

ANCIENTS, MODERNS, GENDER: MARIE-JEANNE L'HÉRITIER'S *LE PARNASSE RECONNOISSANT OU LE TRIOMPHE DE MADAME DES-HOULIÈRES*

Abstract

This article examines the relationship between the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* and the *Querelle des femmes* as it was articulated in *Le Parnasse reconnoissant ou le triomphe de Madame Des-Houlières* by Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier. Published in 1694 as a riposte to Boileau's misogynist *Satire X*, the text contributes to the tradition of defences of women. However, L'Héritier deliberately inserts her rejoinder into the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns; in so doing, she responds to another work by Boileau, the *Dialogue des héros de roman*. After establishing how different quarrels and concerns combine in Boileau's two texts, this article suggests that L'Héritier consciously exploited the platform of 'Ancients and Moderns' to discuss women's cultural practice. While this confirms the critical view that the two quarrels were interlinked, it also reveals a hierarchy of quarrels in which the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns had greater capital: as such it proved useful for a woman entering the literary field. L'Héritier's strategies demonstrate the complexities of being a Modern women writer, despite the typical alignment of these identities, and invite us to examine how this contemporary hierarchisation of quarrels has shaped their recent reception.

In 1694, soon after the publication of Nicolas Boileau's misogynist *Satire X*, Parisian publisher, Claude Mazuel, printed a short text, *Le Triomphe de Madame Des-Houlières, receue dixième muse au Parnasse*. This was written to defend the cultural and intellectual contributions of women, which the *Satire* had mocked, by honouring the recent death of the poet, Antoinette Deshoulières. It also stages the punishment of a 'nouveau Juvenal' – Boileau – 'qui a eu la temerité de répandre avec trop d'aigreur le fiel satirique de sa quinteuse rime contre les Femmes.'¹ The text was attributed to, and acknowledged by, *salonnière* and *protégée* of Charles Perrault, Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier de Villandon, now best known for her fairy tales. The timing and emphasis make it evident that the text is a riposte to Boileau's satire: it therefore constitutes an engagement in the long tradition of defences of women.

To make her case for women's cultural legitimacy, L'Héritier draws on the tradition of the 'Triumph' or 'Pompe funèbre', the fashionable location of Parnassus, with its pageants of ancient and modern writers, and on the motif of trial and debate familiar from the recent vogue for *Dialogue des morts* – genres and forms which would,

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¹ Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier, *Le Triomphe de Madame Des-Houlières, receue dixième muse au Parnasse* (Paris: Mazuel, 1694). The edition used here is: 'Le Parnasse reconnoissant ou Le triomphe de Madame Des-Houlières. A Mademoiselle de Scuderi', in *Œuvres mêlées de Mlle L'H**** (Paris: Guignard, 1696), pp. 404-24 (p. 420). The title page gives the publication date as 1696, but the 'achevé d'imprimer' is dated October 1695. Subsequent references given in-text.

by 1694, have come to be associated with the ‘Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns’, and the flurry of works produced in the wake of the famous confrontation between the ‘Ancient’ Nicolas Boileau and the ‘Modern’ Charles Perrault at the *Académie française* in January 1687.² More precisely, in casting *Le Parnasse reconnoissant* in this way, L’Héritier deliberately echoes another text by Boileau, the *Dialogue des héros de roman*, a satire of contemporary feminocentric novels that were set in the ancient world.³ Although written in the 1660s, the *Dialogue* uses the Ancients and Moderns as a platform; it was only published for the first time, though apparently without Boileau’s sanction, at the height of the Quarrel in 1688.⁴ It was published again in 1693, also without permission, shortly before L’Héritier’s proto-feminist rejoinder.⁵

In her pioneering study, *Ancients against Moderns*, Joan DeJean explains such intermingling of quarrels by convincingly arguing that the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns was an extension of the *Querelle des femmes*.⁶ This view of the Quarrel has been contested, for instance by Marc Fumaroli and Larry Norman, who focus primarily

² For a discussion of L’Héritier’s text as part of the ‘Triumph’ genre, see Delphine Denis, *Le Parnasse galant: institution d’une catégorie littéraire au XVII siècle* (Paris: Champion, 2001), pp. 67-80.

³ This is also noted by Joan DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho: 1546-1939* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 114-15.

⁴ *Retour des pièces choisies ou bigarrures curieuses*, 2 vols (Emmerich: Varius, 1687-88), II (1688). I use ‘Quarrel’ to refer to the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns.

⁵ Saint-Evremond, *Œuvres mêlées*, 5 vols (Paris: Barbin, 1693-94), IV (1693), 222-55.

⁶ Joan DeJean, *Ancients against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 31-77, 167.

on its aesthetic questions.⁷ However, by adopting a method that promotes a socio-literary understanding of the ideologies and discourse around taste, DeJean and others persuasively argue that the Quarrel was triggered by changing literary publics and the increasing literary presence and authority of women, who, because they often possessed a less formal erudite education, contributed to the development of tastes and practices that did not have ancient models.⁸ As such, this Quarrel is considered to be a crucial forum for defining the literary field in late seventeenth-century France. The ‘woman question’ was taken up by the figureheads of the two ‘parties’, with Charles Perrault’s *Apologie des femmes* written as his reply to Boileau’s *Satire X*. And indeed, *Satire X* itself has been read as an explicit response to the way Perrault turned the Moderns into the champions of female taste, and privileged a spontaneous and natural reaction to culture that was characterized as feminine.⁹ Because of the polarised positions of the Quarrel’s figureheads, and because many women wrote in genres self-consciously understood as

⁷ Marc Fumaroli, ‘Les Abeilles et les araignées’, in *La Querelle des anciens et des modernes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), ed. by Anne-Marie Lecoq, pp. 7-218; Larry F. Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient: Literature and History in Early Modern France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

⁸ See also Elizabeth Berg, ‘Recognizing Differences: Perrault’s Modernist Esthetic in *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes*’, *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 18 (1983), 138-145; Alain Viala, *La France galante* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France), pp. 226-57.

