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# The Salonnières and the Philosophes in Old Regime France: The Authority of Aesthetic Judgment

*Jolanta T. Pekacz*

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During the eighteenth century a significant shift occurred in the perception of the authority of aesthetic judgment in France, from a group usually referred to as “polite society” and widely considered the exclusive source of taste (*goût*) to various competing groups arrogating to themselves the right to judge artistic matters.<sup>1</sup> In the present article I discuss the changing recognition of the genders as arbiters of taste, exemplified by Parisian salonnières on the one hand, and the philosophes on the other, during two eighteenth-century quarrels over the French and Italian operas: the *Querelle des Bouffons* in the 1750s and the controversy between *Gluckistes* and *Piccinistes* in the 1770s. I argue that by the end of the 1770s, as a result of the collapse of the old paradigm of “polite society” of which salons were a part, Parisian salon women lost the position (however illusory it might have been) which they enjoyed in the seventeenth century as arbiters of taste. While the philosophes attended feminine salons,

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<sup>1</sup> Some aspects of this shift were discussed as a part of the emerging “public sphere” in Paris in the 1750s or elsewhere e.g., William Weber, “Learned and General Musical Taste in Eighteenth-Century France,” *Past and Present*, 89 (1980), 58-85; James H. Johnson, “Musical Experience and the Formation of a French Musical Public,” *Journal of Modern History*, 64 (1992), 191-226 and *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1995). However, the gender dynamics of this shift have been neglected.

they rejected the idea of consulting salonnières on the matters of taste (and on other matters), as was previously the case, and relegated them to formal, if not merely decorative, roles of guardians of good manners and propriety, the roles accepted by salonnières.

The ousting of the salonnière from aesthetic arbitration exemplified by the two operatic quarrels may be viewed as a continuation of the process of exclusion of salon women from discursive development that began in the seventeenth century, as discussed by Erica Harth in *Cartesian Women: Versions and Subversions of Rational Discourse in the Old Regime* (1992) and, most recently, by Joan DeJean in *Ancients against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle* (1997). In the seventeenth century the norms of feminine *bienséance* (decorum, propriety) allowed a woman to establish a salon but made it impossible for a salonnière to create a space intellectually comparable to that of the French Academy. After having lost a gendered competition for intellectual space with the Academy by the 1680s, the salon, as Erica Harth put it, “proved a discursive dead end for women.”

In this essay I carry through this argument into the eighteenth century and demonstrate that salon women lost a competition with the philosophes not only in the intellectual but also in the aesthetic sphere. Salonnières did not choose not to make aesthetic judgments out of respect for the exclusive right of the philosophes to make such judgments<sup>2</sup> but rather were silenced by the philosophes and complied in order not to violate the limits of feminine *bienséance* in the public sphere, that is, to survive as salonnières. The seventeenth-century ideals of feminine *bienséance* taken over by eighteenth-century salonnières were no longer perceived as sufficient (or legitimate) to recognize women as arbiters of taste. In fact these ideals proved to be as detrimental as a source of authority for salon women in the *siècle des lumières* as they were ambiguous in the *grand siècle*.

Ironically, not only were the eighteenth-century Parisian salonnières ousted from aesthetic arbitration, but neither did they succeed in their roles as guardians of propriety and good manners for the philosophes, that is, in keeping the Enlightenment discourse civil. In both operatic quarrels the dominant genre of discourse was a pamphlet, a *libelle*, not a salon conversation. While during the *Querelle des Bouffons* the philosophes were unanimously pro-Italian, the Gluck-Piccini quarrel caused a deep split among them, followed by fratricidal fighting, which seriously undermined their authority in public matters.

