In search of a politesse du chant: Rediscovering salon vocal performance practice through the lens of the airs sérieux in the Recueils d'airs serieux et à boire de differents autheurs, 1695-1699

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Chapter 6

Conversation, the salon, and the *air sérieux*

6.1 Introduction

Having built up a picture of the elements required for the type of ideal singing espoused by the theorists, in these two final chapters I now seek to use the specific case of the *airs sérieux* in the early *Recueils* to demonstrate how the values, norms of behaviour, and specific context of the salon would have transformed the theorists' instructions, creating a vocal performance practice unique to the salon.

To do this, I will firstly situate the *air sérieux* within the world of the salon and within polite discourse. Whereas chapter 2 presented the occasions, dramatic works, and physical venues in which *airs sérieux* were sung, this chapter reduces its gaze even further. I will examine the interactive social triggers which propelled a *salonnière* or cultured member of society to move from speech to song, how the singing of airs mingled with worldly activities, and the place of the sung air within sociable interactions of the polite classes.

In building up this contextual picture for the purposes of this chapter, I have relied on three principal sources of information. Firstly, I have reviewed fictional representations of singing in the works of Madeleine de Scudéry and other writers from the latter part of the seventeenth century. From Scudéry's privileged vantage point as both writer and salon hostess, the fictional representations of the singing of airs in her novels and the social interactions modelled in her series of instructional texts are generally considered to be idealised reflections of real-life exchanges which took place in polite society such as salon gatherings. Although much work has been done by Goulet and Gordon-Seifert in their reviews of literary sources, my own investigation has revealed further significant references to the singing of airs, offering an additional window on the integration of airs into sociable interaction.

Secondly, as had already been the practice for some decades, the *Mercure galant* printed notated music for one or two *airs sérieux* each month, several of which were also published in the *Recueils* studied. Rather than being printed in moveable type as was Ballard's practice, these were engraved airs, with varying degrees of musical or textual modifications as compared to their Ballard counterparts.[580] In its accounts of events and, to a lesser extent, worldly interactions, the *Mercure* also makes fleeting but important references to moments and occasions on which airs were sung, offering further evidence of vocal context. I integrate into this chapter those references to song which have been newly uncovered by my examination of the monthly journal between the years 1695 and 1699, along with references to singing that have been identified from previous years of that publication.

[580] Those airs printed in the Mercure galant which are printed in the *Recueils* are the following: "*Quand on aime bien tendrement*" ('Mercure galant', May 1695 and RASB 1695/9/177); "*Un soir dans une grotte obscure*" ('Mercure galant', January 1696 and RASB 1696/1/20); "*Avoir tous les appas de l'aimable jeunesse*" ('Mercure galant', January 1697 and RASB 1697/2/26); "*Aimable objet d'une flame innocente*" ('Mercure galant', May 1697 and RASB 1697/6/112); "*Par un jeu digne d'un héro*s" ('Mercure galant', September 1698 and RASB 1698/9/174, -176, -182, -188); "*Moutons chéris d'une fière bergère*" ('Mercure galant', June 1697 and RASB 1697/6/122); "*L'ingrate Iris me fuit et ne veut plus m'entendre*" ('Mercure galant', April 1699 and RASB 1699/4/70); "*Fuyez de nous, bergers volage*s" ('Mercure galant', June 1699 and RASB 1699/7/138); "*Reviens affreux hiver, regne dans nos bocages*" ('Mercure galant', November 1699 and RASB 1699/11/210).

Finally, conversation handbooks and etiquette manuals flourished in seventeenth-century France. In the latter part of that century, these instructional tomes moved away from prescribing behaviour in hierarchical structures such as at court to prescribing ideal speech and behaviour for a wider, more egalitarian audience[581] – the worldly, cultivated person such as the salon participant. Presented in dialogues with either direct speech or reported, third-person format, these manuals either take the form of didactic guides in which an experienced and worldly person instructs a less-experienced person as to how to converse and behave in society, or manuals which present fictional, model conversations for emulation. Scudéry contributed much to this genre, including her *Conversations Morales, Nouvelles Conversations morales, Conversations sur divers sujets, Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets,* and *Entretiens de morales.* Such was the accuracy of the representation in Scudéry's *Conversations Morales* that they were, according to some academics, the models for Madame de Maintenon's shorter and adapted *Conversations,* which formed part of the curriculum at Saint-Cyr between 1686 and 1691 and were designed to prepare the girls for worldly, salon life.[582] On the basis of Scudéry's salon credentials, and although not representing the totality of this genre, the aforementioned have been reviewed for this chapter. Manuals by other authors were selected for review according to the extent to which they addressed the salon, rather than the courtly, aspirant. The following representative works were thus reviewed for this chapter: *L'esprit de cour* by René Bary, *De la conversation, discours* by Antoine Gombaud, chevalier de Méré, the *Nouveau Traité de la civilité* by Antoine de Courtin, *L'Art de plaire dans la conversation* by Pierre d'Ortigue de Vaumorière, the anonymous *Entretiens galants,* and *Modeles de conversations pour les personnes polies* by Jean-Baptiste Morvan de Bellegarde.

Owing much to a sixteenth-century Italian work, these French manuals disseminated a culture of decorum, propriety, *politesse,* and *galanterie* - values that pervaded thinking on ideal worldly interaction. The practice of song, both in the salon and in less formalised exchanges between people in polite sociable circles, interwoven as it was with the spoken word, was inevitably impacted.

These worldly values, at odds both socially and ideologically with the brand of expressive, passionate representation and vocality which chapter 5 has demonstrated was required of the professional stage singer, distanced salon and polite renditions of *airs sérieux* from stage renditions and dramatic vocal practice. As a prelude to the practical performance observations which are set out in chapter 7, sections 6.5 and 6.6 set out the societal values which diluted and modified stage vocality, and the performance values and strictures which contributed to the dilution of dramatic renditions to a shape and form which was apt for usage amongst music-making members of polite society.

6.2 Conversation defined

In order to conform to expected social morés, it was necessary to know how to express oneself with grace and skill. Conversation was the means by which people were judged and it was how one distinguished oneself.[583] According to one writer, nothing was more

[581] Randall, 'Court, Salon, and Republic of Letters', 149.
[582] Goldsmith, 'Excess and Euphoria', 66.
[583] Avertissement to Bellegarde, *Modeles*, n.p.

important to getting on in life than knowing how to please in conversation.[584] The proliferation of seventeenth-century instructional manuals on conversation attested to this preoccupation.

These manuals and model conversations frequently ponder the nature and definition of conversation itself, and from these we learn that the type of exchange to which they turned their attention was not what occurred when people carried out business, negotiated transactions or pleaded in court.[585] Rather, the notion of conversation carried the connotation that that conversation would be convivial, elevated and refined. Defined in the 1694 dictionary of the *Académie Françoise* as a familiar conversation or "*entretien familier",* Chevalier de Méré elaborates that conversation encompasses all the communications between people who meet each other either by chance and exchange only a few words, when one walks or travels with friends or people one does not know, when one shares a table with good company, when one pays a visit to people one likes, or those interchanges that take place in an *assemblée* dedicated to diversion.[586] According to Bellegarde, people of quality who were fairly leisurely and with no occupation spent much of their time visiting or receiving visitors.[587] Many were the occasions therefore when those of a certain standing would have engaged in conversation as defined here – not only was it expected in formal salon interactions, but it was also expected in all polite and leisurely exchange. The conversation manuals and literature I reviewed for this chapter reflect this broad range of setting, and we find conversations taking place not only on visits to people's houses, but on walks, in small rooms, in gardens, and in snatched private moments when two people break away from a larger circle.