⁹ Charles Perrault, *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes*, 4 vols (Paris: Coignard, 1688; 1690; 1692; 1697), I, 21-22. For this reading, see DeJean, *Ancients against Moderns*, p. 68; and Lewis C. Seifert, *Fairy Tales, Sexuality and Gender in France (1690-1715): Nostalgic Utopias* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 93.

Modern, namely novels and fairy tales, women writers have traditionally been affiliated with the Moderns;¹⁰ the famous exception to this being Anne Dacier, translator of Homer and professed Ancient, whose singularity rather proves the general trend.

This article will examine how Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier, as a Modern female writer, negotiated her place both with and within quarrels. It will first introduce Boileau's *Dialogue* and *Satire X* to show how quarrels about antiquity and women were entwined; and how, through formal features and publication strategies, he prioritised the *Satire*'s engagement with debates about women and the *Dialogue*'s with Ancients and Moderns, both revealing a distinction between the two quarrels and shaping their perception. It will then analyse how L'Héritier responds to Boileau's texts in *Le Parnasse reconnaissant*; it will suggest that L'Héritier deliberately privileged the context of the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns as the forum in which to present her defence of women's cultural practice. This gesture confirms the Quarrel's function as a space for determining cultural legitimacy and the centrality of questions about women's writing to it. However, L'Héritier's deliberate confrontation of the *Querelle des femmes* and the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns also reveals a hierarchy in which the latter emerges as more authoritative. This hierarchy demands attention: it suggests that, for this woman writer, in the literary field of late seventeenth-century France, the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns had more capital than arguments concerning her own sex. This Quarrel over cultural legitimacy itself possessed a – legitimised – prestige. By juxtaposing a defence of women's cultural activity with her particular vision of antiquity, L'Héritier also

¹⁰ Carolyn C. Lougee, *Le Paradis des femmes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 18; Erica Harth, *Cartesian Women: Versions and Subversions of Rational Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 80-81; DeJean, *Ancients against Moderns*, p. 67; Viala, *La France galante*, pp. 248-49.

challenges the premises on which Boileau attacks – and Perrault defends – ‘female’ knowledge: both revealing them to be similar and troubling the male-determined association between women writers and the Moderns. In doing so, L’Héritier exposes the vexed tensions entailed in espousing both identities. Her stance poses suggestive questions about what it means to be a Modern, and asks us to assess how the hierarchisation of quarrels present in the literary field of late seventeenth-century France has shaped their more recent reception in literary history.

Boileau’s Dialogue des héros de roman and Satire X

Boileau’s *Dialogue* and *Satire X* demonstrate how far the question of women’s influence was intermingled with debates over ancient culture and modernity. However, as I will examine here, each text is subtly positioned within a different quarrel: the *Satire* prioritises questions about women and the *Dialogue* representations of antiquity. In this respect, while quarrels are used to shape each text’s interpretation, and each quarrel is credited with influence, a distinction is made between them.

As suggested, Boileau’s 1694 *Satire X* can be seen as a reaction against Perrault’s championing of female taste in his *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes*.¹¹ This counter-attack is further portrayed within the *Satire* when Boileau mocks the influence literary women, the ‘précieuses’, have acquired over Modern taste:

Mais qui vient sur ses pas? C’est une Précieuse [...]

C’est chez elle toûjours que les fades Auteurs

¹¹ Nicolas Boileau, ‘Satire X’, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Adam and Escal (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), pp. 62-80.

S'en vont se consoler du mépris des Lecteurs. (438-44).¹²

To ridicule further the reign of the *précieuses*, Boileau condemns the literary genre with which they were particularly associated: he accuses Madeleine de Scudéry's novel, *Clélie*, of immorality:

D'abord tu la verras, ainsi que dans Clélie

Recevant ses Amans sous le doux nom d'Amis [...]

Dans le crime il suffit qu'une fois on débute

Une chûte toûjours attire une autre chûte (158-66)

Boileau's attack on the novel, which echoes previous comments in his *Art poétique* (1674), further attests to his engagement with Perrault and the Moderns, many of whom advocated the novel as a quintessentially Modern genre, equal to classical epic. *Satire X* thus epitomizes how far quarrels about Ancients, Moderns, novels and women were interlinked. And yet, Boileau particularly foregrounds the *Satire's* engagement with arguments about women: he explicitly inserts his poem into a tradition of misogynous invective. The 'précieuse' is just one manifestation of several deplorable female stereotypes Boileau caricatures, and indeed, the poem as a whole is presented as marriage 'advice' given to a young man, recalling the *molestiae nuptiarum* ('woes of marriage'). Its place in this misogynous satirical tradition is signalled self-consciously within the early sections of the *Satire* through allusions to Juvenal and Rabelais.¹³ The timing thus connects Boileau's *Satire* to the Quarrel; however, by inserting the *Satire* into this

¹² Brossette, publisher of Boileau's 1716 *Œuvres*, suggested that this 'précieuse' is Madame Deshoulières. See Adam and Escal, p. 937.

¹³ On this tradition, see Floyd Gray, *Gender, Rhetoric and Print Culture in French Renaissance Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 6-29.

particular longstanding tradition, Boileau also subtly distinguishes the woman question, turning it into a related, but nevertheless separate, concern.