I. The negative connotation associated with the epithets *pedant*, *savant*, and their derivatives in seventeenth-century French treatises on *honnêteté* indi-

<sup>2</sup> Implied in Dena Goodman’s interpretation of the relationship between the philosophes and salonnières in *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994).

cates that the authority of judgment of “persons of quality” in matters of taste resulted from the code of *bienséances* in social relations. Blaise Pascal probably best summarized arguments for the superiority of an *honnête* person (as opposed to a professional) in the realm of aesthetics; being an outcome of *la finesse* (a specific quality characteristic of polite society and acquired through an exposure to this society), a judgment of an *honnête* person was superior to that of a professional, who had nothing at his disposal but the knowledge of rules resulting from bookish study, *la géométrie*.<sup>3</sup> Pascal was concerned that in his time the judgment began to become the preserve of the expert rather than of the *honnête* person: “Poète et non honnête homme.”<sup>4</sup>

For Antoine de Courtin the authority of judgment had a hierarchical structure (analogous to the existing social structure); an *honnête* person should acknowledge such authority and respect it. In his *Nouveau traité de la civilité* (1671), one of the most widely read books on the rules of civility, de Courtin wrote:

When it be your fortune at any play, or ball, or spectacle, to be placed next to the person of quality, it is ungraceful to fly out into any rapture or extravagant acclamation at every passage that pleases you; you must give him leave to judge first, by attending his approbation. For though many times you may have reason enough, and it may show your Capacity, yet it will be a greater evidence of your want of breeding and respect. It is the best way therefore to forbear till that Person of Quality applauds or condemns it, and then you may fall in as you see occasion.<sup>5</sup>

An *honnêteté* person was a superior critic in aesthetic matters because the criteria of *honnêteté* in the social realm and those of a seventeenth-century work of art based on the classical doctrine were difficult to separate: while an *honnête* person was modelled after the aesthetic norms, the aesthetic norms were also modelled after the rules of *honnêteté*. The language of *honnêteté* permeated the language of aesthetic discourse, and it was very often the rules of *honnêteté* that a work of art was expected to follow. *Bienséances* were to be observed not only in social relationships but also in art, and just as exaggerated

<sup>3</sup> “La vraie morale se moque de la morale; c’est-à-dire que la morale du jugement se moque de la morale de l’esprit, qui est sans règles. Car le jugement est celui à qui appartient le sentiment, comme les sciences appartiennent à l’esprit. La finesse est la part du jugement, la géométrie est celle de l’esprit.” Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. L. Brunschvicg (Paris, 1964), 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 38. See also A.-W.-S. Baird, “The *honnête homme* and the Aesthetics in the *Pensées*,” *Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association*, 28 (1967), 203-14.

<sup>5</sup> Antoine de Courtin, *The Rules of Civility, or, Certain Ways of Deportment Observed in France* (London, 1671), 47-48.

and bizarre behavior was considered a violation of *bienséances*, so was singularity and oddness in art. “Real beauty [in music] is in the *juste milieu*,” declared Jean Laurent Lecerf de La Viéville at the beginning of the eighteenth century in his book arguing the superiority of French over Italian music. He compared French music to the church of the Noviciat in Paris, built in a simple style, and Italian to the Jesuit church of St. Louis, overwhelmingly decorated.<sup>6</sup> Abbé Pluche wrote in *Le Spectacle de la nature* (1732) that “Music should conform to certain rules of decency, good taste, modesty; it is necessary that music adjusts to the text, that is, poetry, but with simplicity and moderation.”<sup>7</sup> “It is a mistake to believe that the profusion of ornaments enhances beauty of architecture; it harms it rather than helps it.”<sup>8</sup> Just as a craze for novelty was inappropriate for an *honnête* person,<sup>9</sup> so following fashion was not the way to achieve perfection in art.<sup>10</sup>

As opposed to *honnêtes* persons, *savants* and *pedants* (often identified), whose main asset was their bookish knowledge and who were unable to overcome their professional narrow-mindedness, were considered to have no taste and were thus unable to judge. “The majority of these gentlemen who are honored with the title of *savants* have bad taste and judge wrong,” wrote Abbé de Bellegarde in 1702. Taste, it was believed, like *honnêteté* itself, could be mastered only through contacts with polite society.<sup>11</sup>

Rules, however, were not quite excluded from *honnête* criticism; even *honnêtes* persons, the best judges, should have some instruction in the matters they judged, argued Abbé d’Aubignac in his work of 1663 on a dramatic poem.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Claude Perrault claimed that knowledge of rules pertaining to the work judged should not be entirely dismissed. “One should not judge poetry, painting, music, etc. by taste, that is, by an agreeable or disgusting feeling, the

<sup>6</sup> [Jean Laurent Lecerf de La Viéville, sieur de Fresneuse], *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique françoise ou, en examinant en détail les avantages des spectacles et le mérite des compositeurs des deux nations, on montre quelles sont les vraies beautés de la musique* (1704-6) (Graz, 1966), 2e dialogue, 55 and 77-78.

