The Satire of the Salonnière
Women and Humour in Seventeenth-Century France

Abstract

This article reassesses styles of humour in the literary output of the seventeenth-century French salons by attending to women and satire. While scholarship has repeatedly dwelt on salons and salon hostesses as objects of satire, this study argues that salon hostesses were also writers of satire, and importantly writers of satire aimed at would-be hostesses, via an analysis of Madeleine de Scudéry's *Artamène, ou, Le grand Cyrus* (1649-1653). In the "Histoire de Sapho" (Book II, Tome X of *Artamène*), Scudéry presents a satirical portrait of an 'anti-salonnière' named Damophile. This wannabe salon hostess strives to imitate the titular salonnière, Sapho, and become a well-respected *savante*, but instead appears excessive and pedantic in her efforts, attracting the ridicule of Sapho and her circle. Drawing together modesty, mockery, and collective amusement, Scudéry's use of satire provides a model for other women writers that is firmly reconciled with the *honnête* values of salon culture.

Des lois pour la raillerie

In seventeenth-century French culture, the uses and usages of humour inspired countless commentaries in the form of treatises, written dialogues and dictionary entries that sought to instruct readers on conventions and techniques.[1] Integral to this output were the behavioural codes associated with *honnêteté*, the prevailing concept of virtue and moral character, which encouraged refined styles of social interaction based on spontaneous and unaffected speech, prudent judgment, and a cheerful disposition typically rooted in a playful sense of humour.[2] The scope of this *honnête* humour, or *la raillerie*, ranged from witty ripostes and teasing to mockery and outright ridicule depending on the speaker's interpretation of, and commitment to, *honnêteté*.[3] The multifarious exercise of *la raillerie* was further complicated by the asymmetrical codes of conduct ascribed to men and women in early modern France where a stringent expectation of modesty on women, partly imposed through the contested model of the *honnête femme*, was difficult to reconcile with wit and jest.[4]

The stakes of these humorous interactions are aptly exemplified by the celebrated salonnière, Madeleine de Scudéry. In a dialogue that hovers at the intersection of *la raillerie* and gender, Scudéry sets up a conversation between Silamis, Pisistrate, Euridamie and Cerinthe on the subject of *la raillerie* in the ninth volume of *Artamène, ou, Le grand Cyrus*

1 Jean Leclerc, "Parler d'autrui: enquête sur la raillerie, la médisance et la calomnie dans le *Dictionnaire universel*", *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, XLV:88 (2018), pp.99-114.

2 Emmanuel Bury, *Littérature et politesse: L'invention de l'honnête homme (1580-1750)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996), pp.102-110. See also Michael Moriarty, *Taste and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.49-52.

3 David Culpin, "*Raillerie, honnêteté* and 'les grands sujets': Cultured conflict in seventeenth-century France" in Sarah Alyn Stacey and Véronique Desnain (eds), *Culture and Conflict in Seventeenth-Century France and Ireland*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), pp.128-134 (pp.129-133).

4 Aurora Wolfgang and Sharon Diane Nell, "The Theory and Practice of *Honnêteté* in Jacques Du Bosc's *L'Honnête femme* (1632-36) and *Nouveau recueil de lettres des dames de ce temps* (1635)", *Cahiers du dix-septième*, XIII:2 (2011), pp.56-91. See also Ian Maclean, *Woman Triumphant: Feminism in French Literature, 1610-1652* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp.124-127; and, Jean Mesnard, " 'Honnête homme" et "Honnête femme' dans la culture du XVIIe siècle", *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature*, 36 (1987), pp.15-46.

(1653).[5] Prompted by feelings of both jealousy and civility, Euridamie criticizes her friend, Cerinthe, for mimicking the speech and behaviour of an overzealous suitor, Théocrite, to the amusement of another suitor, Pisistrate. As the conversation shifts from a discussion of mocking a lover to mockery in general, the characteristically grave Euridamie likens the habit of ridiculing others to the peril of walking along a precipice, inscribing a degree of danger onto the practice of *la raillerie*. Justifying her vertiginous imagery, she sets out the manifold difficulties to be considered:

> la plus difficile chose du monde, est de le faire tout à fait bien, sans choquer ou l'amitié, ou la bienséance, ou la probité, ou la bonté, ou sans se faire tort à soi-même. Car enfin, il n'est presque pas possible de faire profession de raillerie sans se faire haïr, ou du moins sans se faire craindre: joint qu'à parler raisonnablement, il n'y a presque personne dont il doive être permis de railler [...].[6]

Initially, Cerinthe and Pisistrate deem Euridamie's judgment too severe and only the narrator, Silamis, is in agreement with her. Yet, as the interlocutors engage with the succession of examples that Euridamie lays out to expose the pitfalls of mockery, they begin to realise that they share at least some of Euridamie's views. Even Cerinthe admits that "je veux que la raillerie soit galante, & même un peu malicieuse: mais je veux qu'elle soit modeste, & délicate".[7] Strikingly, Cerinthe's vision of humour is couched in the moralist language of women's virtue, harmonizing mockery with modesty. Captivated by Euridamie's impressive eloquence on the topic, Pisistrate beseeches her to establish "des lois pour la raillerie".[8] Although hesitant to assign her opinions with the weight of "lois", Euridamie nonetheless proposes a style of humour that is amusing without being hurtful, distinguishing the light-heartedness of "la raillerie" from the thorniness of "la satire".[9] With Théocrite's arrival, the conversation moves on to other subjects, leaving the reader to mull Euridamie's position and its implicit nuances for women's humour.