In contrast, the context and conditions of the *Dialogue*'s publication serve to prioritise its engagement with the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns and the attendant questions about the novel, even though it does contain a – at least equal – focus on the interconnected question of female cultural influence. The *Dialogue* is thought to have been written and read aloud in the mid-1660s, a time when long novels depicting the ancient world by authors such as Gautier de la Calprenède and Madeleine de Scudéry were at the peak of their success; and when the related social and literary practices of *galanterie* – a mode that privileged the feminine, and was associated with the Moderns and modern genres, particularly the novel – was gaining cultural value. In this multi-character 'dialogue' set in the underworld, reminiscent of Lucian's second-century *Dialogues of the Dead*, 'Pluton' has decided to convoke heroes from the *champs Elysées* to deal with a mutiny.¹⁴ With the judge of the dead, Minos, at his side, he tasks Diogène with introducing them. Increasingly flabbergasted by the *galant* novelistic version of ancient heroes he encounters, Pluton ends up condemning these characters to be stripped, whipped and drowned in the waters of Lethe, consigned to oblivion. Boileau makes his targeting of contemporary novelists clear by naming authors in the text: 'Ah! La Calprenede! Ah, Scuderi!' (p. 488).

As has been argued by various critics, Boileau's *Dialogue* can be seen to be attacking both novels, and in particular their representation of antiquity, and the female-oriented cultural circles that produced them; it thus bears witness to the entangled and

¹⁴ Nicolas Boileau, 'Dialogue des héros de roman', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Adam and Escal, pp. 447-89. Subsequent references will be given in-text.

multi-faceted nature of the quarrels marking this period.¹⁵ In particular, the *Dialogue* targets what Lewis Seifert describes as the ‘ludic role-playing’ practices of the salon.¹⁶ Such targeting is figured through references to the use of pseudonyms, through tropes of the imposter, and in gendered language, which, drawing on the discourse surrounding both literary taste and contemporary manners and mores, is critical in particular of a ‘mollifying’ female influence. This criticism perpetuates the targeting of the novels’ authors and also reveals what Boileau sees as problematic in the *galant* treatment of antiquity. For instance, far from being concerned with battle, all the gathered heroes are preparing for a ball; Diogène describes: ‘c’est qu’ils sont en fort bon equipage pour danser. Ils sont jolis, ma foy, je n’ay jamais rien veu de si dameret ni de si galant’ (p. 452) – terms that also occur in Boileau’s *Art poétique*. While ‘galant’ has connotations of mixed sociability, ‘dameret’ describes even more strongly the pleasing of women.¹⁷ The *Dialogue* foregrounds the feminization of coded cultural practices and their effect on literary production. Pluton complains that many of the characters are simply made up, exclaiming, ‘Je sçais aussi bien mon Herodote qu’un autre’ (p. 454), and he is completely baffled by Scudéry’s ‘Carte de Tendre’, her cartographical depiction of sentiment that formed the centrepiece to her novel, *Clélie*: ‘de quel pays parle-t-elle là? Je ne me

¹⁵ See, for instance, Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 166-77; Viala, *La France galante*, pp. 234-250; Lewis C. Seifert, *Manning the Margins: Masculinity and Writing in Seventeenth-Century France* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), pp. 70-71.

¹⁶ Seifert, *Manning the Margins*, p. 142.

¹⁷ ‘Qui veut paraître de bonne mine pour plaire aux dames.’ Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel*, 3 vols (La Haye et Rotterdam: Leers, 1690). For more on the terms ‘galant’ and ‘dameret’, and their derogatory uses, see Seifert, *Manning the Margins*, pp. 57-98.

souviens point de l'avoir veu dans la carte' (p. 463). Embedded in this gendered criticism is an implicit suggestion that cultural legitimacy should not be conferred on those who appear to lack erudite knowledge of the ancient world.

And yet, the complex publication history of the *Dialogue*, and the alignment with quarrels this entailed, served to prioritise its condemnation of the novel and defence of ancient literature, somewhat downplaying these overtly gendered attacks. Though written in the 1660s, the *Dialogue* was only officially published as part of a revised edition of Boileau's *Œuvres* in 1713, two years after his death, based on a manuscript he had given to his literary executor, Esprit Billiot, prior to his demise. It was, however, circulated in the early 1670s as the quarrel over the novel was simmering.¹⁸ Another version, entitled *Dialogue des morts* and attributed to 'Mr. B...', was published in 1688 in Emmerich am Rhein, apparently without the author's permission; the work was published again in Paris, also unsanctioned and correctly attributed, in 1693, in a collection of works by Saint-Evremond. Although the publication of the *Dialogue* in 1688 was apparently unsanctioned, its appearance was timely, given that the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns, self-consciously understood as such, was at the peak of its intensity and Boileau had not yet replied to Perrault's provocative poem, *Le Siècle de Louis le Grand*, read at the *Académie française* in January 1687.¹⁹

When Boileau came finally to prepare this text for official publication in his *Œuvres*, its positioning within quarrels over the novel and antiquity – and, importantly, the foregrounding of their primarily literary nature – is made all the more evident. He added an introductory *Discours*, in which he primarily presents the *Dialogue* as a protest

¹⁸ 1670 saw the publication Huet's defence of the novel: Pierre Daniel Huet, *Traité de l'origine des romans* (1670).

¹⁹ See DeJean, *Ancients against Moderns*, p. 52.

against the novel and a defence of the sanctity of ancient culture. He opens by stating it was written ‘à l’occasion de cette prodigieuse multitude de Romans’ (p. 443), and suggests that the novels of Scudéry, La Calprenède and Gomberville, with their ‘frivoles’ characters, teach ‘la mauvaise Morale’ (pp. 445-46). This condemnation culminates in Boileau’s much-commented upon prescriptive remark, ‘qu’on ne les lit presque plus’ (p. 446), credited with determining the long exclusion of such ‘galant’ novels from the canon, which lasted through the better part of the twentieth century.²⁰ The *Dialogue* is further framed by its placement in the *Œuvres*. From the first edition of 1701, the *Œuvres* contained Boileau’s reconciliatory ‘Lettre à M. Perrault de l’Académie Française’ (pp. 568-74) that dated from about 1698, in which Boileau, although he makes many concessions to Perrault, presents the novel as immoral. He also characterises his quarrel with Perrault as being a literary debate, casting it as a comparison between ancient and modern authors and genres; it is described as a ‘duel grammatical’ (p. 568) and in the preface to the *Œuvres*, as a ‘démêlé Poétique’ (p. 5).