<sup>7</sup> Noël-Antoine Pluche, *Le Spectacle de la nature, ou Entretiens sur les particularités de l’histoire naturelle...* (8 vols.; Paris, 1732-50), VII, 112-16.

<sup>8</sup> Pierre Patte, *Mémoires sur les objets les plus importants de l’Architecture* (Paris, 1769), 16.

<sup>9</sup> For Pascal, an *honnête* person was not enslaved by fashion but always able to distinguish the *modèle naturel*. *Pensées*, 29.

<sup>10</sup> Germain Boffrand, *Livre d’Architecture* (Paris, 1745), 8.

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Baltasar Gracian y Morales, *L’Homme de cour*, tr. by Amelot de la Houssaie (Paris, 1685), 69; Anne-Thérèse de Lambert, *Réflexions sur le goût* in *Oeuvres* (2 vols; Paris, 1748), I, 144-45.

<sup>12</sup> “Il n’est point nécessaire d’être capable de faire un ouvrage pour en juger, il suffit d’en avoir acquis la connoissance, et principalement pour ceux du théâtre, ou tout doit être examiné par le sens commun, mais il faut entendre un sens commun bien instruit. La raison en doit décider tous les différends, mais il faut qu’elle soit éclairée et détrompée des erreurs populaires.” François Hédelin d’Aubignac, *Seconde Dissertation concernant le poème dramatique* (1663), 224, as quoted by René Bray, *La Formation de la doctrine classique en France* (Lausanne, 1931), 135.

cause of which one does not know, but by the judgment which understands things in themselves.”<sup>13</sup> Lecerf de la Viéville, too, tried to reconcile rules with taste. Good taste in music, he believed, was the “natural sentiment [of *honnêtes* persons] purified by rules.”<sup>14</sup> He was quick to add, however, that it was not necessary to know a lot of rules to evaluate a piece of music; it was not *savant goût* but the taste of an *honnête* person that Lecerf had in mind. Saint-Evremond, although far from rejecting rules, also asserted the primacy of taste over rules in aesthetic judgment.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the *honnête* judgment was not about rejecting the knowledge of rules but about accommodating it to polite discourse. The role of a *savant* was to inform polite society, not to dictate its preferences. Polite society was considered necessary to purify intellect from the pedantry inseparable from bookish study.<sup>16</sup> Aesthetic judgment was not a result of an individual experience but a collective opinion; a consensus achieved through comparing one’s experience with those of other members of polite society, ideally, through a polite conversation, that is, a conversation that avoids affectation and artificiality (in favor of naturalness and easiness), judgments (especially negative), obstinacy, contradiction, imperious tone, and assertive manners.<sup>17</sup>

Among “people of quality” women occupied a special place as experts in matters of taste in seventeenth-century France. They were often perceived as superior judges, primarily due to their lack of formal education. The lack of education made women’s intuition unspoiled, their taste “natural,” and their imagination sharper than men’s. Women also excelled in the knowledge of the *science du monde*, which accommodated specialized knowledge into a general discourse and further placed them above philologists and professors.<sup>18</sup> It was this perception of the role of ladies that made de Somaize write in his *Le Grand Dictionnaire des Pretieuses* (1661), “It is certain that if men do something for their glory, it is women who give value to things and grant their works reputa-

<sup>13</sup> Claude Perrault, *De la Musique des Anciens* (Paris, 1680), 579-80.

<sup>14</sup> Lecerf de La Viéville, *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique française*, 291; and elsewhere: “le bon goût n’est que ce sentiment naturel aidé par les principes.” *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>15</sup> René Bray, *La Formation*, 112-13; see also Antoine Gombaud, Chevalier de Méré, *Oeuvres* (3 vols.; Paris, 1930), II, 109.