This literary dialogue, later revised as a stand-alone piece titled "De la raillerie" in *Conversations sur divers sujets II* (1680), evokes the landscape of seventeenth-century debates on humour in which attempts to standardize *la raillerie* only affirm its heterogeneity.[10] As Delphine Denis has argued, *la raillerie* in the seventeenth century best approximates the contemporary idea of *la plaisanterie*, but the lack of consensus in early modern France on *la raillerie* itself weakens this gloss.[11] I will, therefore, make reference to *la raillerie*, mockery, and satire throughout this article as befits the modern specificities of my discussion and examples. Scudéry was especially invested in early modern debates on humour as a salon hostess (salonnière) who welcomed mixed-gender groups of writers, scientists, artists and courtiers to her rooms where intellectual exchange was infused with witty and light-hearted conversation.[12] Serving to amuse salon attendees (habitués) and to

5 This dialogue appears in the "Histoire de Pisistrate" in which Silamis narrates Pisistrate's backstory to Cyrus and the Princess of Armenia.

6 Monsieur de Scudéry [Madeleine de Scudéry], *Artamène, ou, Le grand Cyrus: Neuvième Partie* (Paris: Augustin Courbe, 1656), p.565. I have modernized all spellings in this article.

7 Ibid., p.568.

8 Ibid., p.571.

9 Ibid., pp.571-576.

10 [Madeleine de Scudéry] *Conversations sur divers sujets, Tome II* (Lyon: Thomas Amaulry, 1680).

11 Delphine Denis, *La muse galante: poétique de la conversation de Madeleine de Scudéry* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1997), p.277.

12 Faith E. Beasley, *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), pp.31-50 and pp.80-134; Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, *Exclusive Conversations: The Art of Interaction in Seventeenth-Century France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), pp.7-9; and, Carolyn C. Lougee, *Le Paradis des Femmes: Women, Salons, and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century France*

nurture bonds amongst the circle, this playful yet respectful environment integrated the values of *honnêteté* into the space of the salon.

This interplay between salons and humour resurfaces more explicitly in the next and final volume of *Artamène* where Scudéry seemingly departs from Euridamie's "lois", or at least departs from the objection to satire, showcasing the author's sustained engagement with humour and mockery.[13] In the most famous section of the entire novel, the "Histoire de Sapho", Scudéry presents her literary self-portrait, Sapho, alongside a satirical portrait of a wannabe salonnière named Damophile. Immodest and pedantic, Damophile is an extreme inversion of the esteemed and humble salonnière, Sapho. While this intercalated story focuses on the eponymous character, its depiction of Damophile registers humour in multiple ways: in the use of satire within Damophile's characterisation to mock pedantry and immodesty; in the ridicule that Damophile attracts from Sapho's circle; and, in Damophile's lack of humour that betrays her ignorance of salon culture.

In this article, I attend to the satirical dimensions of Damophile's character as a way of recuperating the humour, chiefly the use of satire and mockery, of salon hostesses. This humour has largely been eclipsed by a scholarly focus on the vituperative attacks levelled at salon hostesses, which mocked the apparently ridiculous culture of *préciosité* at the salons, a culture that was somewhat fabricated by the attackers themselves.[14] As a result, the interaction between salons and satire tends to be reduced to a one-sided encounter in which salon women are predominantly treated as objects of satire rather than as satirists themselves. However, salonnières were not averse to satirizing others including other women. A certain brand of the *femme savante* and her self-important pedantry inevitably aroused their mockery, even if this activity replicated the misogynist tropes and criticisms to which these women satirists were also subjected.[15] This mockery aligns salon women with those often considered their critics. Indeed, Scudéry's mockery of the immodest learned woman through the character of Damophile anticipates the parodic versions of salon women and their imitators in Molière's *Les Précieuses ridicules* (1659) and *Les Femmes savantes* (1672), Antoine Furetière's *Le Roman bourgeois* (1666) and Nicolas Boileau's *L'Art Poétique* (1674) and *Satire X (Contre les femmes)* (1693). In this respect, Damophile belongs to a literary tradition that opposes the "fausse précieuse" (Damophile) with the "vraie précieuse" (Sapho) in order to claim that any harmful consequences of women's learning and cultural engagement derive solely from the actions of fake learned women, thus reworking the timeworn good woman vs bad woman binary for the preoccupations of the seventeenth-century *querelle des femmes*.[16]

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp.11-30.