Through its placement within the *Œuvres*, and the emphasis of the *Discours*, the *Dialogue* itself is therefore contextualised as being part of the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns, and thus also ‘grammatical’ and ‘Poétique’. At the end of the *Discours*, Boileau asserts: ‘je leur donne peut-estre icy le moins frivole Ouvrage, qui soit encore sorti de ma plume’ (p. 446). Boileau distances this text from the frivolity of which he has accused novels by casting it as a genre-based ‘Poétique’ and moral defence of ancient literature. Where *Satire X* drew on a well-founded generic tradition, the *Dialogue* possesses a more complex status. It is personally-targeted, representative of, as Boileau

²⁰ See DeJean, *Tender Geographies*, pp. 165-67; and for a discussion of Boileau’s role in canon formation, see Faith E. Beasley, *Salons, History and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 261-313.

avows, his 'esprit satirique' (*Discours*, p. 445); but also, in its final presentation in the *Œuvres*, it constitutes a form of literary criticism.²¹ By inserting his text into the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns, in this, his last word on the matter, its literary and moral dimensions are privileged; the 'woman question' is placed in a category of its own.

L'Héritier's Querelle des femmes in disguise

Though Boileau hoped to stem the flow of modern and feminocentric novels through his ridicule, one woman responded to his attack: Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier with her *Le Triomphe de Madame Des-Houlières, receue dixième muse au Parnasse* in 1694. Written to honour the death of her fellow *salonnière*, poet and Modern, Antoinette Deshoulières, this text was also dedicated to Madeleine de Scudéry. It stages Deshoulières's transition from the underworld to her triumph on Mount Parnassus where she is received by Apollo as the tenth muse and honoured by a pageant celebrating modern writers alongside, and over, ancient ones.²² It was published without L'Héritier's consent in 1694 (and subsequently with it the following year, in her *Œuvres mêlées*, according to the 'Avis du libraire' published with this version).²³ However, according to the 'Avis', although

²¹ Léo Stambul argues that Boileau elevated his earlier *Satires* to the status of literary criticism by associating them with his *Art poétique* through his publication strategy. Léo Stambul, 'La Querelle des *Satires* de Boileau et les frontières du polémique', in *Le Temps des querelles*, ed. by Jeanne-Marie Hostiou and Alain Viala (= *Littératures Classiques*, 81 (2013)), pp. 79-90.

²² See also the celebration of Scudéry in her later *L'Apothéose de Mademoiselle de Scudéry* (Paris: J. Moreau, 1702).

²³ The *Œuvres mêlées* was reprinted the following year in Holland as *Bigarrures ingénieuses ou recueil de diverses pièces galantes en prose et en vers* (suivant la copie de Paris, chez Jean

L'Héritier protested against the 1694 publication in a series of letters, distancing herself from some of its satire added by an unnamed 'auteur' (who we know to be Eustache le Noble),²⁴ she nevertheless laid claim to the sections explicitly attacking Boileau (p. 402), which were written particularly in reaction to his *Satire X* of 1694.

And yet, the way L'Héritier chose to frame her reply to Boileau and express her praise for Deshoulières strongly emphasises her text's function as a response to the *Dialogue* and as an intervention in the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns. Not only was *Le Parnasse reconnoissant* produced a year after the second unofficial version of Boileau's text, but it was also written in a parallel format. Her text opens in the *champs Elysées* of Boileau's *Dialogue*. Minos is presiding over the trial of a 'cynique', a dead 'misanthrope', who is described as having a counterpart, a second 'misanthrope', alive on earth; the cynique is punished: 'Minos enfin le jugea et le condamna à recevoir de Cerbere autant de morsures que sa langue médisante avait lancé de traits injurieux contre les Femmes' (p. 409). This first misanthrope is possibly the satirist Regnier; and the second is undoubtedly Boileau. Regnier is later described as having been rejected from the triumphant pageant; a fate which 'D...' (Boileau-Despréaux), criticised for his writings against women, also suffers.²⁵ The punishment L'Héritier has inflicted upon the dead 'mistantrope' functions as a sort of ersatz sentence for Boileau; it also mirrors the violence of Pluton's attack on the heroes in the *Dialogue*. Furthermore, L'Héritier

Guignard, 1696). For a discussion of this whole text as a riposte to Boileau, see Jean Mainil, "Mes Amies les Fées": Apologie de la femme savante et de la lectrice dans les *Les Bigarrures ingénieuses* de Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier (1696)', *Féeries*, 1 (2003), 49-72.

²⁴ See Denis, p. 75.

²⁵ There is some inconsistency here as L'Héritier seems to include a living author in her Parnassian fiction.

deliberately uses features which, at the end of the century, would have been understood as ‘tropes’ of the Ancient and Moderns Quarrel: dialogues, Parnassus, catalogues and paralleling of ancient and modern figures. By 1694, the dialogue had become one of the principal forms of this debate, evident from the three volumes of Perrault’s *Parallèles* already published, and from Fontenelle’s *Dialogues des morts* (1683). Parnassus was likewise a familiar topos of texts engaged in this Quarrel – evident, for instance, from Guéret’s *Le Parnasse réformé* (1668) and his *La Guerre des auteurs anciens et modernes* (1671), in which Apollo is figured as arbiter, as he also is in L’Héritier’s *Le Parnasse reconnoissant*.²⁶ Through recourse to these tropes, L’Héritier signals that her text is to be seen as engaging in the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns.