<sup>16</sup> E.g., Morvan de Bellegarde, *Lettres curieuses de littérature et de morale* (Paris, 1702), 287.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Antoine de Gombaud, Chevalier de Méré, *Oeuvres* (3 vols.; Paris, 1930), II, 114; Joachim Jacques Trotti de La Chétardie, *Instructions pour un jeune seigneur ou l’idée d’un galant homme* (2 vols.; Paris, 1683), I, 38; Pierre Ortigue de Vaumorière, *L’Art de plaire dans la conversation* (Paris, 1688), 64 and 94ff.

<sup>18</sup> E.g., Charles Perrault, *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes* (1688-97), made the taste of women an argument in favor of the moderns. See also Claude Favre de Vaugelas, *Remarques sur la langue française* (Paris, 1647) and Saint-Gabriel, *Le Mérite des dames avec l’entrée de la reyne et de cent autres dames du temps, dans le ciel des belles héroïnes ...* (Paris, 1655), 38.

tion.”<sup>19</sup> De Pure echoed him in 1668: “As far as the rules of art are concerned, it is the ladies who decide the value of these things today.”<sup>20</sup> The *Mercuré galant* of June 1677 confirmed that “the majority of our renowned [members] of the *Académie Française* is not averse to consult her [Mme de La Sablière] on their works before presenting them to the public.” Indeed, the Duc de La Rochefoucauld, along with literary men born outside of the traditional nobility such as Pascal, Racine, Molière, La Fontaine, and Boileau, were reported as attending Parisian salons and reading there their works prior to publication.<sup>21</sup>

The authors praising the beneficial influence of women for the evaluation of literary works clearly had *honnêtes* women in mind; not only women who had wit<sup>22</sup> (rather than formal education which women were not supposed to have) but also women conforming to the rules of conduct acceptable by society, primarily to the *bienséances* of their sex. Only an *honnête* woman could give others continual precepts of *honnêteté* and issue judgments, wrote François de Grenaille,<sup>23</sup> as opposed to a *coquette* whose judgment was “bizarre,” shocked common sense, and could easily turn into tyranny.<sup>24</sup> Abbé de Bellegarde, too, made it explicit that women can have both a beneficial and a corrupting influence upon men and that he had in mind respectable ladies, either because of their rank or merit. He ended a chapter in his *Modèles de conversations* with a warning: “[O]ne should avoid, like a pest, libertine women who disgrace their sex, and who have shaken off the yoke of modesty and decency.”<sup>25</sup> Charles-François Nicolas Le Maitre de Claville, in the *Traité du vrai mérite considéré dans tous les âges et dans toutes les conditions* (1734), which enjoyed immense popularity in eighteenth-century France, also expected women to give

<sup>19</sup> Antoine Baudeau de Somaize, *Le Grand Dictionnaire des Pretieuses* (3 vols.; Paris, 1661), I, 240.

<sup>20</sup> Michel de Pure, *Idée des spectacles anciens et nouveaux* (Paris, 1668), 318.

<sup>21</sup> E.g., the salon of Mme de Plessis-Guénégaud played a leading role in diffusing Pascal’s *Provinciales*. See René Rapin, *Mémoire du P. René Rapin de la Compagnie de Jésus sur l’Église et la société, la cour, la ville et la jansénisme* (3 vols.; Paris, 1972), II, 367 and 375; La Rochefoucauld read his *Maximes* for the first time in the salon of Mme de Scudéry, and Boileau used to read his works in the salons of Mme de La Fayette and Mme de Sablière.

<sup>22</sup> Pierre de Villiers, *Réflexions sur les défauts d’autrui* (2 vols.; Lyon, 1694), II, 358-59.

<sup>23</sup> François de Grenaille, *L’Honnête fille* (3 vols.; Paris, 1639-42), I, 262.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 78-80; see also Morvan de Bellegarde, *Réflexions sur le ridicule et sur les moyens de l’éviter, ou sont représentés les moeurs et les différens caractères des personnes de ce siècle* (Paris, 1696), 400-401.