13 As Chantal Morlet-Chantalat charts, this engagement continues in *Clélie*, *La "Clélie" de Mademoiselle de Scudéry* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1994), pp.374-391.

14 Domna C. Stanton, "The Fiction of Préciosité and the Fear of Women", *Yale French Studies*, 62 (1981), pp.107-134; Moriarty, pp.44-45.

15 Nathalie Grande, *Stratégies de romancières: De "Clélie" à "La Princesse de Clèves" (1654-1678)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999), pp.129-130. While this article focuses on satire directed at would-be salonnières, other salon women penned different sorts of satires. See, for example, Volker Schröder, "Madame Deshoulières, ou la satire au féminin", *Dix-septième siècle*, 258 (2013), pp.95-106; Stephen A. Shapiro, "The Romance of the Fronde: The Siege of Orleans in the *Mémoires* of Mademoiselle de Montpensier", *Romance Studies*, 28:1 (2010), pp.17-26; and, Helena Taylor, "Antoinette Deshoulière's Cat: Polemical Equivocation in Salon Verse", *Romanic Review*, 112.3 (2021), pp.452-469.

16 Myriam Maître, *Les précieuses: Naissance des femmes de lettres en France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999), pp.57-118.

Responding to this antithetical pair, scholars have treated Damophile as a literary exemplum of the "fausse précieuse". These studies highlight the traits that Scudéry maligns as a way of substantiating Scudéry's own distance from certain scorned stereotypes of salon women and of detailing mixed attitudes towards women's learning in the seventeenth century.[17] In the following pages, I turn away from this treatment - not to undermine the critical history but to add a new layer to this scholarship. I probe Scudéry's use of satire to analyse her skill as a satirist and to unpack the character created by Scudéry, the author-salonnière, and ridiculed in the text by Sapho, the fictional salonnière. Reorienting the direction of our attention towards the satire of the salonnière, I expand on David Harrison's reminder that the humour of Scudéry's writings is often lost in the critical debates with her detractors.[18] My attention to the satirical dimensions of Scudéry's work lends weight to two underappreciated aspects of salon culture: first, that the light-hearted humour of the salons sometimes strayed into the terrain of satire, inviting us to reflect on the multidimensional forms of humour that moved through these spaces; and second, that salon women were not only writing satires but writing satires aimed at would-be salon women.

Scudéry and the Histoire de Sapho

Born in Le Havre in 1607, Scudéry was the only daughter of Georges de Scudéry, the provincial port's governor, and Madeleine de Martel de Goutimesnil. After losing both parents at a young age, she and her brother, Georges, grew up in Rouen under the guardianship of an uncle whose impressive library and tolerant attitude towards women's learning afforded Scudéry a rich education for a woman of her era, spanning French and European literature, history and philosophy.[19] Throughout the 1630s, she travelled frequently to Paris with her brother, often visiting the salon of Catherine de Rambouillet before permanently relocating to the city in 1647. Having become a central figure in the Parisian salons, Scudéry established her own, *les Samedis*, in Le Marais in 1653.[20] Her salon's membership comprised leading writers and intellectuals including Madame de Sévigné, Madame de Lafayette, Paul Pellisson, La Rochefoucauld and Jean Chapelain. In the ensuing decades, Scudéry hosted her salon and published prolifically, authoring dialogues, poems, and bestselling multivolume novels (*romans héroïques*).[21] Although her works were published either anonymously or under her brother's name, she openly acknowledged full or partial authorship in her correspondence and in conversation at her salon.[22] Her status as the

17 Joan DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho: 1546-1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp.107-110; Karen Green, "Women's Writing and the Early Modern Genre Wars", *Hypatia*, 28.3 (2013), pp.499-515 (pp.505-507); Erica Harth, *Cartesian Women: Versions and Subversions of Rational Discourse in the Old Regime* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp.52-54; David Shaw, "*Les Femmes Savantes* and Feminism", *Journal of European Studies*, XIV (1984), pp.24-38 (p.28); Domna C. Stanton, *The Dynamics of Gender in Early Modern France: Women Writ, Women Writing* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p.23 and p.98; Linda Timmermans, *L'accès des femmes à la culture (1598-1715)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1993), pp.113-116; and, Elizabeth Susan Wahl, *Invisible Relations: Representations of Female Intimacy in the Age of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p.188.

18 David Harrison, "Comic Epitaphs: Lucian, Scudéry, and Boileau", *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 35.1 (2013), pp.38-53 (p.40).

19 Georges Mongrédien, *Madeleine de Scudéry et son salon* (Paris: Tallandier, 1946), pp.9-14.

20 For more detail on Scudéry's salon, see Mongrédien, pp.101-150; Alain Niderst, *Madeleine de Scudéry, Paul Pellisson et leur monde* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976), pp.241-352.

21 The term "roman", and its English equivalent "novel", postdate the publication of Scudéry's multivolume romances but are now widely used to describe them, particularly in recognition of Scudéry's role in formulating the genre.