This is also achieved by her position and self-positioning as a Modern. She moved in circles associated with Moderns and was Perrault’s *protégée*; she wrote in the Modern genre of the fairy tale. L’Héritier’s admiration for Deshoulières also shows Modern alliances: she too was a prominent Modern, one of the few women to engage explicitly in the Quarrel, as she was thought to be the author of a critical sonnet about Racine’s *Phèdre* (preferring Pradon’s version); and championed the French language in the *affaire des inscriptions*. Modern gestures are likewise evident throughout L’Héritier’s *Le Parnasse reconnoissant*, namely in her use of appropriation in her decision to address Scudéry using the author’s customary salon pseudonym, Sappho, thus adopting a treatment of antiquity so derided by Boileau. The genre of the ‘Triumph’ or ‘Pompe funèbre’ dates to the 1640s, and was developed, Denis argues, to celebrate and legitimise a new *galant* aesthetic: L’Héritier thus self-consciously places her work into a Modern

²⁶ Gabriel Guéret, *Le Parnasse réformé* (Paris: Jolly, 1668); *La Guerre des auteurs anciens et modernes* (Paris: Girard, 1671).

tradition.²⁷ This placement is also inscribed within her text: as part of the celebrations on Parnassus, L'Héritier describes two *Arcs de Triomphe*; on the relief on one side are the 'Sçavantes de l'antiquité', 'illustres femmes', including Sappho. On another can be found the 'Sçavantes modernes', including Christine de Pizan, Catherine Des Roches, and Madame de Villegieu. There is a comparative perspective here, albeit muted: the 'Sçavantes modernes' are shown to have surpassed their ancient counterparts. Of the ancient Sappho, L'Héritier writes: 'quoiqu'elle ait été autant surpassée par une nouvelle Sappho, qu'elle a surpassé elle-même les plus fameux Poëtes de l'antiquité' (p. 416).

However, further examination relativizes the importance of this already subtle competitive paralleling. L'Héritier validates the achievements of contemporary and recent female writers by placing them in a tradition that stretches back to Sappho. The identification between Scudéry and Sappho strengthens the community of women – past and present – that this text celebrates, and which is reinforced in the association between women and the arts that the muses represent. While such identification is part of a Modern gesture of appropriation, the onus is clearly placed on women's literary strengths and not simply on those of the modern or contemporary women. Figures of the Muses and the Arts, accompanied by ancient and modern practitioners (though, as mentioned, 'Satire' refuses to walk with 'D...' [Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux]) come out to celebrate Deshoulières's entry into Parnassus as tenth muse. The company is united, ancient and modern, in an attack against the 'bilieux' Boileau:

Cette Pompe faite à l'honneur de nôtre Sexe, rempli de joye tout le Parnasse, et mes sœurs et moy intéressées dans l'honneur de ce Sexe, nous en prîmes occasion d'animer toute l'Assemblée contre ce Bilieux qui a eu la temerité de répandre

²⁷ Denis, pp. 74-80.

avec trop d'aigreur le fiel satirique de sa quinteuse rime contre les Femmes. (p. 420)

This perspective is confirmed by the fact that the *querelle* or complaint – to use the word's etymological root, *querela* – at the heart of *Le Parnasse reconnoissant* is narrativised through Boileau's explicit condemnation for his treatment of women and his ersatz trial. Boileau is not being tried for being an Ancient; he is being tried, primarily, for being misogynist. For all its Modern leanings, this text is first and foremost a defence of women.

If we look beyond the 'specious veil' of the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns, to repurpose Perrault's term, we might recognise that some of the formal features L'Héritier uses belong to the practices of writers long engaged in championing women, a tradition known now as the *Querelle des femmes*.²⁸ L'Héritier's catalogue of exemplary women, which engages self-consciously with Madeleine de Scudéry's *Les Harangues Héroïques* (1642) and contemporary catalogues of *femmes fortes*, also echoes the work of the male and female defenders of women writing in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.²⁹ The female-dominated space that she represents in her vision of Parnassus not only modifies the norms of the genre but also evokes the *Cité des Dames* by Christine de

²⁸ Perrault, *Le Siècle de Louis le Grand* (Paris: Coignard, 1687), lines 11-12.

²⁹ On the importance of the *Querelle des femmes* in this period, see Helen J. Swift, *Gender, Writing and Performance: Men Defending Women in Late Medieval France, 1440-1538* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Pisan of the fourteenth century (a period L'Héritier greatly admired, and Christine de Pisan was one of her 'Sçavantes modernes').³⁰

But why did she present her text in a way that would have, at this point, been seen as an intervention in the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns? Why not explicitly reply to Boileau's tenth satire on its own terms with an *Apologie des femmes*, as indeed Perrault and a number of other male writers did?³¹ Using the setting of Parnassus doubtless makes the text entertaining, and both responds directly to Boileau's self-crowned position as its arbiter and stages the very hybrid and creative interpretation of antiquity that so irked him. L'Héritier's depiction of Parnassus allows her to move the debate away from the question of women's marital virtues and instead legitimise the intellectual woman – a gesture which also highlights the limitations of this particular manifestation of the *Querelle des femmes*. L'Héritier may also have been wary of attacking Boileau in the genre of verse satire he had so mastered, particularly as it was a genre that was not easy to reconcile with the polite and 'agréable' rhetoric of Modern *galanterie*.³² L'Héritier shows herself to be sensitive to such gendered poetics as she pointedly describes Deshoulières's work as belonging to the 'Troupe' of 'satyriques

³⁰ L'Héritier praises the French literary tradition of this period and earlier: see, for example, 'Lettre à Madame de G***', in *Œuvres mêlées*, pp. 299-318.

³¹ Jacques Pradon, *Response à la Satire X du Sieur D**** (1694); Jean-François Regnard, *Satire contre les maris* (1694); Pierre Bellocq, *Lettre de Madame de N... à Madame La Marquise de.... sur la Satire de M. D*** contre les femmes* (1694).