<sup>25</sup> Abbé de Bellegarde, *Modèles de conversations pour les personnes polies* (Amsterdam, 1702<sup>4</sup>), 222-37. In a similar vein David Hume praised the beneficial influence of *honnêtes* women: “What better school for manners than the company of virtuous women, where the mutual endeavour to please must insensibly polish the mind, where the example of the female softness and modesty must communicate itself to their admirers, on where the delicacy of that sex puts every one on his guard, lest he give offence by any breach of decency?” “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences,” in *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (2 vols.; Edinburgh, 1804), I, 138.

men examples of modesty and simplicity, testifying to the persistence of the traditional model of women's role in society.<sup>26</sup>

The seventeenth-century perception of *honnête* women as excelling in intuition, imagination, and "natural" taste (due to their lack of formal education) and in the *science du monde* (due to their expertness in matters of propriety, the *bienséance*, for men and women alike) set the limits for women as critics in matters aesthetic. The judgment allowed to women was of a special kind: it could go as far as a judgment based on intuition and "natural" taste alone could go, and as far as the rules of feminine propriety allowed it. Women who exceeded these limits were accused of perversion of taste and transgression of the *bienséances*, and found themselves under heavy fire from both men and *honnêtes* women alike, as the examples of seventeenth-century *femmes savantes* and *femmes précieuses* demonstrate.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, women who ventured judgments about complex works requiring erudition and knowledge of languages could meet with severe criticism from men who otherwise accepted feminine judgment, as demonstrated by Nicolas Boileau in the quarrel of the ancients and the moderns.<sup>28</sup>

II. If in seventeenth-century Parisian salons the *honnête* mode of criticism enjoyed supremacy, it was because of the shared recognition by both salonnières and their guests, that in salons specialized knowledge should (and could) be accommodated into general (polite) discourse, that women are indispensable in this process, and that polite society had the upper hand in matters of taste. The confrontation between the two modes of criticism was eliminated by the limitation of self (not only by the salon hostesses in order to play their role properly but also by the salon guests to conform to salon rules) in favor of the consensus of the group.

<sup>26</sup> *Traité du vrai mérite considéré dans tous les âges et dans toutes les conditions* (Paris, 1734), reached about twenty editions between 1734 and 1777 and was translated into Italian in 1757.

<sup>27</sup> For example, [Félix de Juvenel], *Le Portrait de la coquette, ou la Lettre d'Aristande, à Timagène* (Paris, 1659), 52; François Hédelin, abbé d'Aubignac, *Histoire du temps, ou Relation du royaume de coqueterie. Extraite du dernier voyage des Holandois aux Indes de Levant* (Paris, 1654), 28; Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Huetiana* (Paris, 1722), 174. See also Harth, *Cartesian Women*; Linda Timmermans, *L'Accès des femmes à la culture (1598-1715)* (Paris, 1993), 153-76; and Elizabeth L. Berg, "Recognizing Differences: Perrault's Modernist Esthetic in *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes*," *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 18 (1983), 135-48.

<sup>28</sup> In his *Satire X* (1694) Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux attacked Parisian women for their support of the moderns. Boileau aimed his attack on women who were not considered authorities in matters of taste because they violated the rules of *honnêteté*. The latter had nothing against women and their judgment, as long as they respected these rules: in 1667 he used to read his works in the salons of Mme de La Sablière and Mme de La Fayette; at the beginning of the 1670s he also read in some Parisian salons fragments of his *Art poétique* (1674).



The eighteenth century did not break immediately with the traditional concept of taste as a property of polite society. Montesquieu, who distinguished two kinds of taste, the natural and the acquired, mutually affecting and altering each other,<sup>29</sup> nevertheless related taste to the higher social orders.

At court one finds a delicacy of taste in all things, which comes from continual use of the excesses of a great fortune, from the variety, and especially the weariness, of pleasures, from the multiplicity, even the confusion, of fancies, which, when they are pleasing, are always accepted.<sup>30</sup>

Hence *gens du monde*, exposed to all *agréments*, could develop good taste which made them superior judges: “those who judge with taste [*goût*] works of the intellect have an infinity of feelings which other people do not have.”<sup>31</sup> In contrast, “people without taste call *beautiful* that which is large, difficult, and which was made with a great deal of work.”<sup>32</sup>