22 Nicole Aronson, *Mademoiselle de Scudéry*, trans. by Stuart R. Aronson (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), p.19; Maja Pawłowska, "Mlle de Scudéry: Portrait de Sapho ou l'inclusion par l'exclusion", *Romanica*

most successful woman writer in seventeenth-century France was sealed by the Académie Française's decision to award her first prize in eloquence in 1671 for her "Discours à la gloire" in the first year of the accolade's presentation and by her election to the Accademia dei Ricovrati of Padua in 1684.[23]

Scudéry's "Histoire de Sapho", widely attributed to her alone, appears in one of her *romans héroïques*, namely in the second book of the tenth volume of *Artamène*, a ten-volume novel published between 1649 and 1653. The novel recounts the life of Cyrus, the founder of the Persian empire, as he battles political enemies and strives to reclaim his beloved, Mandane, from multiple kidnappers. The "Histoire de Sapho" is the longest intercalated story, or subplot, of the entire novel. Inserted into the penultimate part of the final volume, it pointedly turns away from the text's central romance between Cyrus and Mandane, introducing a new set of characters who had not yet appeared in the action. This divergence is all the more significant when combined with the title and narrative of the intercalated story, which ties it to the author who had adopted the name of Sapho (specifically "Sapho" with one "p") as her alter-ego in salon circles. In bringing this avatar into the novel, Scudéry extended her practice of embedding characters inspired by contemporary figures into her literary output. This technique spurred her readers to pursue these resemblances and identify Scudéry's sources of inspiration, forming the basis of the sub-genre now known as the *roman à clef* that Scudéry is credited with popularizing.[24] Mirroring the ludic atmosphere of the salons where parlour games were a frequent activity, the *roman à clef* offered a literary guessing game to readers familiar with the social networks of salons.

The story of Sapho is told by Démocède who enters Cyrus's camp as the latter is readying to fight the army of Thomiris and rescue Mandane. Arriving with his friend, Léontidas, Démocède is introduced as "ami particulier de Sapho; & qu'il est frère de la plus chère des amies de cette fameuse Lesbienne".[25] Delighted to make the acquaintance of Sapho's friend, Cyrus asks for news of Sapho whom he has previously met in Mytilene and assembles a group to hear Démocède's two-hour tale of Sapho's life. Relating her birth, upbringing, and activities, Démocède describes Sapho's fame in Greece, acquired through the singularity of her poetry and the brilliance of her conversation. In her neighbourhood of Mytilene, Sapho draws together several other witty women - Cydnon, Athys, Amithone and Erinne - to create a salon-like space. While Sapho's reputation attracts many noble men to her rooms, she is uninterested in all of them and remains adamant in her belief that marriage can only be slavery for women. However, when Sapho meets Phaon, her resolve begins to weaken for the first time in her life. After a series of obstacles and separations, Sapho is finally granted a happy ending with Phaon on her own terms in a distant land where they continue to receive each other's affections but remain unmarried.

Evidently, the "Histoire de Sapho" is not a straightforward satire. Rather, Scudéry's use of satirical techniques in a romance novel builds on the larger satirical output of seventeenth-century France, which encompassed a broad range of texts, performances and styles that exploited humour as a vehicle of social criticism. This miscellaneous production

Wratislaviensia, LVII (2011), pp.95-104 (p.96).

23 Aronson, pp.15-16 and p.20.

24 Karen Newman, "Introduction" in Madeleine de Scudéry, *The Story of Sapho*, trans. by Karen Newman (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp.1-11 (pp.4-5); Mongrédien, pp.47-49.

25 Monsieur de Scudéry [Madeleine de Scudéry], *Artamène ou le grand Cyrus: Dixième Partie* (Paris: Augustin Courbe, 1656), p.323. References to the "Histoire de Sapho" come from the early modern edition since the full text is not available in any modern edition. Where possible, I follow these references with their corresponding pages in the abridged modern edition.

stems from satire's slippery definition, which had been pieced together from different classical passages. Debates ensued, contesting the purpose of satire, in which adversaries disputed whether satire should be primarily entertaining or edifying, and the form that it should take. At one end of the spectrum clustered the satirical purists who modelled themselves on Roman verse satirists, especially Horace and Juvenal, penning their satires in French classical alexandrines to emulate the dactylic hexameters of their ancient predecessors and to attribute a degree of nobility to works that were sometimes perceived as crude.[26] Other satirists followed a looser approach, producing satires in different literary forms, such as Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670) and Jean de La Bruyère's *Les Caractères* (1668), implying that satire is better defined as a mode rather than as a genre. This assortment of satirical works is joined by numerous texts that drew on key features of neo-classical satire. These texts are not satires by definition, but weave satirical elements into a larger text belonging to another genre as in the case of the "Histoire de Sapho". While the deployment of satirical devices within other genres is neither unique to seventeenth-century France nor a new development in French literature of this period, it is nonetheless a recurrent feature of seventeenth-century French writing. Thus, satire in early modern France was various in character, echoing its etymological roots in the Latin word "satura", meaning "a dish of many fruits" and "medley".[27]