More than an ornament making life more agreeable, conversation served the social function of introducing politeness and elevated moral values into the world.[588] Much was to be learnt from observing and mixing with those skilled in conversation,[589] and the most able models were considered to be women.[590] Women were acknowledged leaders in this field, and it was in the *ruelles* of polite society that new phrases and words were coined under their influence.[591] Conversations could be short (as in Bary's manual) or they could be constituted by debates in which the characters discuss topics over a number of days, such as those featured in Scudéry's works. The topics of conversation evidenced in the materials reviewed for this chapter were heavily focused on the emotions, with characters debating (amongst other topics) the nature of friendship, love, hate, jealousy, greed, raillery, dissimulation, and convention. Philosophy was considered a fitting topic for discussion in the *ruelle*.[592] Although speakers were cautioned not to bore their listeners and to make their exchanges interesting to the whole circle, Scudéry notes that, in principle, no topic was *interdit.*[593] Conversation topics should be free and diversified and suited to the particular

[584] Vaumorière, *L'art de plaire*, 4.
[585] Scudéry, *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 1680, 1:2; Méré, *Conversation*, 14.
[586] Méré, *Conversation*, 13–14.
[587] *Avertissement* to Bellegarde, *Modeles*, n.p.
[588] Scudéry, *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 1680, 1:1.
[589] Méré, *Conversation*, 40.
[590] Bellegarde, *Modeles*, 303; Vaumorière, *L'art de plaire*, 253.
[591] Bellegarde, *Modeles*, 300.
[592] 'Mercure galant', February 1699, 13.
[593] Scudéry, *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 1680, 1:30.

interlocutor or conversation circle, the time, and the place. In short, conversation should be *bienséant.*

6.3 The contours of a conversation circle

The sources provide the following facts about the conversation circles which both actively defined salon practice and which formed the nest in which many of the *airs sérieux* of this study made their home. If Madeleine de Scudéry's literary accounts of salons are indeed reflective of the reality of these sociable gatherings, then conversation was considered ideal when practised within a group "*dont le nombre n'est pas fort grand*".[594] A clearer idea of numbers of participants in these conversation circles is given in the *Mercure galant*, which describes a conversation circle made up of two duchesses and ten or twelve other participants of lower ranks.[595] A description of a salon a year later in the same publication describes eight or ten people of both sexes taking part, and states that each participant would take a turn to speak.[596] In René Bary's conversation manual, all his model conversations take place between two people only.[597] In Pierre Ortigue de Vaumorière's work,[598] a maximum of seven participants converse together, with a fairly equal representation of both sexes. In the frontispiece to that work, six people sit together in a circle, but each pair of participants (comprising one woman and one man) engages in private exchanges within the group.[599] Such a practice of pairing off is confirmed by Scudéry in the dialogue which precedes the *Conversations sur divers sujets,* where she notes that "*les Dames et les Galants se parlaient par troupes, au lieu de se séparer deux et deux, comme il arrive assez souvent*".[600] The frontispiece to her *Entretiens de morale* visually confirms this practice, with a man and woman conversing in the foreground and couples interacting in the background. In an outdoor setting amongst ornamental water fountains shown on the frontispiece of the first volume of Scudéry's *Nouvelles Conversations*, a private moment of conversation between a man and woman is portrayed. A group of four women look on from a distance, with a single man also watching separately in the background from under a tree. In another exterior scene, the *Mercure galant* of December 1699 describes a conversation outside in a *cabinet de verdure,* noting a fluidity in groupings and stating that the conversation circle was "*tantôt meslée, tantôt séparée".*[601] The following three figures provide some examples of this scenography.

[594] Scudéry, *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 1680, 2:385. 'Of which the number was not too large'.
[595] 'Mercure galant', March 1673, 371–72; as cited in Lecœur, 'Conversation and Performance', 27.
[596] 'Mercure galant', June 1674, 24–26; as cited in Lecœur, 'Conversation and Performance', 28.
[597] Bary, *L'esprit de cour*.
[598] Vaumorière, *L'art de plaire*.
[599] As noted by Lecœur, 'Conversation and Performance', 27.
[600] 'Dialogue' in Scudéry, *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 1680, 1:n.p. 'The ladies and the gallant men spoke in groups, rather than separating into pairs as often happens'.
[601] 'Mercure galant', December 1699, 149. 'Sometimes mixed, sometimes separated'.

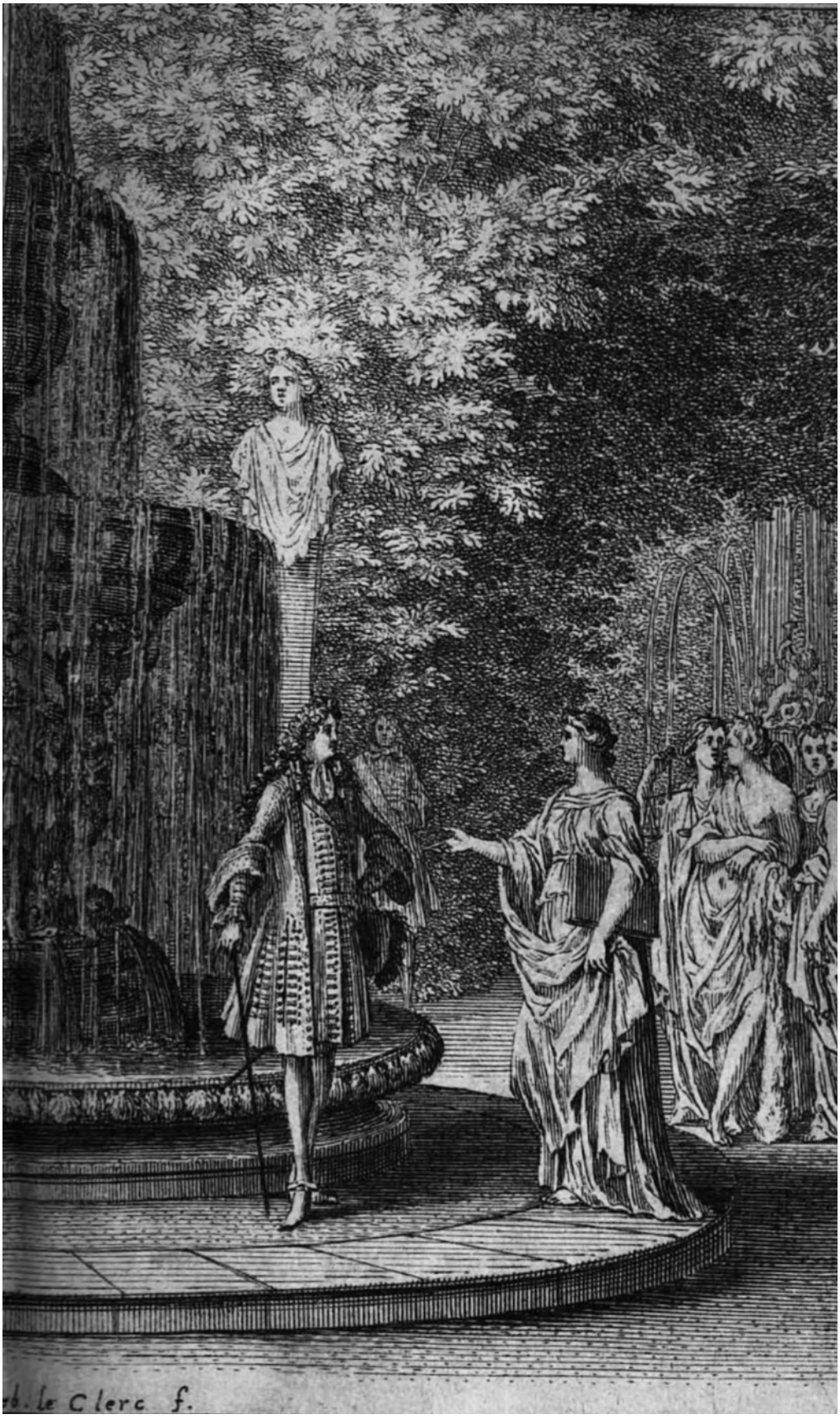

Figure 6.1: Frontispiece from Madeleine de Scudéry's *Nouvelles conversations de morale* (1688).