However, Montesquieu should not be seen as an unqualified supporter of the supremacy of the higher social orders as judges of *ouvrages d'esprit*. In fact, writes Montesquieu, it depends on the complexity of a work evaluated and in some cases a mediation/explanation of the professionals (*gens du métier*) may be necessary. “It is not through discussion that you judge well the beauties of Theocritus, Vergil, Ovid...,” wrote Montesquieu in 1726. “The fate of works of the intellect is hardly determined by other than professionals who can discuss as well as feel. They touch, so to say, the right cord of polite society and inform them.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, Montesquieu acknowledged a limited role for the *savant* without, however, denying a substantial participation of *gens du monde* in forming judgments on literary works.<sup>34</sup>

The question of the authority to judge was further complicated in the case of music. Traditionally, the upper social classes were considered the ultimate authority in matters of musical taste. As William Weber observed, while in the sphere of literature their authority had to acknowledge the existence and valid-

<sup>29</sup> Montesquieu, *Essai sur le Goût*, introduction et notes par Charles-Jacques Beyer (Geneva, 1967), 63-65.

<sup>30</sup> Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, tr. and ed. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone (Cambridge, 1989), 33 (“On education in monarchies”).

<sup>31</sup> Montesquieu, *Essai sur le Goût*, 87.

<sup>32</sup> *Pensées et Fragments inédits de Montesquieu* (2 vols.; Bordeaux, 1899), I, 313.

<sup>33</sup> Letter of 26 September 1726 to Jean-Jacques Bel, quoted by Charles-Jean Beyer, in his Introduction to Montesquieu, *Essai sur le Goût*, 30-31.

<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Jean-Baptiste Dubos in his influential *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (Paris, 1719), still represented a traditional elitist conception of the public, including only those enlightened through reading or worldly experience. See, Thomas E. Kaiser, “Rhetoric in the Service of the King: The Abbé Dubos and the Concept of Public Judgment,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 23 (1989-90), 193.

ity of learned tradition and the authority of the *Académie Française*, in secular music there was no learned tradition and no institution comparable to that of literature: the *Académie Royale de Musique*, founded in 1665, was merely an opera company.<sup>35</sup> Dedications of some musical pieces produced in France in the first decades of the eighteenth century leave no doubt as to who was an authority of taste for the musicians. For example, composer Lemaire flattered the Count d'Argenson to whom he sent a book of his cantatas in 1724: "I do not fear to put it before the eyes of the public if it has already met with your approval." Similarly, in 1729 J. B. Anet desired to place himself under the patronage of the Count de Clermont by inserting the following declaration: "This little work, which I dare not produce privately without trembling, will now appear boldly in public since it has pleased Your Highness to put it under your protection. I flatter myself that no one will dare to despise what Your Highness has approved."<sup>36</sup>

The concept of the "public" (identified with polite society), rather than a composer or a professional musician as an arbiter of musical taste, can also be found in Louis Fuzelier's preface to *Les amours déguisez, balet[sic] représenté par l'Académie royale de musique l'an 1713* (Paris, 1720), in which the author made it clear that it was "inutile aux auteurs de défendre leurs pièces de théâtre. C'est au public à les justifier." The prevailing notion of the "public" as identical with polite society is further attested by Nicolas Racot de Grandval, *maitre de clavecin*, who in 1732 plagiarized large portions of the *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique française* (1704-6) by Lecerf de la Viéville, obviously assuming a responsive audience:

In matters of music one can distinguish two kinds of people: those who may be called the low people, the servants, shop assistants, artisans, porters, etc., who listen to songs of the Pont Neuf and do not go at all to the Opéra; the other kind, the *honnêtes* persons, a distinguished multitude who frequent the *spectacles* but do not have knowledge of the rules; they are the people I have in mind.<sup>37</sup>

The social hierarchy underlying the concept of taste in music and the importance of *honnêteté* is also exemplified by the position of the most devoted music patrons in eighteenth-century Paris, Alexandre-Joseph de La Pouplinière (1692-1762) and Baron Charles Ernest de Bagge (1722-91). Despite their en-

<sup>35</sup> William Weber, "Learned and General Musical Taste in Eighteenth-Century France," *Past and Present*, 89 (1980), 58ff.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in François Lesure, *Music and Art in Society* (University Park, Penn., 1968), 41-42. See also Jean-Henry d'Anglebert's dedication to Princess de Conti of *Pièces de Clavecin* (1689, Paris, 1934).