Yet, although varied, satire as a literary mode was predominantly practised and published by male writers, mirroring the androcentrism of the ancient satirical tradition. In the absence of classical and contemporary models, Scudéry presents her satirical offering, which carves out a space for women satirists and provides a style of satire that, as we shall see, strikes a tricky balance between entertainment and civility. The potential of Scudéry's satirical writing for other women authors is reinforced by her use of the verbal portrait to introduce Damophile, which I analyse in the next section.[28] By adapting a form familiar to salon women who often produced literary portraits of their fellow habitués replete with hyperbolic praise, Scudéry repurposed a genre already suffused with key features of satire, such as exaggeration and embellishment, by exchanging a laudatory tone for a parodic one that could serve as a model for those habituées.[29]

The Damophile Effect

Throughout the narrative, Sapho and Damophile appear as an antithetical duo. Sapho is presented as the perfect salonnière. She is witty and intelligent, but extremely modest, deflecting all praise of her talents and accomplishments. As Joan DeJean has analysed, Sapho is set up as an example for future literary women, expanding on a tradition within women's writing where Sapho is invoked as an early ancestor of women writers.[30] Damophile, meanwhile, is introduced as a shoddy imitator of Sapho whose poor impersonation has led to unease in Greece about women's learning and cultural participation. From the outset,

26 Pascal Debailly, *Boileau et la satire noble* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2020), pp.15-34.
27 Edward James, "Review Article: Verse Satire Versus Satire, or the Vanity of Definition", *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 22 (2000), pp.205-212 (p.208).
28 For an in-depth discussion of the *portrait littéraire*, see Jacqueline Plantié, *La Mode du portrait littéraire en France (1641-1681)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1994), pp.16-32.
29 I use 'habitués' to designate salon attendees in general and 'habituées' to indicate women attendees of salons specifically.
30 Joan DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho*, p.104; and, Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), pp.45-50.

Damophile is characterized in negative terms, both in her failure to imitate Sapho well and in the unfavourable backlash that her imitation has garnered.

In seeking to fashion herself as a learned lady, Damophile surrounds herself with male scholars in contrast to Sapho who is constantly in the company of four female friends. Damophile persistently writes to men of science, articulates herself via grandiloquent terms spoken in a haughty tone and eschews socialising with the uneducated. Démocède assures his audience "sans mensonge" that Damophile's study is filled with more books than she has ever read while Sapho's contains far fewer books than the latter has actually read.[31] The visibility of books in Damophile's study mirrors her bookish style of speaking, which - in a clear case of overkill - is solely preoccupied with books:

> De plus, Damophile, non seulement parle en style de livre, mais elle parle même toujours de livres et ne fait non plus de difficulté de citer les auteurs les plus inconnus en une conversation ordinaire que si elle enseignait publiquement dans quelque académie célèbre.[32]

This grammar of bookish excess paradoxically enacts a reduction, a quintessential feature of satire.[33] So keen is Damophile to associate herself with books that she is reduced to speaking entirely like and about books as if she has undergone a ridiculous transformation and become a book. Her attempt to gain recognition as a learned woman backfires; in lieu of appearing in possession of knowledge, Damophile conversely seems possessed by the books. Across these descriptions, Damophile's characterization abounds with excess. She is too inquisitive, and too eager to be acknowledged as an educated woman. She has too many questions, too many books, too many scholars in tow. Even the words that she uses are too long. Through this caricature, Scudéry insinuates the embarrassing possibilities accompanying unchecked and ostentatious attitudes to exhibiting one's knowledge, revealing her inclination towards what La Bruyère quipped was "la honte d'érudition".[34] Indicative of the aversion to scholarly and erudite manners that were construed as both pedantic and immodest by the cultural elite in seventeenth-century France, Scudéry remoulds the trope of the pedant in satirical literature to create a version that derides showy and pedantic learned women.

The antithetical tension between Damophile and Sapho is extended in an odd anecdote from Démocède:

> Mais ce qu'il y a eu de plus rare en la vie de cette personne [Damophile] est qu'elle a été soupçonnée d'avoir promis à un homme [...] quoiqu'il fût très désagréable, à condition qu'il ferait des vers qu'elle dirait qu'elle aurait faits, afin de ressembler mieux à Sapho. Jugez après cela si la passion de passer pour savante peut faire faire de plus bizarres choses que celle-là.[35]

If taken at face value, this passage is a humorous addition to Damophile's fruitless attempts to resemble Sapho, betrothing herself to a man in order to plagiarize his poetry. Not only does this anecdote suggest Damophile's struggle to produce poetry of her own, it also exposes the