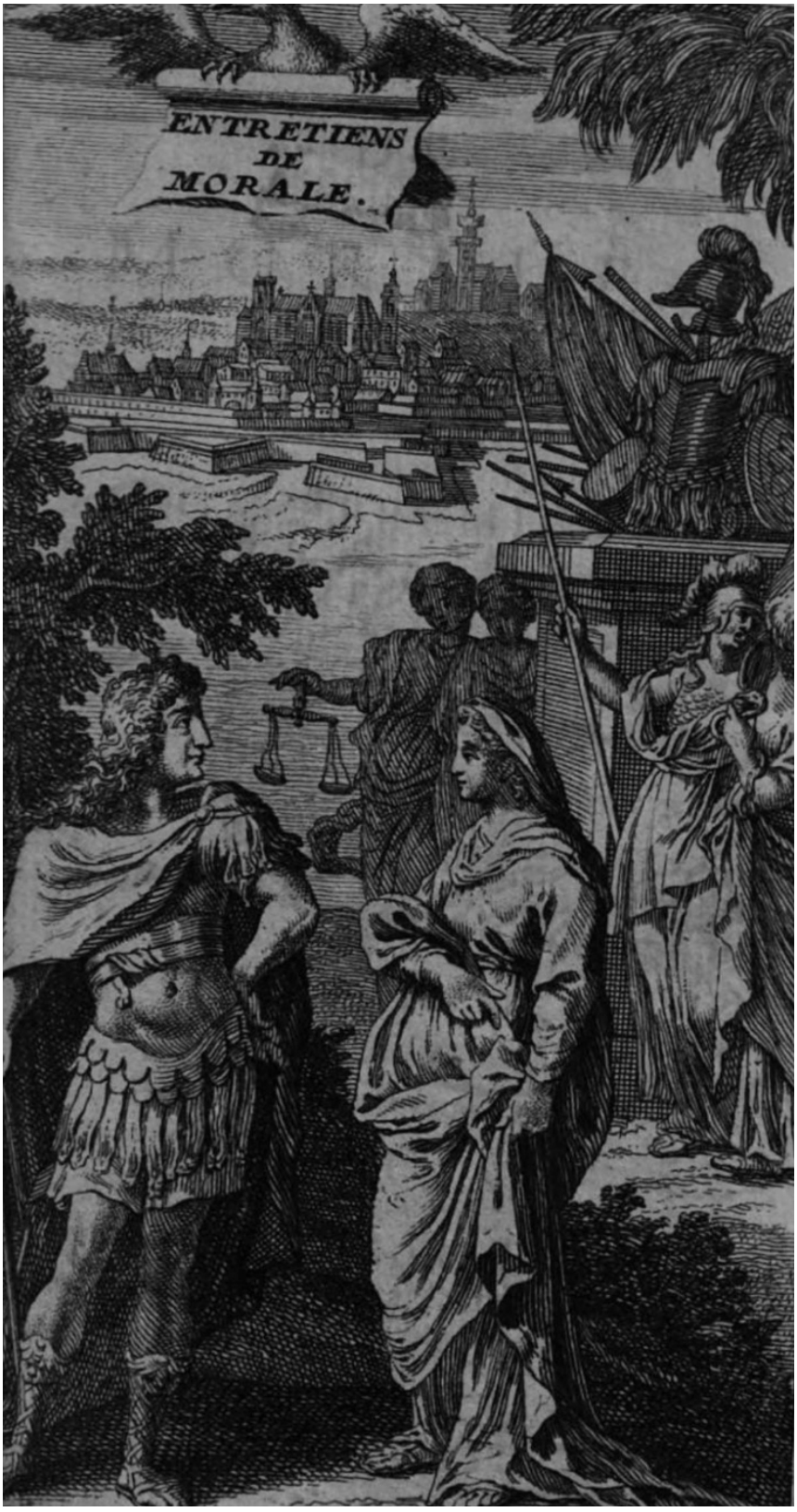

Figure 6.2: Frontispiece from Madeleine de Scudéry's *Entretiens de morales* (1692).

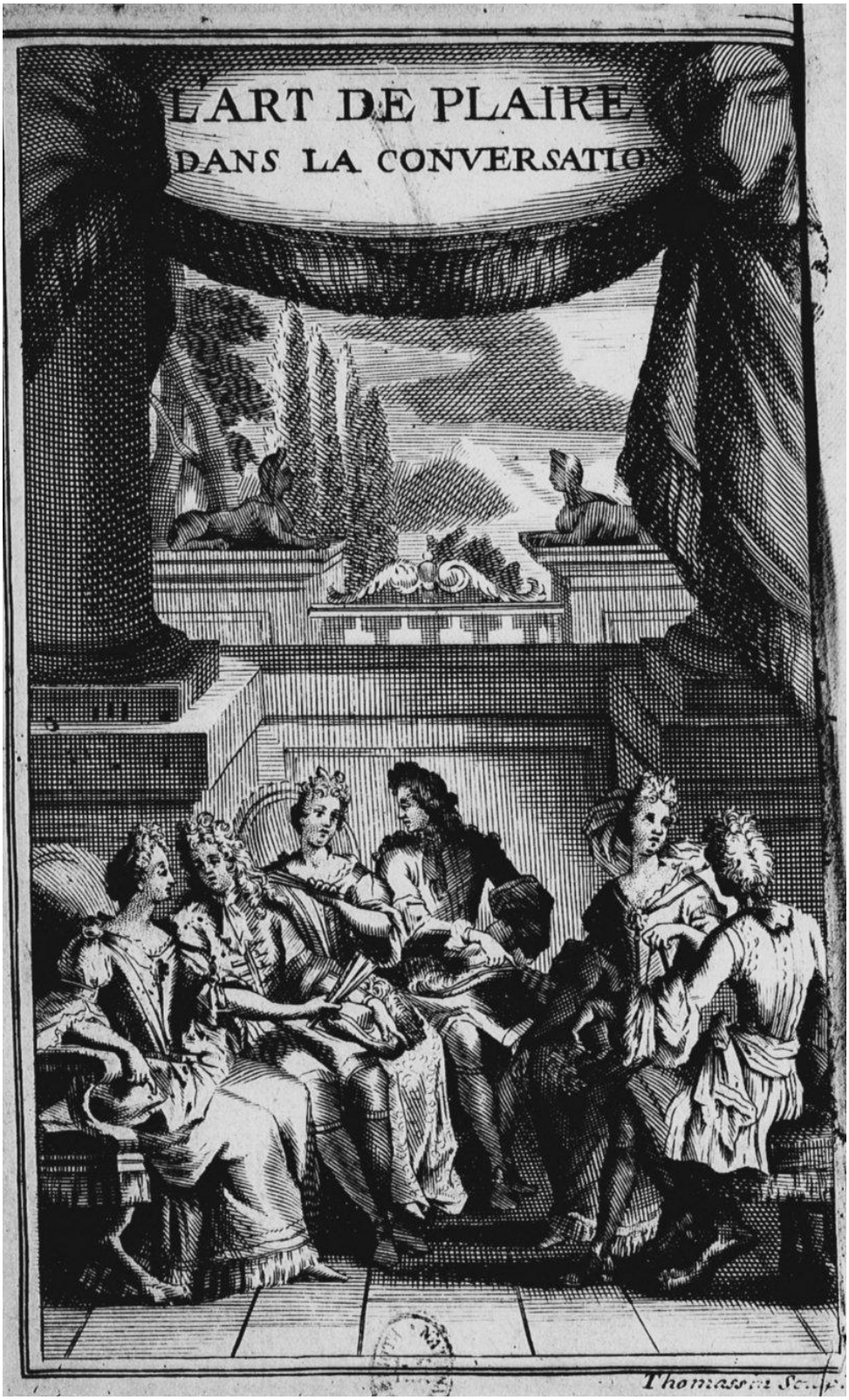

Figure 6.3: Frontispiece from Pierre Ortigue de Vaumorière's *L'art de plaire dans la conversation* (1701).

6.4 What circumstances within worldly conversation prompted song?

Scudéry makes frequent use of song texts in her literary works. Goulet notes the following early examples. In *Mathilde d'Aguilar,* the eponymous heroine is said to sing admirably, and the song texts which are examples of her repertoire are set out by the author.[602] Scudéry's *Clélie* and *La Promenade de Versailles* each contain two poems which were set to music in the *Livre d'airs,* although the music is not printed in Scudéry's works.[603] Elsewhere in *Clélie,* both the music and text of an air are printed,[604] constituting the sole example of this in her œuvre.

One episode in *Clélie* reveals the following: the character, Amilcar recounts to a group of females in his company the story of Herminius' unsuccessful attempt to seduce Valérie. Amilcar narrates that Herminius, in a moment of anger, composes verses on an air that both he and Valérie know in which he lamentingly takes his leave of Valérie. Amilcar is implored by his company to recite this text, and Amilcar makes the suggestion that he will sing the verses rather than reciting them, in order better to capture the attention of his company.[605]

In Scudéry's *La Promenade de Versailles,* the character, Glicère, recounts the declaration of love that Cléandre makes to Célanire. During a walk in a garden noted for its echo, Cléandre contrives to arrange for a male singer to sing some lines about how one must remain silent in love, and then to sing another air which Cléandre is said to have composed, which figures in the *Livre d'airs* of 1670. Cléandre then repeats the last lines of the song to Célanire, speaking in sighs the material that has just been sung by another. He whispers to his beloved that he has had to find ingenious ways such as this of declaring his love in public to Célanire, since he has not been able to declare his love in private. Earlier in the novel, too, Célanire sends Cléandre a rejection in the form of a quatrain of verse, which is set to music and found in the *Livre d'airs* of 1671.[606]

The prose of Mme Gomez de Vasconcellos' *Le Galant nouvelliste* is dotted with verse, all of which is written by her daughter. In this work set in worldly society, sung airs are used as miniature diversionary interludes in salon conversation, the narrator frequently sings to company, and on one occasion performs an air of his own composition in order to instruct his interlocutor in his gallant adventures. At the conclusion of the novel, four songs are said to be sung for the marquise and her company during their coach ride to the Tuileries, although the performers' identities remain ambiguous.

The narrator of Tallemant's epistolary allegory, *Le second voyage de l'Île d'Amour,* readily moves from prose to verse. The frequent poetic interludes in the work serve several functions: as a means of giving voice to personal thoughts which in effect comment on the narrative action described in the prose, as a means of encapsulating the narrator's thoughts on a subject, and as direct versified speech of both the narrator and the characters he encounters. The verses which the narrator sings to himself every day when he arrives at the

[602] Scudéry, *Mathilde*, 58; as cited in Goulet, *Poésie, musique et sociabilité*, 615–16.
[603] As cited in Goulet, *Poésie, musique et sociabilité*, 639.
[604] Scudéry, *Clelie*, 1658, 8:639–40; as cited in Goulet, *Poésie, musique et sociabilité*, 639–40.
[605] Scudéry, *Clelie*, 1658, 3:253; as cited in Goulet, *Poésie, musique et sociabilité*, 648.
[606] See further Goulet, *Poésie, musique et sociabilité*, 649.

allegorical town of Indifference evoke love, and are a tactic of diversion on his part,[607] expressing the ability for the intrigues of love to help him by-pass the tedium of that fictional location.