<sup>37</sup> Nicolas Racot de Grandval, *Essai sur le bon goust en musique* (Paris, 1732), 52.

thusiasm for music and patronizing many musicians, neither of them was considered an authority on musical taste. William Weber suggested that it was an ambiguous social status that excluded patrons like La Pouplinière from the circle of authorities of taste: despite his relatively high social position he did not, however, hold a major title.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, for the author of a satirical play, La Pouplinière represented a “bourgeois patron” exemplifying a mixture of arrogance and lowness and thus all the hypocrisy of society.<sup>39</sup> In other words, La Pouplinière was rejected as a patron because he interfered with the traditional roles of higher social orders. But La Pouplinière also epitomized what was strongly resented by the middle bourgeoisie: an ostentatiously luxurious and extravagant lifestyle and the social pretensions and presumptions of the financiers, as rationally and morally irreconcilable with traditional bourgeois values.<sup>40</sup>

Baron de Bagge’s case reveals another aspect of the question of authority over matters of taste in music. In comparison with La Pouplinière, he had a less impressive lineage: upon moving to Paris in 1750 he was registered merely as a “native of Courland” by the French authorities.<sup>41</sup> But as opposed to La Pouplinière, he was not criticized for being a bourgeois, but for his musical fanaticism, pretentiousness and excessive generosity to musicians. Both La Pouplinière and de Bagge epitomized the stereotype of the music lover most frequently satirized in their times. Both were questioned as authorities on taste not only because of their ambiguous social status but, more importantly, because of assertiveness of their musical interests and their compulsive, almost fanatic, enthusiasm, violating the limits designated for *honnêtes* persons and placing them outside the circle of arbiters of taste.<sup>42</sup> The fact that both La Pouplinière and de Bagge became *personnes de revue* suggests that they were not accepted by the authors of these plays (who were not nobles); in other

<sup>38</sup> Weber, “Learned and General Musical Taste,” 58-85; see also Henri Thirion, *La vie privée des financiers au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1895), 75.

<sup>39</sup> A commentary on the comedy *Le Protecteur Bourgeois ou La Confiance trahie. Comédie en cinq actes, en vers* by Antoine Bret, written in 1763, banned from performance, and outlined in *Journal Encyclopédique ou Universel* (Geneva, 1967), VIII, part II (December 1772), 258-68.

<sup>40</sup> It was ostentation and exaggeration that was most resented; see Elinor G. Barber, *The Bourgeoisie in 18th Century France* (Princeton, 1973), 90-98.

<sup>41</sup> See Georges Cucuel, “Un Mélomane au XVIIIe siècle: Le Baron de Bagge et son temps (1718-1791),” *L’Année Musicale* (1911), 146.

<sup>42</sup> For example, Madame de Graffigny mentions La Pouplinière in her *Correspondance* but does not make any comments about his concerts. See *Correspondance de Madame de Graffigny*, I, 1716-17, June 1739, ed. English Showalter; II, 19, June 1739-24 September 1740, ed. English Showalter et al. (Oxford, 1985 and 1989). Similarly, Baroness d’Oberkirch did not report upon concerts given by Baron de Bagge, whereas she did comment on the musical interests of the Count d’Albaret. See *Mémoires de la Baronne d’Oberkirch sur la cour de Louis XVI et de la société française avant 1789*, ed. Suzanne Burkard (Paris, 1970).

words, they were rejected as authorities on musical taste by both the traditional elite and the non-nobles alike. While for the former they violated the principles of *honnêteté* by exaggeration, for the latter they compromised what the newly ennobled considered a source of prestige.

III. The traditional concept of taste as a property of polite society and the ultimate authority of this society in artistic matters was challenged by the philosophes in the *Querelle des Bouffons*. The *Querelle* divided the Parisian public into pro-French and pro-Italian factions: while the philosophes unanimously supported Italian opera, polite society (“the great, the wealthy and the ladies”—to use Rousseau’s phrase) believed in the superiority of the French operatic genre, considered by the philosophes as aesthetically conservative and politically reactionary.