31 Scudéry (1656) pp.350-351. Madeleine and Georges Scudéry, "Histoire de Sapho" in *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus: Extraits*, ed. by Claude Bourqui and Alexandre Gefen (Paris: Flammarion, 2005), pp.463-464.
32 Scudéry (1656), p.315; Scudéry (2005), p.464.
33 Matthew Hodgart, *Satire: Origins and Principles*, with a new introduction by Brian A. Connery (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2010), p.115.
34 La Bruyère, "Des Jugements 18" in *Les Caractères*, ed. by Emmanuel Bury (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1995), p.457.
35 Scudéry (1656), p.351; Scudéry (2005), p.464.

superficiality of her character at a remove from the ideal of sincerity obliged by *honnêteté*.[36] If true, this gossip reverses the more common seventeenth-century trend whereby women authors published works under the names of men. It recalls the ironic presentation of the "Histoire de Sapho" itself, published under the name of Georges de Scudéry yet containing a literary portrait of Madeleine de Scudéry that explicitly identifies her as a writer through her avatar, Sapho, and the insistence on Sapho's skill as a poet. However, this story of Damophile's deception may itself be deceiving. It is not exactly a truthful claim but the reproduction of suspicion and rumour. While the uncertainty of Démocède's report is never resolved, there is a lingering implication that Damophile is ridiculous and desperate enough to be capable of such fraud.

These accounts of excess and deceit converge around performativity. While Sapho is a learned woman, Damophile deploys excess and deceit to merely play the learned woman. This crucial difference, as Karen Newman stresses, is expressed via polyptoton that turns on the verb 'savoir'.[37] Sapho "sache presque tout ce qu'on peut savoir" but "elle ne fait pourtant point la savante".[38] Damophile, meanwhile, "n'entreprit pas de l'imiter en détail, mais seulement d'être savante comme elle".[39] The suggestion here is that Damophile's desire "d'être savante comme elle" does not make her one. In other words, there is more to being a true *savante* than exhibiting one's knowledge or *savoir*. *Être savante* is not the same as *faire la savante*. The stakes of this difference pivot on the expectations of *honnêteté*, specifically those of the *honnête femme* for whom modesty was the most important virtue.[40] In Scudéry's rendition, a true *savante* should be learned and modest, even renouncing any wish to be acknowledged as a *savante* at all. Damophile transgresses these expectations, signalling her distance from the model of the *honnête femme* as well as her distance from the figure of the ideal salonnière, which had incorporated *honnêteté* into its paradigm.

The satirical weight of Damophile is fully realized when she and Sapho find themselves together at a concert. Having been juxtaposed throughout Démocède's descriptions, the salonnière and anti-salonnière are depicted sitting literally side-by-side, generating a humorous scene that is conspicuously set on the fringes of a theatrical setting in the audience prior to a performance where their proximity sharpens their differences. As soon as Sapho takes her seat beside Damophile, she is accosted by her and her friends, first on a point of grammar and then about an obscure verse in Hesiod, displaying the pedantry that Démocède had previously described but not yet illustrated. To the second request, Sapho responds "modestement [...] en souriant" that Damophile ought to consult someone else since she (Sapho) "ne consulte jamais que mon miroir pour savoir ce qui me sied le moins mal".[41] Despite Sapho's modest declarations, the requests come pouring in for her poetry and for her advice. The succession of requests to Sapho amplifies the effects and repercussions of Damophile's behaviour, encouraging others to chime in and make demands. This comic accumulation of questions, topics and voices rests on the irony of the situation. The petitioners seek to engage Sapho, perhaps even flatter her, but, unbeknownst to them yet obvious to the reader, they are plainly annoying her. Sapho's emphatic modesty in this

36 Bury, p.49.

37 Karen Newman, "The French Disease", *Comparative Literature*, 64.1 (2012), pp.33-48 (p.42).

38 Scudery (1656), p.350; Scudéry (2005), p.463.

39 Ibid.

40 Sharon Diane Nell and Aurora Wolfgang, "Introduction" in Jacques Du Bosc, *L'Honnête Femme: The Respectable Woman in Society* and the *New Collection of Letters and Responses by Contemporary Women*, ed. and trans. by Sharon Diane Nell and Aurora Wolfgang (Toronto: Iter, 2014), pp.1-39 (p.17).

41 Scudéry (1656), pp.357-358; Scudéry (2005), p.469.

situation is slightly baffling, which has prompted Erica Harth to wonder how Sapho might have gained such a formidable reputation if she is always so modest.[42] Perhaps there is a mischievous humour embedded in Sapho's response that overstates her modesty whilst excusing herself from a culture of learning based on priggish consultation rather than pleasant discussion.