³² See Marine Roussillon, "'Agréables différends": L'esthétique galante de la querelle dans deux dialogues de Jean Chapelain et Jean-François Sarasin', in *Le Temps des querelles*, ed. by Hostiou and Viala, pp. 51-62.

agréables’, who ‘par les traits fins d’une Satyre toujours vive, sans blesser jamais personne, avoit, avec tant de délicatesse et d’esprit, censuré les défauts des hommes’ (p. 407).³³

Her decision also implies that in the literary field of late seventeenth-century France, for a woman writer, it was the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns that had a prestigious status. For her text against Boileau’s misogyny to count and be more effective, it had to appear in the guise of an Ancients and Moderns text because this Quarrel had, as Boileau also recognised and upheld, a certain capital. Explicitly disentangling the woman question from the one concerning ‘Ancients and Moderns’ was thus a privilege reserved for L’Héritier’s male contemporaries. Boileau presented the litany of complaints that occur in the *Dialogue* under the aegis of the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns, using this, and his place within such debates, to make his complaints appear ‘less frivolous’. In contrast, L’Héritier deliberately exploited the Quarrel’s hallowed auspices not to categorise her text retrospectively but to present complaints which, from a woman in particular, would otherwise not attract the same attention. For L’Héritier, the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns, and her position within it as a Modern, could be seen to be a sort of ‘Trojan Horse’: it constituted her means of access to the debate, and once her access was recognised and accepted, she could present her own case: that which concerned women.³⁴ The Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns thus embraces a multiplicity of issues, and is a forum for various and competing power plays; however, in relation to these two texts, at least, it also possesses an illusory quality: intervention in the ‘Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns’ becomes

³³ See Volker Schröder, ‘Madame Deshoulières ou la satire au féminin’, *Dix-septième siècle*, 258 (2013), 95-106.

³⁴ My thanks to Richard Scholar for suggesting this coinage.

partly a rhetorical gesture, used to elevate other quarrels, texts or genres, and to serve their creator's career.³⁵

Gendered discourse

L'Héritier's particular and strategic use of the Quarrel highlights the specificity of the challenges and restrictions faced by a woman writer entering the literary field, which distinguish her from both Boileau and Perrault. As I will now explore, this specificity is also made apparent in the discursive mode she adopts in *Le Parnasse reconnoissant*, which likewise implies a tension between the roles of Modern and of woman writer. This tension might be seen as troubling because much of the Modern aesthetic, and one of its channels, *galanterie*, was explicitly predicated on deference to women and on the celebration of female presence in culture: female judgement played a determining role in what Michael Moriarty calls 'male taste-discourse'.³⁶ It was used as a paradigm for the ability to use one's 'propres lumières' to respond to a work, rather than parrot institutional and book learning. The privileging of female discernment can be seen in Perrault's *Parallèle*, particularly in the discussion about the relative strengths of the translation of Lucian's or Plato's *Dialogues* in which the Abbé has recourse to the judgement 'des dames'.³⁷ Furthermore, Perrault's *Parallèle* exemplifies his *galant* mode

³⁵ On the different methodologies used for approaching quarrels – some of which focus on the socio-literary strategies entailed in taking a position – see Antoine Lilti, 'Querelles et controverses: les formes du désaccord intellectuel à l'époque moderne', *Mil neuf cent: Revue d'histoire intellectuelle*, 25 (2007), 13-28.

³⁶ Michael Moriarty, *Taste and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 8.

³⁷ Perrault, *Parallèle*, I, 21-22.

of discourse because, unlike Boileau's works, it does not form an aggressive attack: Perrault represents the views of the ancient side without satire in the sage, though ultimately unimaginative, Président.³⁸

However, the gendered conception of judgement that Perrault promotes, serves, as Elizabeth Berg argues, to value 'women' symbolically as readers precisely because of their exclusion from culture.³⁹ Recent studies, which have focused on the nature of women's learning in this period, remind us that Perrault's position was discursive rather than wholly representative.⁴⁰ As discursive, Seifert and Norman suggest that these constructed female qualities are mobilised primarily to serve men's place both in the Quarrel and, more generally, in society.⁴¹ The ideal *galant* male treads with a refinement, a 'soft masculinity' gendered as female. This implicitly female-gendered mode of discourse is one that lacks aggression, is gentle, even conciliatory, at once maintaining the binary gendered norms that the writers engaged in the *Querelle des femmes*, in different ways, had been questioning, and implying that, on some level at least, women

³⁸ See Béatrice Guion, '“Une dispute honnête”: la polémique selon les Modernes', *Littératures Classiques*, 59 (2006), 157-72; and Viala, *La France galante*, pp. 254-55.

³⁹ Berg, pp. 144-45.

⁴⁰ Jane Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets: Language, Gender and Authority from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 324-35; and Carol Pal, *Republic of Women: Rethinking the Republic of Letters in Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴¹ Seifert, *Manning the Margins*, pp. 86-91; Norman, pp. 127-30; and Myriam Dufour-Maître, *Les Précieuses: naissance des femmes de lettres en France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1999), p. 339.

should not quarrel.⁴² Seifert in particular demonstrates the limitations of both Perrault's Modern championing of women and the femininity at the heart of *galanterie* by stressing that male appropriation and usage of female-gendered behaviour is not incompatible with the assertion of male dominance. To support this, he registers a crucial difference between male and female constructions of feminine influence, as he argues that Madeleine de Scudéry's mid-century conception of female-oriented *galanterie*, and in particular the trope of modesty, is 'a form of empowerment'.⁴³

In *Le Parnasse reconnoissant*, L'Héritier appears to move away from the modest female that had been appropriated by Perrault to serve his Modern cause, revealing a more complex relationship with the 'douce' female voice.⁴⁴ Her presentation of Deshoulières's 'triumph' is all the more powerful in this context given Deshoulières's own challenges to gendered poetics, her use of the ancient world and claims to legitimacy.⁴⁵ In *Le Parnasse reconnoissant*, L'Héritier engages in a violence and

⁴² See Swift, pp. 217-21.