In Dancourt's stage work, *L'Été des coquettes*, song intervenes within conversation on similar grounds; this time, not only to divert, but to prolong and sustain an exchange whose momentum is faltering. In one scene, Angélique implores her singing master, M. des Soupirs, to make copies of a song he has just sung to her. The singing master re-appears with the copied music, and Angélique takes him up on his offer of singing it to the company that has gathered, on the grounds that the conversation has languished and a song would be welcome. The company then discusses the merits of the song. This fictional account of an air as a sustainer of a dwindling conversation mirrors the remark of Le Cerf de la Viéville, who, in addressing the subject of accompaniment, says that "*La conversation languit: on prie quelqu'un de chanter un Air, on l'écoute et on recommence à causer*."[608] Evidence of song as a sustainer of discourse was also unearthed in my reading of Scudéry's conversation on discretion, in which one character who is described as having a pleasant voice offers to sing for his hostess so as not to give her the trouble of having to entertain him. The episode describing this vocal offering from an albeit unwelcome guest shows equally how the singing of a song could serve as a "conversation filler".[609] Another such occasion is described in the *Mercure galant* when a suitor who is not gifted in the art of conversation asks the object of his admiration to sing for him so that he would be saved from the obligation to converse.[610]

In a statement which is revealing not only of the ubiquity of song but of its relationship with the art of discourse, the anonymous author of *Entretiens galans* complains that Parisians sang "*éternellement*". Song seemingly insinuated itself into social exchange given the least chance, and such was the entanglement of the spoken and the sung that airs often took the place of a spoken reply in polite conversation:

> *On ne les voit jamais sans entendre un air de l'Opera. Où qu'ils aillent, ils entonnent toûjours quelque chose. Ils disent une chanson dans la converation la plus serieuse. Et ils vous repondent en musique, lorsque vous vous attendez à quelque réponse de bon sens. Pour leur Maîtresse, ils ne l'entretiennent que sur un ton d'Opera. Ils n'expliquent leur tendresse que par quelque petite chanson. Ils trouvent toûjours quelque couplet qui a du raport à ce qu'on leur dit, & ils le chantent pour y répondre.*[611]

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[607] Tallemant, *Le second voyage de l'Île d'Amour*, 14.
[608] See Goulet, *Poésie, musique et sociabilité*, 668. 'The conversation dwindled. We asked someone to sing an air. We listened to it and started to speak again'.
[609] Scudéry, *Conversations morales*, 1686, 2:588.
[610] 'Mercure galant', May 1698, 227.
[611] *Entretiens galans*, 1681, 2:101–2; as cited in Goulet, *Poésie, musique et sociabilité*, 669. 'One never sees them without hearing an air from the opera. Wherever they go, they always start to sing something. In the most serious of conversations, they will speak a song. And they will reply to you in music when you are expecting some sensible response. For their mistress, they will only speak to them on the tones of opera. They only ever express tenderness by some little song. They always find some couplet which bears some relation to what they are saying, and they sing it by way of response'.

In this same work, we find a conversation which is ostensibly about music but which thinly veils an underlying game of flattery and seduction played at least by the male character, Philemon. Berelie and Philemon discuss an air which Philemon has just sung. The female character, Berelie, then sings the whole air with Philemon, who stops to exclaim how good the air is. Compliments are exchanged between the pair, but Berelie insists that Philemon's compliments are only made to elicit a compliment in return. Philemon happily replies with a couplet in song, saying that when one loves the musette of the shepherd, one soon loves the shepherd himself. Berelie replies with another sung couplet, pretending to flee Philemon. She sings another complete song and Philemon is about to reply when a third character who is hosting the pair remarks that the pair have just made a fairly long "*scene en musique*".[612] My review of Scudéry's conversation on laziness reveals another example of this reactive, almost "antiphonal" use of airs, in which the characters engage each other to sing couplets in dialogue to one another.[613]

Although not an example of verse which is sung, the *Mercure galant* describes an episode in which a character composes poetry for the purpose of explaining a Latin inscription on a statue to his company.[614] Similar examples of verse which was created in order to edify and clarify abounds in the literature reviewed for this study. As the natural musical extension of this practice, within Scudéry's descriptions of conversations, the singing of an air could also serve as a means of explaining or summarising, albeit in an ornamental and vocalised form, one's point of view. One such exchange is found in the *Conversation de l'Esperance* in Scudéry's *Conversations morales*: in a gathering of polite society which takes place during a moment of rest following a walk in a public garden, six friends discuss the nature of hope. Towards the end of the lengthy conversation, one of the circle recites a song text by way of summary of her view.[615] Inspired by this, the other participants offer their views in the form of songs, such that by the end of the exchange, several song texts have been recited. The conversation scene closes by one of the participants rising from her seated position and singing a couplet from the song text which she had previously recited aloud, which she is said to repeat several times to her friends while the walk continues.

Several further examples of the interaction between conversation and song, which have not yet been the subject of academic attention, were revealed in my investigation of Scudéry's works. In one exchange in *Nouvelles Conversations,* the characters discuss repentance. The host, Damon, wishes to memorialise the conversation by making maxims out of it either in verse or prose. One of the company, Mérindor, is charged with the task of composing some lines in an easy measure which one can sing, which would then be performed by one of Damon's able musicians. He is said to choose as a model four lines that everyone had sung before. The company discusses repentance again, then they are said to walk to a beautiful grotto. The soft murmurs of a fountain are said to act as the theorbo for the musician, who surprises the party and sings perfectly what Mérindor had created that morning.[616]

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[612] *Entretiens galans*, 1681, 2:55–57.
[613] Scudéry, *Conversations morales*, 1686, 1:176.
[614] 'Mercure galant', August 1699, 282–83.
[615] Scudéry, *Conversations morales*, 1686, 1:67; as cited in Gordon-Seifert, *Music and the Language of Love*, 232.
[616] The fact that the performance by the fountain in the grotto was pre-meditated rather than spontaneous shows that the lack of accompaniment was planned and not considered in any way to derogate from the beauty of the rendition. In short, accompaniment was not a necessity.

Afterwards, all the company are said to be pleased because it reflected their thoughts well.[617] Each participant selects the verse which they find most fitting to their own opinion on repentance, and one participant is said to sing his chosen verse. Song is also mentioned when the next day, on departure, the host charges his musician to sing an air, which includes a reference to repentance, linking back this impromptu farewell to the topic of conversation of the day before. This account uses song to memorialise a lively conversation by summarising diverse views and as a musical farewell with allusions to the same theme. From it, we can conclude that song was both a function of conventional social niceties (saying goodbye) and a powerful parallel to the opinions expressed in the spoken word.

My reading of Scudéry also uncovered the following episode which has not yet been accorded academic attention. In a conversation about jealousy in the *Conversations morales*, the assembled company dine together, then go into a *cabinet* where the host's daughter, who is said to sing admirably well, took up a theorbo and sang several operatic airs. Finally, she is said to sing several couplets of an air by Le Camus, each of which finishes with the line, "*Helas je n'estois point jaloux"*.[618] This last rendition is said to be on the order of the hostess, Ismenide, who wants to thereby remind the company of what she has resolved in relation to the topic of conversation - jealousy. Once these verses are sung, they form the impetus for further conversation on the topic. Another in the conversation circle remarks that it was jealousy that was responsible for curing him of love, and that at the time, he had sung a piece which finished by two lines, which he quotes as "*Importune raison pourquoy vous dois-je suivre,/Quand on n'aime plus rien il faut cesser de vivre".*[619] This episode is significant, not only as it further reinforces song's function in concretising one's opinion expressed in the spoken word and generating further discussion, but because it provides a glimpse of the crossover of vocal practice between stage and salon which will be explored in chapter 7.

