who 'in spite of her piety was accused of being rather too fond of the glass⁴.' She was sister-in-law to the Duchesse de Richelieu⁵, whose first husband was Alexandre d'Albret, Seigneur de Pons, elder brother of the Maréchal. Left a widow, 'without money, beauty of youth, and without much *esprit*,' she succeeded in capturing the young Duke of Richelieu, much to the astonishment of the Court and greatly to the chagrin of his aunt and guardian, the Duchesse d'Aiguillon⁶. Mlle de Montpensier speaks slightly of her—'elle avoit un air bourgeois; c'était une tracassière qui ne savait pas vivre'—but Mademoiselle's judgments are often biassed. At any rate the Duchess bore with her husband's extravagance and gambling-losses without any sign of ill-temper. They had this in common that they liked the society of wits and men of letters, and their house was frequented by more or less the same guests as the Hôtel d'Albret. There was, however, this difference, says Mme de Caylus,

¹ Saint-Simon, *Mémoires*, x, pp. 195–7.

² She is sometimes spoken of as her niece, but she was only a niece *à la mode de Bretagne*. She was one of the most beautiful women of her time.

³ *Souvenirs de Mme de Caylus*, ed. E. Raunié, 1889, p. 52.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, pp. 14–15. Mme de Sévigné's cousin Coulanges made an irreverent *chanson* on her.

⁵ Anne Poussart Du Vigan, sister of Condé's love; their mother was a great friend of the Duchesse d'Aiguillon and a frequent visitor at the Hôtel de Rambouillet.

⁶ See *Mémoires de Mme de Motteville*, iii, pp. 110–115.

that at the Hôtel de Richelieu, the Abbé Testu took the lead and aspired to be its Voiture. 'He wrote indifferent verse,' adds the lady, who evidently did not like him, 'and his style was full of antithesis and points¹.' He certainly had no small share of the *précieux* spirit, and he deservedly figures in the dictionary of Somaize as 'Tiridate troisième du nom, dont l'esprit est connu de toutes celles qui tiennent alcoves.' Among his many lady friends, however, there were several who were not in the least *précieuses*, notably, Mme de Maintenon, Mme de Coulanges, who greatly added to the gaiety of the Hôtel de Richelieu—her confessor said of her that 'each of her sins is an epigram'—and Mme de Sévigné, in whose letters we hear much of the Abbé's vapours and sleeplessness².

Among the other frequenters of the Hôtel de Richelieu one of the most distinguished was the Cardinal d'Estrées³, who was a member of the Academy from 1658 and lived to be its *doyen*. Though he published nothing, he was, says Saint-Simon, a man of 'rare condition,' 'un esprit supérieur' as well as a *bel-esprit*. In all Saint-Simon's gallery there is no portrait that makes a more favourable impression⁴ than that of this well-bred, dignified, high-minded, entertaining, and in every way delightful churchman of the *Grand Siècle*. One of his remarks will bear repetition. One day at dinner the king, who was an enormous eater, complained of the inconvenience of having no teeth. 'Des dents, Sire,' replied the Cardinal, who old though he was had beautiful white teeth, which he showed in speaking, 'Eh ! qui est-ce qui en a ?'

Other *habitués* were M. de Barillon, for many years ambassador at the Court of St James; Mlle d'Aumale, who married the celebrated Maréchal Schomberg, as his second wife, in 1669, and who according to Mme de Caylus was a *précieuse*⁵; and Mlle de Pons, a relation of the Maréchal d'Albret, afterwards Mme d'Heudicourt, who was extremely pretty, very amusing, and altogether a highly original character⁶. Mme de Maintenon, who kept up her intimacy with her, declared that she never opened her mouth without making her laugh.

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¹ *Souvenirs de Mme de Caylus*, pp. 83-4.

² 1626-1706. He was elected to the Academy in 1665. Saint-Simon has a good portrait of him, which is much more favourable than that of Mme de Caylus. He says that he was one of the first persons to have the 'vapours.' (See *Mémoires*, iii, pp. 444-5.) See also D'Alembert, *op. cit.*, iii, pp. 335 ff., and for his poetry, Lachèvre, *op. cit.*, ii, pp. 485-6, iii, pp. 550-1.

³ 1628-1714.

⁴ *Mémoires*, x, pp. 348-355.

⁵ *Souvenirs*, p. 87. According to Segrais she is one of the *précieuses* in Mlle de Montpensier's novel of *La Princesse de Paplagonie*.

⁶ *Ib.*, pp. 87, 129-132; Saint-Simon, *Mémoires*, i, pp. 351-3.