⁴³ Seifert, *Manning the Margins*, pp. 89-91, 123.

⁴⁴ This complexity is present elsewhere, notably in 'Les enchantements de l'éloquence ou les effets de la douceur', *Œuvres Mêlées*, pp. 163-229. Seifert reads her extolling of 'douceur' as appropriative; it expresses L'Héritier's 'utopian desire for discursive powers that resist the recuperation and subordination of women by the Moderns'. Seifert, *Fairy Tales*, pp. 91-99 (p. 96).

⁴⁵ See Schröder. There is not space to discuss Deshoulières's work in detail here, although further exploration of her position as a Modern would be fruitful. The poems 'Apothéose de Gas mon chien à Iris, 1672' and 'Au R. P Bouhours, sur son Livre de l'Art de bien penser sur les ouvrages d'esprit, 1687', which treat questions of legitimacy, gender and taste, serve as

aggression akin to Boileau: she has his dead counterpart bitten by the monstrous Cerberus; she calls him ‘bilieux’ (p. 420) – in response to his characterisation of the querulous ‘Bilieuse’ of *Satire X* (622) – and employs satirical humour when she suggests that women have found good (and appropriate, given Boileau’s attacks) use for his pages by using them as hair curlers, ‘papilottes’ (p. 422). L’Héritier thus differentiates her text from the ‘agréables’ debates which use Apollon as arbiter. Alain Viala argues that in Guéret’s two texts and the anonymous *Tite et Titus* (1673), the Parnassus model in which Apollon arbitrates is used to end ‘agréables disputes’; ‘dispute’, with its etymological root in *disputatio*, implies an element of moderation in the presentation of the ‘for and against’ of an argument.⁴⁶ By moving from the ‘irenic’ dispute and into the ‘agonistic’ quarrel, L’Héritier subverts the recent conventions of this genre in a move that stresses her antagonism.⁴⁷

L’Héritier deliberately juxtaposes the gendered-as-female Modern position – evident in her muted, discreet and subtle intervention as a Modern in the Quarrel – with a more strident, also gendered-as-female one, in her defence of women’s cultural practice. She self-consciously opposes the ‘female’-influenced Modern stance with one that problematizes the restrictive perceptions of gender such a stance in the end upholds. L’Héritier thus calls into question some of the gendered conceptions of knowledge and culture at the heart of Perrault’s position and present in Boileau’s derogatory view of the

illuminating intertexts for L’Héritier’s *Le Parnasse*. See *Madame Deshoulières, Poésies*, ed. by Sophie Tonolo (Paris: Garnier, 2010), pp. 373-76, 464.

⁴⁶ Alain Viala, ‘La Querelle des *Bérénice* n’a pas eu lieu’, in *Le Temps des querelles*, ed. by Hostiou and Viala, pp. 91-106 (pp. 100-04).

⁴⁷ On this distinction, see Jean-Jacques Lecercle, ‘Dispute, Quarrel, Interpellation’, *Paragraph* (forthcoming, 2016).

feminisation of certain cultural practices. In both of their positions, implicitly, erudition – that is, literacy in ancient languages – is gendered as male.

In reaction to this, L'Héritier deliberately subverts the expectation that women should keep their learning hidden. She emphasises the female gender of the persona-narrator of *Le Parnasse reconnoissant*, and, by extension, her own literary persona, in the opening address to 'Sapho': 'je suis trop attachée au parti des Femmes [...] pour ne pas venir vous informer du destin de *Des-Houlières*' (p. 406). And she, literally, parades her knowledge of classical culture in the celebratory pageant. The text thus both stages a process of legitimation in its depiction of Deshoulières's apotheosis and constitutes L'Héritier's own claim to cultural legitimacy. Her gestures suggest that knowledge of (and literacy in) ancient culture – which Perrault and Boileau both possessed, albeit to different degrees – had a symbolic and legitimising value. L'Héritier's display of classical knowledge would be repeated later in 1732 when she translated Ovid's *Heroides*; in the preface to this translation she stresses that she intends it for female readers and makes her own gender conspicuous.⁴⁸

And yet, as much as *Le Parnasse reconnoissant* expresses such ambitions, it also reveals the gulf between the ease with which the fictional legitimation takes place and the complex reality faced by a Modern female writer, whose relationship to culture was regulated by the threat of accusations of pedantry from the Moderns and frivolity from the Ancients.⁴⁹ Such a discrepancy can be traced both in the extradiegetic positioning by the author and in the narrative itself. L'Héritier's denial of authorship of some of *Le Parnasse*'s biting satire registers reluctance to be associated with this far from modest

⁴⁸ Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier, *Les Épîtres héroïques d'Ovide* (Paris: Brunet fils, 1732).

⁴⁹ See Dufour-Maître, pp. 325-340.

genre. With similar self-consciousness, in the *préface* to her translation of the *Heroides*, she also resorts to the trope of modesty: she attributes both her decision to publish the translation and her precision with Latin to the advice of male acquaintances. Instead of the empowering modesty present in Scudéry's salon writing, L'Héritier's stance comes across rather as an affected trope, which, Dufour-Maître suggests, constitutes a fraught and precarious strategy for entry into the literary field.⁵⁰ The very fact that women's recognition has to be imagined in the fictitious *Le Parnasse reconnoissant* implies its necessarily wishful nature. L'Héritier's intervention provides a suggestive case: it reveals the complexity entailed by being a culturally ambitious woman entering a literary culture that privileged wearing one's learning lightly, and so left women, whose erudition could not be taken for granted in the same way a man's could, vulnerable. This vulnerability is compounded by the fact that the very discourse available for their defence is conciliatory, both potentially restrictive in argumentative terms and a symptom of the gendered norms that their very 'defence' might seek to question. In the scope of its claims and the tensions revealed in their formulation, therefore, *Le Parnasse reconnoissant* expresses frustration at the conflicted situation faced by a Modern woman writer.