The fundamental difference between Sapho and Damophile is behavioural: Sapho's modesty is opposed with Damophile's self-aggrandizement. While a straightforward analysis of this opposition would understand Sapho to be the model to follow, and Damophile to be the "anti-model" whose conduct threatens the reputation of true *savantes*, DeJean has proposed an alternative interpretation. Arguing that Damophile is not necessarily Scudéry's way of rescuing one type of intellectual woman by distancing her from another type, DeJean suggests that Damophile is a projection of men's fears about learned women.[43] This reading is compelling given the narration of the "Histoire de Sapho" by Démocède whose unqualified praise of Sapho and bitter derision towards Damophile may reflect male expectations of female modesty. From this angle, we might conclude that Damophile is a satire of widespread anxieties about women's learning, excessive like the fears that she represents. However, although this reading has merit, it is difficult to ignore the satirical depth of the character that repeatedly encourages the reader to laugh at Damophile rather than at an extraneous society that fearfully envisions her. In this sense, DeJean's reading feels symptomatic of our discomfort, as modern critics and feminist historians prone to celebrating women's audacity, towards Scudéry's stinging disparagement of an immodest *savante*. When we pay closer attention to the use of humour in the narrative, we are able to fully appreciate the ridicule that Scudéry aims at this type of learned woman.

Across our encounters with Damophile, the crux of the readers' amusement lies in a derisive humour towards her self-ignorance. Not only is Damophile pedantic and pretentious but she is seemingly unaware of her embarrassing behaviour. This characterization recalls ancient theories of humour set out in Plato's *Philebus* and Aristotle's *Poetics*, and reformulated in Descartes's *Les Passions de l'âme* (1649). These theories turn on a comic tension generated by a spiteful reaction to a character's inferiority that is premised on their misfortune or lack of virtue (or both).[44] In other words, when a character behaves in a ridiculous manner that serves to illuminate their lack of virtue, the audience or reader laughs at that behaviour *and* at the character's self-ignorance, expressing pleasure at their own distance from such conduct. My intention here is not to affirm Scudéry's knowledge or application of such ancient theories, but to draw attention to the way that she ensures Damophile is read humorously with this comic distance placed between Damophile and the reader. This is achieved through the narrative form and the first-person voice of Démocède. Through the framed narrative, Démocède introduces Damophile to his listeners (and to the reader) as a self-ignorant character whose pretentions undermine the excellent example of women's learning epitomized by Sapho, immediately marking out Damophile's inferiority. By attaching this characterization to the voice of Démocède rather than to an omniscient third-person narrator more associated with the author, Scudéry somewhat distances herself from the fervour of the satire. This careful narration releases Scudéry from any suggestion that the barbed commentary on Damophile transgresses the bounds of civility for an *honnête femme*.

42 Harth, p.54.
43 DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho*, p.108.
44 Aristotle, *Poetics*, 2.2 and 3.4; Plato, *Philebus*, 48a-51a; and, Descartes, Articles 178 and 180 in *Les Passions de l'âme*.

Collective Amusement

Just as Damophile is offered as a subject of ridicule to the reader, and to Démocède's listeners, she is repeatedly the subject of *raillerie* amongst the characters. For example, on the eve of the lunar eclipse, Phaon and Démocède bump into their friend, Thémistogenes, "avec cinq ou six savants en Astrologie, qu'il allait mener chez Damophile", all of whom then "avaient presque passé toute la nuit chez elle à parler l'interposition de la Terre, entre la Lune & le Soleil".[45] When Sapho's salon reconvenes the following day, they amuse themselves by imagining the scenes at Damophile's house the previous night:

> Car encore que Sapho n'aime point qu'on raille en sa présence, elle n'avait garde de s'opposer à cette espèce de raillerie: au contraire, elle raillait de Damophile la première: afin de faire mieux connaître combien elle était éloignée de sa manière d'agir. Si bien que faisant une plaisante peinture d'une conversation savante, & embrouillée, elle en divertit extrêmement la compagnie.[46]

In a cyclical stroke, Sapho imitates Damophile and the "conversation savante" amongst her circle. What attracts this mockery is the unabashed erudition at Damophile's soiree, represented by the half a dozen astronomers and the undeviating discussion of eclipses.

This portrayal of Damophile as a would-be astronomer bears parallels with one particular section in Boileau's aforementioned *Satire (Contre les femmes)*, which supplies a useful point of comparison in terms of satirical style. Updating Juvenal's *Satire VI* (*Against Women*) for a seventeenth-century audience, Boileau takes aim at salon women and specifically targets Marguerite de La Sablière by evoking the names of scientists who populated her salon (Qu'estime Roberval, et que Sauveur fréquente) and by recalling her use and possession of scientific objects (Un astrolabe en main, elle a, dans sa gouttière,/ À suivre Jupiter passé la nuit entière).[47] Attributing La Sablière's "l'oeil trouble" and "le teint si terni" to her nocturnal studies of the planets, Boileau's diatribe reactivates the classical satirical trope of misogynist criticism, but tailors it for his contemporary readers by attacking women's curiosity through the language and arguments of the second major *querelle des femmes* of the seventeenth century where it became synonymous with both vanity and slovenliness.[48]

While both Scudéry's Damophile and Boileau's "savante" are ridiculed for their allegedly immodest interest in astronomy, Scudéry's satire is far less biting. Firstly, the portrait of Damophile is not a personal attack. The character expands on a short fragment from Philostratus's third-century biography, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, in which the biographer briefly recounts the activities of an intelligent woman called Damophyla who had female companions and composed poetry just like Sappho. Scudéry develops this legendary snippet into a fuller character, tapping into the traditional doubling fictions of Sappho, but still Damophile lacks a known or obvious correlating figure in seventeenth-century society.[49]