Parallel to the expectation that salon participants be able to ornament conversation by calling up extracts to cite from poetic texts, plays, and published letters, one can imagine salon participants privately committing to memory lyric texts and airs in part or in whole, to be sung or spoken at opportune moments during polite exchanges. Scudéry's descriptions of impromptu song within conversation reveal that such study was a social necessity. A good memory was a sought-after social trait. Within a conversation, such displays of a well-performing memory met a multitude of purposes, as shown above, and cemented a person's reputation as a person of quality and refinement. Conversation guides show that preparation of subjects to converse on and material was a serious task,[620] but in line with the prohibition on affectation explored below, such learning of passages must be seen to have emanated not from a laborious exercise of rote-learning, but from an effortless and casual pleasure. This prohibition on effort and affection is evident throughout the fictional

[617] Scudéry, *Nouvelles conversations*, 1688, 1:341–52.
[618] Scudéry, *Conversations morales*, 2:634. With the assistance of the *Catalogue des airs publiés dans le Mercure galant* (1678-1700) found at http://philidor.cmbv.fr/catalogue/intro-mercure_airs, I was able to conclude that this air was '*Je pensois que sous vtr' empire*', the words of which were by Scudéry. The music of this air has been identified as appearing in the author's work, *Clélie*, but its presence in Scudéry's *Conversations morales* has not previously been noted.
[619] Scudéry, 2:635. 'Bothersome reason, why must I follow you?//When one no longer loves anything, we must cease to exist'.
[620] See for example the advice given by Vaumorière, *L'art de plaire*, 259, 261.

discussions and model conversations of the instruction manuals reviewed. Time and again, a character, seemingly off-the-cuff, delivers a long quote or recites a poem, and yet this impressive display of memory is always couched within a statement of humility in which the character protests that he or she may not remember the extract accurately or apologises for his or her probable mistakes. Such displays of self-deprecation appear regularly in the *Mercure galant,* too.[621]

The trying out of new pieces in convivial, worldly company also prompted moments of song. Sight-singing, or singing *à livre ouvert,* mirrored the reading aloud of poetry, novels, and *lettres galantes,* parallel activities which also afforded salon circles the opportunity to experience, judge, and discuss new works for their own edification, rather than for garnering praise.[622] Scudéry's *Conversation de la Paresse* paints a portrait of this practice. In this conversation, two friends (Artemire and Clarinte) await the arrival of two others in a cabin in a large garden. In this cabin, there are four paintings, on which are inscribed the words of an air. The music of this air is notated on a brass plate attached to the marble base of the middle painting (but not notated within Scudéry's work). While waiting for the rest of the company to arrive, Artemire reads the verses. After doing so, she then sings the verses in their musical setting and says that she does so in order to see "*si l'air estoit aussi singulier que les paroles*".[623] When the rest of the company arrives, they find that one gentleman has secretly placed cards on which are written new verses beneath the original verses. Artemire invites another of the gentlemen to sing all eight verses with her as a dialogue. This gentleman, Telamon, sight reads the verses and music before the assembled company in a spirit of curiosity to see how the new verses fit with the music. A similar occasion presents itself in de Pure's *La Prétieuse*, in which the salon hostess Eulalie tries out Gelasire's verses to an existing sarabande in order to see if the words fit the music.[624]

The creation of airs during a worldly gathering was another significant facet of convivial musical activity amongst groups of cultured connoisseurs, and the trying out of freshly composed creations which must have inevitably followed this activity also constituted a point of entry of the *air sérieux* into the sound landscape of the salon. The penning and recitation of poetry by salon participants was a central part of this creative process. A *rite mondain,*[625] the ability to compose verse was a worldly skill that was not only key to social success, but likely a natural extension of a world in which interaction was dotted with snippets of poetry and poetic references, and in which poetry was part of everyday interaction. Goulet evokes a privileged world in which the writing and recitation of poetry was ubiquitous and part of worldly exchange, not necessarily as a means to display one's literary talents, but to divert company and to show one's spirit.[626] In the context of her study of the *Livres d'airs*, she identifies several modes of creation. Poetry was commonly invented to fit existing music,[627] or a musician could equally take inspiration from a piece of

[621] See for example 'Mercure galant', December 1699, 29, 148.
[622] Note that an author reading his or her own text was, by contrast, personally implicated in a desire to impress, involving therefore a certain degree of affectation. See Lecœur, 'Conversation and Performance', 78.
[623] Scudéry, *Conversations morales*, 1686, 1:161. 'If the air was as special as the words'.
[624] Pure, *La prétieuse*, 2:228.
[625] Goulet, *Poésie, musique et sociabilité*, 443.
[626] Goulet, 443–48.
[627] Goulet, 454–56.

poetry and set it to music.[628] Without exhaustive investigation, evidence of "recycling" of materials and collaborative working is to be found in at least three airs of the repertoire studied: "*Ah! laissez-moy rêver dans cette solitude"*[629] is set by both Charpentier[630] and by Monsieur de Breuil in the *Recueils,* the text of Monsieur Desfontaines' *"Sans les connoître"*[631] is used by Jean-Baptiste Drouard de Bousset in a different musical setting several years later,[632] and "*Je vous aime"*[633] bears the same melody as Campra's "*Ad un cuore"* from *L'Europe Galante,* but with adapted text.

The creation of the text could equally be a collaborative effort, with a composer tackling the task of writing the words for the *double* or a poet adding additional text to extend a pre-existing poem.[634] These modes of creation are all depicted in the novel of the abbé de Pure, *La Prétieuse ou le mystère des ruelles.* Catherine Gordon-Seifert also finds evidence of this collaborative spirit in Scudéry's *Conversations morales,* and describes how one member of a group may create a first strophe, with another then composing a second strophe presenting a slight variation on the first. Other participants modify certain words or phrases while others offer a different song text altogether that either complements or contrasts with those already included. Gordon-Seifert identifies this collaborative spirit as extending to the compositional realm, too, demonstrating that more than one poet and composer participated in the creation of various airs by Bacilly, Lambert, and Le Camus.[635]

The texts of the *airs sérieux* themselves also provide us with valuable clues. They reveal the immediate context which, at the moment of the poetic-musical utterance, has triggered the narrator to express him- or herself in verse and song. Within the poetic landscape of the repertoire studied, strong emotion is the principal instigator. The emotional states that purportedly prompt the poet to write (and, by extension, later in the rhetorical "chain" of events, the composer to set the text and the singer in his or her *actio* to represent that expression) almost always involve affairs of the heart. Lyric texts in the first-person poetic voice predominate the collection, with laments, complaints, and amorous declarations directed at the beloved figuring heavily. Unjust treatment in the game of love, evidence of unfaithfulness, unreciprocated feelings, gazing admiringly on the beauty of the beloved all gave rise to emotions, therefore, which seemingly propelled song. Admiration (although not in this case for the beloved) as the impetus for writing verse on which music is then composed is also in evidence in Scudéry's description of Saint-Cyr in *Nouvelles Conversations*. Following its description, one character remarks that a friend had so much admiration for the institution after inspecting it that she could not help but write some poetry about it, on which a very good song had been composed.[636]

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[628] Goulet, 457. The latter practice is fictionally portrayed in Scudéry's *Histoire de la Confiance* in her *Conversations Nouvelles,* in which a character composes six verses of poetry renouncing his beloved. His companion reads the verses aloud and says that simply writing the verses is not enough – they should be sung, in his opinion, and he retains the poetry and puts them to music.

[629] RASB 1697/10/192.

[630] See *Recüil d'airs à voix seule, à deux, et à trois parties composez par differents autheurs*, F-Pn Rés Vmf ms 13, 90-91.

[631] RASB 1697/11/208.

[632] Bousset, *Second recueil*, 279.

[633] RASB 1698/2/26.

[634] Goulet, *Poésie, musique et sociabilité*, 457–60.

[635] Gordon-Seifert, *Music and the Language of Love*, 232–33.

[636] Scudéry, *Nouvelles conversations*, 1688, 1:272.

In the texts of the *airs sérieux* studied, the voice is also portrayed as a weapon of seduction and persuasion, with both men and women employing the singing of an air at moments in which they seek to charm their prey. For example, in an air from the July 1697 *Recueil,* the narrator compliments his beloved on the tenderness of her voice, but views this vocal quality as so powerful a force that it threatens to bend his resolve to renounce love:

> *Que vostre chant est tendre!*
> *Est-il quelque chagrin qu'il ne puisse charmer?*
> *Mais, helas! n'est-il pas dangereux de l'entendre*
> *Quand on ne veut plus rien aimer.*[637]

Similarly, in an air from the October 1699 *Recueil,* the voice of the beloved is described as having the powerful capacity to soothe the ardour of a lover:

> *Laissez chanter Climeine*
> *Sa voix agreable à mon coeur,*
> *Sçaura calmer la vive ardeur*
> *Qui m'enflame pour l'inhumaine.*[638]

As we shall see below, the high value placed on the concept of *bienséance* within the worldly interaction of the salon meant that it was not always appropriate to directly express feelings of disgruntlement and love. The *Mercure galant* of July 1699 provides one such example, where a well-born girl receives a declaration of love and she is said to reply in the only way that such a girl as she can – by blushing, which is said to allow one to guess that which cannot be said.[639] In her study,[640] Faith Beasley has demonstrated that singing an air was a means of expressing feelings that propriety would otherwise demand be left unsaid and remain hidden. This element of dissimulation is echoed in the conversation about music in *Entretiens galans.* There it is said that Philemon worked on his voice in order to have a pretext on which to sing to Berelie in order to express in song that which he did not dare say.[641] My study of the texts of the *airs sérieux* of the early *Recueils* supports this view, as the texts provide a suitable shield for distancing the singer from too direct and personal an expression. Firstly, although verse was often generated following real events and encounters with real people (even if those real people are merely characters inhabiting fictional works[642]), stock pastoral names and attributions are standard fare. Fictionally, we can see the dire consequences that can ensue when protagonists use real names rather than pastoral pseudonyms; when Mélinte is named as the renounced lover by Timante in his verses in Scudéry's *Conversation de la Confiance* and these are then turned into song and sung everywhere in Paris, the consequences for the character, Mélinte, are a source of great