However, L'Héritier's text also suggests that one could read, consume, and even be inspired by ancient literature and culture, *and* write within *mondain* culture and promote contemporary aesthetics. Norman's recent study of the Quarrel has underscored how porous, fluid and contradictory the positions taken by professed 'Ancients' and 'Moderns' were, and has greatly advanced our understanding of the complexity of the

⁵⁰ Dufour-Maître, pp. 395-96; and Myriam Dufour-Maître, 'Les Précieuses, de la guerre des sexes aux querelles du Parnasse: jalons d'une polémique empêchée', *Littératures Classiques*, 59 (2006), 251-263 (pp. 260-63).

debate.⁵¹ In exploring how these complexities are manifest in the canonical texts of the Quarrel, he contends that although there might be ‘Ancient’ and ‘Modern’ positions taken in texts – with the Ancient position advocating the wonder and strangeness of the ancient world and the Modern one attacking its barbarity and disorder – their attribution is too contradictory for there to be pure Ancient or Modern writers; instead the participants manifest ambivalence and internal conflict.⁵² The way L’Héritier adopts postures of the Moderns to negotiate her place in the literary field nuances this assertion, stressing instead the importance of constructing and projecting such an identity. Furthermore, L’Héritier’s version of what such a Modern posture might entail encourages us to broaden our expectations of this position, thereby modulating what we might understand as being contradictory or conflicted. L’Héritier shows that a Modern woman can be inspired by antiquity, and can situate herself within aspects of its tradition, without betraying the appropriative, hybrid and generically innovative aesthetics of the Moderns. From this perspective, the Quarrel seems to concern less the inherent value of the ancient world and rather disputes over legitimate forms of interpretation. And yet, for all that the Quarrel addressed the question of cultural validity, L’Héritier’s response also shows that it was hardwired with a masculine logic of legitimacy: it was not an open forum but an already rarefied discursive space, access to which was determined by a certain level of erudition.

L’Héritier’s deliberate intermingling of questions of women’s cultural legitimacy within an apparently ‘Ancients and Moderns’ text appears to be a compromise which reveals that contemporary culture had invested more in that Quarrel than in the *Querelle des femmes*. However, this gesture is a double bluff in that it also exposes that Boileau’s

⁵¹ Norman, pp. 11-34 (p. 25).

⁵² Norman, p. 49.

Dialogue – and the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns more widely – *was* in fact a response to the increasing prominence of women in culture. L'Héritier's complex self-positioning in this text was not only a symptom of, or compromise to, the 'aporie', to use Dufour-Maître's apt term, that Modern women faced, caught between the rock of pedantry and the hard place of frivolity, but it also served to diagnose this conflicted situation.⁵³ These acts of exposure and diagnosis afford L'Héritier an agency that makes her a speaking subject in both quarrels. She reveals the extent to which the very premises of the Ancients and Moderns debate were male-determined; in so doing, she inverts the hierarchy: here *Moderne* serves *femme*.

Coda

The male-centred practices of late seventeenth-century France, 'even' amongst certain Moderns, that L'Héritier's text highlights, might not, perhaps, be as revelatory as the questions her gestures raise about the recent writing of literary history. L'Héritier's particular stance reveals how some of the arguments related to women's access to culture in the late seventeenth century were primarily articulated through the prism of the Ancients and Moderns debate by those invested in that Quarrel; our understanding, as critics, of both the nature of certain arguments about women and their relative prominence compared to questions about antiquity comes filtered through their strategic and biased deployment. Close analysis of how a woman negotiates her own position within the literary field as a defender of women and of Modern practices points to the necessity of seeing gender as more than simply a discursive category in a man's debate, showing the descriptors of Ancient and Modern, in their prevalent form, to be restrictive

⁵³ Dufour-Maître, *Les Précieuses: naissance des femmes de lettres*, p. 339.

and somewhat normative. Such analysis calls for an approach to the Quarrel that is based as much on the practice of women writers as it is on the interventions of *académiciens*.

Presenting her defence of women by using the tropes of the ‘Ancients and Moderns’ Quarrel enabled L’Héritier to enter a powerful forum of debate. But *Le Parnasse reconnoissant* also exposes the uneven premises of the debate itself, and suggests that it is in part because the Quarrel itself was a mark of distinction that it became a repository for the many quarrels modulating the literary field in late seventeenth-century France. This perspective somewhat troubles the privileged status that the Quarrel has enjoyed in literary history as the all-encompassing mega debate of late seventeenth-century Paris. Many of the studies of this Quarrel, which themselves often take a side, have tended to see it as a super and supra Quarrel that incorporated all other intersecting debates (about the novel, women, *galanterie*), and to universalise it as a paradigm for arguments about the canon, the value of literature or the nature of criticism.⁵⁴ Of course, we have to recognise that there was a ‘Quarrel’ in which ancient and modern cultures were compared; that it was seen as such at the time – the name is after all endogenous – and that some of its questions resonate today. But singling out its importance within the entangled nexus of quarrels that marked late seventeenth-century Parisian culture, without acknowledging the reasons for this prominence, not only distorts its universality, but also reveals a bias far less transparent and benign than the professed way in which critics take sides. This is a bias that bears the trace of the gender-normative argument, in which the question of women’s place in culture was made intermediate.

⁵⁴ For instance, DeJean takes the Modern side; Norman and Fumaroli tend towards the Ancient one.