45 Scudéry (1656), p.421.
46 Ibid.
47 Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, "Satire X", *Œuvres complètes de Boileau-Despréaux Tome I*, ed. by M. Daunou (Paris: Librairie Stérétype de Dabo, 1819), p.442. For a study of La Sablière, see Faith E. Beasley, *Versailles Meets the Taj Mahal: François Bernier, Marguerite de La Sablière, and Enlightening Conversations in Seventeenth-Century France* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).
48 Anne E. Duggan, *Salonnières, Furies, and Fairies: The Politics of Gender and Cultural Change in Absolutist France* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), pp.121-140; Delphine Reguig, *Boileau poète: « De la voix et des yeux… »* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2016), pp.265-269.
49 DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho*, p.108.

Possible contenders span the unidentified Madame Du Buisson, the Cartesian Madame de Gueudreville, the salonnière Charlotte d'Auchy, and the writer Marie de Gournay, none of whom have been soundly established as the inspiration for Damophile.[50] Relatedly, there is no commentary on Damophile's appearance or ancestry, frustrating attempts to make a convincing identification. Secondly, the presentation of Damophile's behaviour is grounded in amusement. When Sapho mocks Damophile amongst her intimate circle, she is not seeking to publicly humiliate her. More accurately, Sapho's "plaisante peinture" of Damophile serves a twin purpose: to underscore her own distance from the actions of her usual impersonator and to entertain her salon.

The amalgamation of entertainment and "peinture", as Sapho's mimicry is termed, reoccurs in a different form during the exchange between Sapho and the painter, Léon. Playfully evoking the culture of portrait composition at the salons, the execution and ekphrastic descriptions of Léon's portraits provide entertainment for Sapho's circle, particularly when Léon reveals that Damophile has commissioned an extravagant self-portrait:

> C'est, madame, lui dit-il, qu'elle veut que je représente auprès d'elle une grande table où il y ait quantité de livres, des pinceaux, une lyre, des instruments de mathématique et mille autres sortes de choses qui puissent marquer son savoir. Je pense même qu'elle veut être habillée comme on peint les Muses [...].[51]

Upon hearing Damophile's commission, Sapho laughingly asks to be painted in the guise of Oenone, the shepherdess, in the simplest costume that betrays no evidence of her learning. Later, Sapho "fit une si plaisante et si innocente raillerie du portrait de Damophile que nous achevâmes de passer le jour fort agréablement."[52] Once again, the jokes at Damophile's expense work to entertain the group, corresponding with the responsibilities of a salonnière whose role constituted the diversion of her habitués. Ultimately, mockery emerges as an important adhesive within the community that Sapho has built around her. Humour allows Sapho and her salon to mark their separation from Damophile and the latter's circle whilst reinforcing bonds amongst their own community into which the reader is also drawn. To be in on the joke is to be part of the group, and, as long as it is performed in an "innocente" or harmless way, Scudéry situates humour and mockery at the centre of salon activities.

Conclusion: Damophile's Legacy

After the episode with Léon's portraits, Damophile vanishes from the narrative until the very end of Démocède's tale where she is singled out as "la seule qui se réjouit de la perte de Sapho, et elle s'en réjouit parce qu'elle se crut alors seule savante à Mytilène."[53] Resounding an ironic note, this final evocation leaves Damophile to bask in her self-ignorance, confident that Sapho's exile will now assure her own reputation and legacy as the "seule savante" in the city. On a purely narrative level, Damophile's reputation and legacy seem non-existent, suggested by her obscure origins as Scudéry's fictional character compared with the monumental position of Sappho in literary culture. Damophile's outward desire for recognition does not in fact guarantee any. Yet, beyond the narrative and within the wider

50 Victor Cousin, *La Société Française au XVIIe siècle, Tome II* (Paris: Didier, 1858), p.151; Green, p.505; Maître, p.243 n.66.
51 Scudéry (1656), p.447; Scudéry (2005), p.522.
52 Scudéry (1656), p.448; Scudéry (2005), p.522.
53 Scudéry (1656), p.606; Scudéry (2005), p.585.

literary history of seventeenth-century France, Damophile holds an important place. Predating the satires of Molière and Boileau, Scudéry's portrait of this wannabe *savante* anticipates the attacks that salon hostesses will encounter and proposes to skirt them by foregrounding modesty as a central feature of salon culture. Above all, it is through Damophile that Scudéry forges new terrain in a glaring echo of the innovation attributed to her alter-ego, Sapho. While the idea of a modest satire might appear self-contradicting, Scudéry attempts this project, offering a playful satire that aims to encourage modest behaviour without endorsing the harsh or vituperative undertones of her fellow satirists. By combining mockery and modesty, Scudéry reconciles women's humour with the behavioural codes of the *honnête femme* to provide a much-needed model for women's satire in early modern France.