[637] RASB 1697/7/125: "*Que vostre chant est tendre"*. 'How tender your song is!//Is there any chagrin that it cannot charm?//But, alas!, is it not dangerous to hear it//When one wishes never again to love'.
[638] RASB 1699/10/198: "*Importuns habitans".* 'Let Climeine sing.//Her voice, pleasing to my heart//Will know how to calm the lively ardour//Which sets me afire for her'.
[639] See 'Mercure galant', July 1699, 71–72.
[640] Beasley, *Salons*.
[641] *Entretiens galans*, 1681, 2:53.
[642] See for example the verses addressed to a woman with the pastoral pseudonym 'Iris' following one conversation participant's encounter with her in Scudéry, *Nouvelles conversations*, 1688, 2:438–39.

affliction. Bucolic pseudonyms were therefore not only conventional, but acted as a sort of poetic shield. Another device used to create a safe space for the expression of strong feelings through song is the absence of the "*vous"* in many of the song texts of the repertoire. Poetically speaking, the beloved is not in the room, and only appears as an absent and, therefore, safely-distanced, third person. Finally, the first-person narrative voice of the airs studied is predominantly male, rendering these songs a safe-house of emotional expression for the female amateur singer who populated the salon.

In the *airs sérieux* studied, the seductive powers of the singing voice are often associated with deception. For example, in one air*,* the singing narrator remonstrates his/her beloved for his/her touching manner of singing, which the narrator claims is at odds with the beloved's lack of real-life tenderness.[643] Likewise, in a fifteen-verse gavotte air*,* the narrator claims that Tircis' amorous musical pleadings to his beloved are excessive if his air is simply *badinage*, but too little if his feelings are in fact sincere.[644] Associated with flattery and with overtones of insincerity, singing was thus a weapon of *galanterie,* and a means of dissimulation.

6.5 Baldassare Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano* (1528) and its influence on salon comportment and vocal practice

As explored in chapter 2, the respect of formal conventions in social interaction and dialogue formed the basis for acceptance into polite society. These formal conventions were prescribed in the French etiquette and conversation manuals of the seventeenth century. The theorists who authored these manuals assimilated the views expressed by Baldassare Castiglione in the philosophical debates which make up his lengthy book on sociability, *Il libro del cortegiano* (1528). This work sets out the characteristics that constituted an ideal and worthy courtier or court lady (in the third chapter). Castiglione's work on sociability found fame outside Italy and was widely read, translated, and re-printed across Europe.[645] Translated into French first by Gabriel Chapuis in 1580 and in some cases in the seventeenth century, incorporated word for word into writings,[646] Castiglione's views have been shown to have held considerable sway with seventeenth-century French thought.[647] The influence of those views in the conversation manuals reviewed shows the impact they had on sociable interaction such as that practised in the salon, and by extension, the singing that took place as an integral part of that sociable exchange.

Through the mouthpiece of the Count of Urbino, Castiglione instructs his readers that the ideal courtier is one whose grace makes his words, gestures, and actions universally pleasing, and who practises a certain effortlessness (*sprezzatura*). This effortlessness conceals all artistry and makes whatever one says or does seem uncontrived, and thereby natural. The avoidance of contrivance and affectation was critical. True art is what does not seem to be art, and the most important thing is to conceal artistry, according to Castiglione. It is by concealing artfulness that the courtier avoids the appearance of affectation and

[643] See RASB 1695/11/216: "*Vous chantez d'un air si touchant*".
[644] See RASB 1696/1/20: "*Un jour dans une grotte obscure".*
[645] For an overview of the reception of Castiglione's work in Europe, see chapter 1 of Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier*.
[646] Lecœur, 'Conversation and Performance', 37.
[647] Fader, 'The Honnête Homme', 10.

shows grace. Although not offering specific instructions on how to avoid affectation, certain principles emerge, which are summarised in brief as follows: exaggerated concentration and effort are to be avoided. One must act as if one cares little for the activity in which one is engaged and as if one is thinking about something else. The courtier should ideally stick to simple tasks rather than difficult ones in which his labour and effort are apparent. Graceful and intentional minor imperfections are allowed (although these should not be exaggerated, presumably on the basis that such exaggerations would be an affectation in themselves), with perfection occasionally giving way to imperfection. Effortlessness and excellence in performance were not considered incompatible, therefore; it was nonchalance that distinguished the aristocratic or worldly performer from the professional.

Castiglione's *sprezzatura* was translated into the French context through the interrelated concepts of *politesse, honnêteté, bienséance,* and *grâce.*[648] These were values which informed all aspects of ideal worldly comportment and interaction, and permeated, equally, into aesthetic judgements. In Scudéry's description of Saint-Cyr in her *Nouvelles conversations de morale*, for example, it is precisely the sense of moderation and proportionality of the physical surroundings of that institution (in short, its *bienséance*) which attracts praise from the narrator. The apartment of the founder of the school is said to be large and beautiful, but also modest in a way which is infinitely pleasing. The view is said to be perfectly beautiful, neither too wide nor too limited beyond the gardens. Everything tells of modesty and piety, although it all equally has an air of *politesse* and an extremely noble grandeur.[649] *Bienséance* also infiltrates into the glowing description of the pupils at the school[650] and figures in writings about fashion[651] and poetry.[652]

These values are also in evidence in relation to judgements on vocality. So fundamental were these values to singing that Méré states that beauty of voice and vocal talent would not suffice to win admiration. To be esteemed as a singer, the possession of *honnêteté* was an essential quality. This was the case even if the singer knew little of music.[653] The inroads that *sprezzatura* made into French musical thought are equally demonstrated in a passage identified by Don Fader and written by Le Cerf de la Viéville. Speaking in the context of the *querelle* between French and Italian musical aesthetics, he draws an unfavourable picture of Italian music, personified by a showy and highly made-up coquette who is said to smile and grimace in a studied manner with brilliance and liveliness but without heart, soul or sincerity. In contrast, Le Cerf de la Viéville portrays French music in favourable terms as a noble but modest woman who is neat, dressed with gallant propriety and natural face-colouring except for some occasional rouge to cover some tiny flaw. This woman is said to be far removed from all that is false, speaking well without flattering herself that she is a good speaker.[654] A lack of affectation and self-flattery are held up as ideal and portrayed as essential ingredients of politeness. That naturalness (represented by the woman

[648] Fader, 11. '*Grâce*' was less commonly referred to as '*négligence*'.
[649] Scudéry, *Nouvelles conversations*, 1688, 1:255–56.
[650] Scudéry, 1:264. They are said to dance to songs without constraint but with great modesty, and even the youngest girls are commended on the games they play because of their proportionality to the pupils' age.
[651] *Entretiens galans*, 1681, 2:3–4.
[652] *Entretiens galans*, 1681, 1:143–44. Naturalness was said to be prized over exaggeration and the creation of chimeras.
[653] Méré, *Conversation*, 39.
[654] Fader, 'The Honnête Homme', 6.

personifying French music in Le Cerf de la Viéville's comparison) was prized over affectation was a common theme, evidenced by the frequent raillery against the *précieuses*, who were criticised for only liking outrageous and extraordinary things, and preferring elaborate turns of phrase to express the most simple things.[655] In Scudéry's *Conversation des Louanges* in *Nouvelles Conversations,* the criticisms directed at a figure who is said to praise his house, family, gardens and himself, and to boast of his bravery in battle also show that self-effacement was a virtue highly esteemed by polite society.[656] The necessity of shunning affectation, effort, and too studied a manner is echoed throughout the conversation manuals reviewed.[657]

In Courtin's manual, which allies civility with Castiglionian concepts of *bienséance* and decorum, the author prescribes small and often precise practical details as to what is considered good and bad etiquette. His brief comments relating to music are noteworthy. As can be expected in a social climate which prized modesty and a lack of contrivance, he stipulates that one's talents for singing, music, or writing verse should remain hidden. If one's talents are discovered and you are asked to sing or play, then *honnêteté* dictates that you should first decline by politely excusing oneself. Only after being pressed to do so should you acquiesce.[658] To avoid affectation, Courtin also indicates that one should not spend too long tuning one's guitar or lute.[659] One should avoid pointing out interesting parts in the music, as this is a vanity. Moreover, one should not sing or play for too long, or speak or interrupt others while they are singing and playing.[660] In commenting about the correct way of speaking, Courtin counsels his readers against making big hand gestures,[661] and one can imagine that this would apply equally to members of polite society engaging in song.

Restraint and an absence of affectation also emerge as ideal attributes of the noble musician in a description found in Scudéry's *Clélie.* In a portrait supposedly representing Mme de Sévigné, a *salonnière* and keen musician, Scudéry describes the ideal amateur musician as someone who sings in a passionate manner and very well, but nevertheless as a noble person, without expecting to be asked and without affectation.[662] Passion in performance was acceptable but it should not be exaggerated or affected.

Echoes of Castiglione's principle of *sprezzatura* are equally to be found in the fictional representations recounting moments of musical experimentation and sight-singing *à livre ouvert*. In both of the representative examples described in Scudéry's *Conversation de la Paresse* and de Pure's *La Prétieuse* in section 6.2 above, the characters try out new pieces and the music and words become the subjects of scrutiny. By making the music and texts the protagonists rather than the act of performance, affectation is formally precluded.

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[655] Bellegarde, *Modeles*, 355; Courtin, *Nouveau traité de la civilité*, 85.
[656] Scudéry, *Nouvelles conversations*, 1688, 2:424.
[657] See for example Scudéry, *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 1680, 1:30; Bellegarde, *Modeles*, 355; Vaumorière, *L'art de plaire*, 5,11; Courtin, *Nouveau traité de la civilité*, 85; Méré, *Conversation*, 25.
[658] Courtin, *Nouveau traité de la civilité*, 158–59.
[659] Courtin, 158–59.
[660] Courtin, 160.
[661] Courtin, 59.
[662] As cited in Fader, 'The Honnête Homme', 21.

For the worldy salon participant, the deriving of pleasure through music-making was fundamental, not least because the contrary attitude would have carried with it the implication of a certain anxiousness on the part of the performer to please. Such anxiousness could be cast as a type of affectation. Indeed, Bacilly emphasises the pleasurable aspect of singing and prizes the skills of the singer who sings just for their own diversion over the singer who sings to please a whole assembly of listeners.[663] The latter, he says, can only sing in a dramatic style, whereas the former are able to execute both a theatrical and a delicate style of singing.

Moderation was translated into the salon context in the concept of propriety, decorum or *bienséance*. Closely related to *politesse,* the 1694 dictionary of the *Académie française* defines *bienséance* as a standard of behaviour denoting an appropriateness of word and action in relation to the person, age, sex, time, or place concerned. As the latter concepts could differ between people and situations, *bienséance* was therefore a floating set of duties and standards, whose primary elements were the shunning of pedantry, the concealment of knowledge, and a modesty of comportment. Those not born with an innate ability to navigate this floating set of rules were counselled to find good models to imitate. Don Fader suggests that this esteem for innate ability carried with it a concomitant feel of distrust for learned behaviours and for talent, which were perceived as carrying the danger of the person wishing to cultivate these for their own sake.[664] Such a cultivation of behaviour would not be natural and would also flout Castiglione's prohibition on affectation. Bellegarde, writing in 1690, encapsulates the spirit of *bienséance* in a gallant dialogue between two characters, Euthyme and Theagene. In this exchange, a nobleman is admonished for too great a show of his abilities; the high level to which he has cultivated his musical talent is cast as inappropriate and in fact detrimental to his social standing.[665] A deficiency in *bienséance* was at the heart of criticism of the Italian musical idiom, which was cast as exaggeratedly expressive and unmoderated. To conform to the standards of propriety, a member of polite society had to show both naturalness and restraint, therefore. They had to listen carefully to the conversation in order to moderate their responses.[666] The characters in Scudéry's *Conversation de la Discretion* address the links between discretion and *bienséance*, and conclude that the ability to find the right balance between too much and too little generated modesty.

The emphasis on restraint and self-control necessitated a holding back, also, on excessive emotion. Méré acknowledges that in conversation, the movements of the soul ought to be moderated and a distance had to be kept from all that could make the soul sad and sombre and all that could lead it to excessive laughter.[667] Indeed, anything that could shock should be avoided.[668] The volume of the voice and the tone of voice should be moderated to take account of the subject and circumstances[669] in order to match one's words with the

[663] Bacilly, 'Réponse', 12–13.
[664] Fader, 'The Honnête Homme', 14.
[665] Bellegarde, *Réflexions*, 129.
[666] Vaumorière, *L'art de plaire*, 19.
[667] Méré, *Conversation*, 9–11. The comments on laughter are echoed by Courtin. See Courtin, *Nouveau traité de la civilité*, 60–61.
[668] Scudéry, *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 1680, 1:29–30; Courtin, *Nouveau traité de la civilité*, 94.
[669] Méré, *Conversation*, 16–17, 88; Courtin, *Nouveau traité de la civilité*, 69.

occasion.[670] However, this stricture on excess was also itself tempered with considerations of *bienséance* and a sense of proportionality; tears, laughter, and even anger were in fact allowed provided that they were proportionate to the calls of the discussion surrounding them. One's sense of judgement had to be employed to arbitrate on proportionality.

Moderation was said to be an essential character of an *honnête homme,* who avoids impulses of prejudice, instinct and passion, and *honnêteté* was an essential component of good singing. That the singer should have both talent for singing, politeness of language, and the ability to converse in polite society was what distinguished the *honnête homme* from the disparaged and morally dubious professional singer, according to Bacilly.[671] Paradoxically, one writer notes that *salonnières* could achieve naturalness by looking to professional actors, and to imagine that in one's interaction, one is playing a theatrical role. The sense of "distance" that this created was thought to give a person a sense of freedom from constraint in their speech and action. Interestingly, such liberty was perceived as saving one from fear and worry, a sort of affection of which Castiglione would certainly have disapproved.[672]

That the possession of *politesse* and *honnêteté,* considered fundamental to singing by Bacilly, were fundamental to achieving esteem and admiration for the worldly amateur singer is also demonstrated by the various descriptions of Bacilly's teacher, Pierre de Nyert. Nyert was widely acclaimed for his singing and highly esteemed by Bacilly for his vocal skills, but he also embodied Castiglione's principles. Tallemant de Réaux reports admiringly, for example, that he was said to always wait to be asked to sing and that he sang in such a way that there was no danger that he played the singer.[673]

Throughout the literature reviewed, there are references to the concept of *galanterie.* This quality governed the social code between men and women and also had a role to play in shaping behaviour, interaction, and therefore communication (whether that communication was by means of conversation or song). With echoes of Castiglione's stipulations to avoid contrivance and showiness, Scudéry defines *galanterie* as the indefinable grace of natural, easy, and unaffected conversation, in which the speaker uses his or her knowledge but conceals it beneath a playful and gentle exterior. The gallant person gives a pleasing *je ne sais quoi* to things which are not pleasing and adds a certain secret charm to the most everyday conversation, which satisfies and diverts.[674] It is *galanterie* which makes a person pleasing and liked. In conversation, a gallant air consists principally of thinking of things in an easy and natural manner, opting for playfulness and gentleness rather than seriousness and brusqueness, and in speaking simply and without affectation.[675] One should be able to pleasantly relate a trifle to the most serious and grave people, to make an address to the most severe of women, and to speak of science to those who are ignorant of it.[676] According to Vaumorière, there was a way of speaking which softened unfortunate topics of conversation and allowed speakers thereby to address those topics which one might not

[670] Méré, *Conversation*, 70.
[671] Bacilly, 'Réponse', 5.
[672] See further Lecœur, 'Conversation and Performance', 171–72.
[673] As cited in Fader, 'The Honnête Homme', 24.
[674] Scudéry, *Conversations nouvelles*, 1:372.
[675] Scudéry, 1:373.
[676] Scudéry, *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 1680, 1:32–33.

want to address overtly and please those with delicate feelings.[677] This was a type of gallantry and it was also a means by which conversation participants could ensure compliance with the social requirements of *bienséance* - by modulating one's words to fit the situation, but also the feelings of others.

Gallantry was not always synonymous with sincerity, therefore, and was associated with the flattery of women in an attempt to win their favour. Indeed, as has been pointed out previously, the majority of Bary's model gallant conversations involve flattering the female.[678] The concept of gallantry carried connotations of trickery and deceit.[679] Bary noted this propensity for *bienséance* and *galanterie* to coalesce*,* when he said that propriety demands that one say something, but it does not require it always to be truthful.[680] Equally, gallantry allowed a person to say that which others only dare think, and thus not transgress the strictures on decorum and propriety.[681] Whether or not amounting to deceit, gallant behaviour did often involve a sense of dissimulation. Scudéry's descriptions support this view, with a character in her *Conversations nouvelles* explaining that *politesse* required one to judiciously submit one's reason to the conventions of the world, even if one did not always agree.[682] The ability of the speaker or singer to transform the meaning of a word according to his or her tone of voice is recognised in the conversation on coquettry in *Entretiens galans*.[683] There it was acknowledged than an epithet can serve as both insult and commendation, depending on the way it is said and that words which are considered offensive can be transformed in meaning if they are said in an agreeable way. Just as the saving grace of coquettry was the fact that the coquette sought to please others, so the person demonstrating *galant* behaviour was saved from condemnation as this *galanterie* was *bienséant.* A similar view is expressed by Scudéry in *Conversations nouvelles,* where it is said that the way in which one's voice sounds on a particular word could transform gentle raillery into something more malicious.[684]

6.6 Other salon-modifying factors

My review of the literature revealed other social and behavioural strictures which would have impacted on and shaped vocal practice. For example, the speaker had to think only of pleasing his or her listeners,[685] and commendations are given throughout the literature to characters who manage to speak in a way which neither angers nor displeases.[686] An easy and flowing expression,[687] and a natural and noble air were required.[688] One had to maintain an air which balanced cheerfulness with seriousness in order to be modest and to not fall foul of the rules of decorum.[689] When in company, one was required to be

[677] Vaumorière, *L'art de plaire*, 87.
[678] Lecœur, 'Conversation and Performance', 174–75.
[679] Randall, 'Court, Salon, and Republic of Letters', 148.
[680] Bary, *L'esprit de cour*, 41.
[681] Scudéry, *Conversations nouvelles*, 1:373.
[682] Scudéry, 1:126.
[683] *Entretiens galans*, 1681, 1:208–9.
[684] Scudéry, *Conversations nouvelles*, 1:134.
[685] Méré, *Conversation*, 15; Scudéry, *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 1680, 1:8.
[686] See for example Scudéry, *Conversations nouvelles*, 1:122.
[687] Méré, *Conversation*, 23.
[688] Méré, 25.
[689] Courtin, *Nouveau traité de la civilité*, 95.

sociable,[690] but not to dominate the conversation.[691] One should avoid injustice and cruelty.[692] Scudéry stipulated that hatred for another should not be spoken of as it can never lead to pleasant conversations.[693] One should be agreeable and cheerful.[694] Throughout my review of Scudéry's idealised conversations, this latter aspect was striking; the characters are frequently said to converse "*en souriant", "en riant"* and "*agréablement*", even when at odds on philosophical matters. More than twenty years after Méré set out these strictures and Scudéry represented them in her works, we find their echo throughout Vaumorière's 1701 instruction manual, too.

Modesty and restraint of expression were salon values upheld by Tallemant des Réaux, too, who recounts with apparent horror the contortions and intense expressions of a *salonnière* reciting a sonnet.[695] Indeed the code of behaviour which required *bienséance* in one's conversation and conduct, would also have required proportionality of gesture, too. In his treatise, Grimarest directly addresses the popular salon pastime of reading aloud. He comments that people reading aloud should not make a spectacle of themselves. Gesture and pronunciation should not be aligned when engaging in this activity. Pronunciation should remain vivid and readers should make use of various tones of voice appropriate to the text. The different passions which one expresses when reading aloud naturally require small movements of the arms and face, as this gives fire and *agrément* to the reading. Echoing Courtin's instructions discussed above, he states that otherwise, however, gesture has no part to play in this pastime.[696] He contrasts this with declamation; with declamation, one learns by heart the text, its inflexions, and gestures, whereas when reading aloud, one has to guess the *mouvements* which follow without the same degree of preparation. When reviewing the literary texts summarised in this chapter in conjunction with the strictures on decorum and *bienséance* described in the etiquette and conversation manuals, my conclusion is that Grimarest's comments on gesture in relation to the salon activity of reading aloud must also apply to the salon activity of singing an air within polite conversation. Such airs, as we have seen above, were woven almost spontaneously into polite discussions, leaving the singer little time to choreograph his or her movements. Large movements would be read as contrived and reeking of the stage singer in any case. An economy of gesture, on the other hand, was seemly, natural, and modest.

The requirement to maintain an easy and convivial yet unaffected manner and to keep gesture muted impacted in a concrete way on certain aspects of vocal delivery within polite society. Bacilly acknowledges that correct pronunciation and a meticulous observance of syllable quantity and accentuation are critical to the art of singing well. Bacilly states that women (the main transgressors) are firmly opposed to any pronunciation which would seem to change the normal formation of the mouth in speaking, as they perceive any and all changes as ugly grimaces.[697] Bacilly expressly identifies the following of his rules as being

[690] Méré, *Conversation*, 76.
[691] Scudéry, *Conversations nouvelles*, 1:126.
[692] Méré, *Conversation*, 51.
[693] Scudéry, *Conversations morales*, 1686, 2:501.
[694] Méré, *Conversation*, 14.
[695] Tallemant des Réaux, *Historiettes*, 2:901.
[696] Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, 100.
[697] Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 267; For a detailed description of the literature on physiognomy and the conflict between noble bearing and correct pronunciation, see Bane, 'Honnêtes Gens'.

susceptible to this corruption in spoken pronunciation: firstly, especially amongst women, Bacilly notes the tendency to pronounce the -e, -es, or -ent of a feminine ending in a manner which is too open. He cites two examples using the words "*extrême*" and "*inevitable*" and complains that these are often pronounced "*extrêmea*" and "*inévitablea*". The antidote which Bacilly suggests (to pronounce the feminine endings as an "*eu*", with the lips in almost the same position as this diphthong) is seemingly no antidote at all, because, according to Bacilly, even with this diphthong, many singers fail to bring the lips close enough together. Secondly, the same problem exists with the "*ou*" sound (where people only tend to pronounce the "*o*" in this diphthong). Bacilly cites an example of people incorrectly pronouncing the word "*douceur*" which is made up of two diphthongs, and only giving half the sound of each. This results in an "o" and an "e". Another common fault occurs, again particularly amongst women, when they smooth over the "o" vowel, even going so far as to pronounce "*comment*" as "*quement*". According to Bacilly, this makes the "o" lose all its natural power and is done in an attempt to make the sound more delicate.[698]

These corruptions of spoken pronunciation to avoid grimaces were common faults in singing, too. Bacilly notes with disapproval that pupils in search of a singing teacher were attracted by an instructor's ability to sing without making faces. However, this attraction is misplaced according to Bacilly and the faces which are deemed to be grimaces are in fact the result of certain pronunciations which cannot be made without adjusting the mouth. While these may be read as affected facial contortions by some, Bacilly does not consider them to be an affectation at all.[699] He complains, further, that women who sing never acquire the expressive ability associated with the concept of *mouvement*.[700] He explains that the reason for this is that they deem such emotionalism as unseemly to the modesty of their sex, and that this leads to an inanimate vocal style. Méré, likewise, complains of this, doubting the merits of a bland performance which neither leads one to weep nor sigh.[701]

While Bacilly freely voices his complaints against dispassionate performance and corrupted pronunciation, he is nevertheless careful to state that overblown and overly-affected performances are to be avoided, too. He draws a distinction between the salon singer and the stage professional. Exaggerated styles of singing, with affectation and grimaces, are apt for the stage, he says, but should be avoided in the salon, as they take away all the grace and *agrément* of song.[702] In this, he does seem to be casting his vote in favour of music-making that can give priority to the detailed beauty of song – the salon – but his critique of the bad vocal habits of its protagonists is never far away.

6.7 Conclusion

Steering one's course through the voluminous etiquette codes dictating decorous behaviour and speech must have been a difficult and perilous task. Obliging the speaker to demonstrate a natural, unaffected, gracious, and cheerful character, and to hide any effort and artistry, salon codes of behaviour represented a double challenge for the singer of the *airs sérieux* in the early *Recueils*. For if in one ear they heard echoes of Castiglione's ideal

[698] Bacilly, *Remarques curieuses*, 273–74.
[699] Bacilly, 73–74.
[700] Bacilly, 200.
[701] Méré, *Œuvres complètes*, 3:134.
[702] Bacilly, 'Réponse', 11–13.

courtier, in the other ear they heard and witnessed on the stage highly expressive, passionate renditions of vocal music (including renditions of airs drawn from stage works which were also printed in the *Recueils*) such as those envisaged by the theorists whose works were reviewed in chapter 5.

The writings of Bacilly, aesthetic mouthpiece of the seventeenth-century's long theoretical tradition of championing affective representation of text and music, only adds to this sense of peril. As the most celebrated vocal pedagogue and singing theorist in Paris, teacher to royal and noble ladies, instructor of leading and influential (male) stage actors, while he critiques overblown and affected styles of stage singing, he also directs a barrage of criticism at dispassionate performance. His disapproval of the way in which correct pronunciation was corrupted by a resistance to proper phonic formation with the lips and mouth is proof that such practices, despite his battling against them, did exist. Well may he have disapproved, but these "bad habits" were so endemic that they formed part of a new, demographic- and context-specific performance style.

Abiding by the rules as to decorous and polite modes of conduct and communication, attempting to distance oneself from stage professionals yet sub-consciously (or consciously) assimilating some of their habits, giving in to a passionate rendition as far as salon values will allow - these are all possible points at which the world of the salon and the world of the professional could collide. These intersections in vocal mode and expression are explored in the final chapter.