In his *Lettre sur Omphale* (1752) Grimm made it explicit that the ultimate arbiters in matters of artistic taste should be the philosophes. He contrasted them with “the public” and denied the latter any right of judgment independent of that of the philosophes. “Where taste is concerned,” Grimm declared, “the court gives the nation the fashions and the philosophes the laws.” It was up to the philosophes and the men of letters, as “professors of their nation,” to establish taste in matters of music and of all the fine arts, “to enlighten the multitude with their knowledge and to guide it with their precepts.”

This taste, although general in France, is still vague; it is often balanced by old prejudices that seem respectable by their very weakness, like the aged sometimes have no other title to be respected but their decrepitude. It is still up to the philosophes and the time to fix this taste and to restore it corrected to the nation.<sup>43</sup>

In a rather paternalistic manner, Grimm expressed his hope that it was not too late for the public to learn the art of listening to music with the same sensitivity as did the people of Athens. In ten years, believed Grimm, the repertoire of the Parisian Opéra would change radically and there would no longer be: old *tragédies lyriques*, like *Atys* and *Armide* by Lully, and *Hippolite et Aricie* by Rameau; ballets, like *Europe galante*, and *Fêtes de l’Hymen et de l’Amour*; pastorals, like *Pastorale d’Issy* by Perrin and Cambert. A new repertoire would replace the old one and the taste of the public would improve, due, primarily, to the educational work of the philosophes with the public.

Rousseau, in his *Lettre sur la musique française* (1753) which was a fierce attack on French music in the midst of the *Querelle des Bouffons*, followed Grimm’s views as to the leading role of the philosophes in aesthetic matters: “It

<sup>43</sup> Frederick Melchior Grimm, “Lettre sur Omphale,” *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique*, ed. Maurice Tourneux (16 vols.; Paris, 1877-82), XVI, 301-2.

is a poet's task to write poetry, and a musician's to compose music; but it is the duty of nobody else but a philosophe to talk about both music and poetry."<sup>44</sup> Similarly, in his article "Goût" in the *Encyclopédie*, Voltaire compared taste to philosophy, each being the domain of a selected few. D'Alembert, too, believed that taste and judgment were the right of the intellectual elite.<sup>45</sup> Although taste was for him not only a matter of reason but also a matter of the senses, the feelings, and the imagination, he nevertheless arbitrarily concluded that it was the philosophes who had the sole right to formulate standards of taste.

The philosophes' proclamations did not go unchallenged. Not only did they arrogate to themselves the upper hand in setting the standards of taste that previously belonged to polite society, despite their lack of taste (*goût*)<sup>46</sup> and the lack of sufficient expertise.<sup>47</sup> They also collapsed the whole traditional mode of production of aesthetic judgment by violating the rules of polite discourse by issuing negative criticisms, assuming a domineering tone and by the attempt to tutor (rather than inform) an allegedly uneducated public. Indeed, the philosophes were perceived by some of their contemporaries as a kind of coterie not only making judgments but trying to impose them upon others. Elie Fréron made it a frequent topic in his *Année Littéraire*, and even the philosophe Abbé Raynal wrote in his private newsletter during 1754 about "the harsh tone and bad temper that some men of letters of today mistake for philosophy."

If the tone of criticism is abandoned [continued Raynal], it is for the purpose of elevating to the third heaven the authors of the *Encyclopédie* and the author of the *Histoire naturelle* [Buffon]; aside from them there is nothing praiseworthy anymore. They it is who have taught one to think and to write, who have reestablished good taste and philosophy, and who preserve them. Nevertheless, one frequently asks what have they done? These gentlemen, no doubt worthy of esteem by virtue of their knowledge, wit, and manners, degrade their philosophy by a domineering and lawmaking tone, by an affectation of arrogating to themselves a despotism over literary matters, and by their propensity to burn incense to one another everywhere and endlessly.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre sur la musique française* ([Paris], 1753), 3.

<sup>45</sup> See, *Fragment sur l'opéra* and *Réflexions sur l'usage et l'abus de la philosophie dans les matières de goût* (1754), which he read before the French Academy on 14 March 1757.

<sup>46</sup> N. Caux de Coppeval, *Apologie du goût français relativement à l'opéra. Poème avec un Discours Apologetique & des Adieux aux Bouffons* (Paris, 1753), 4.

<sup>47</sup> E.g., Claude-Carloman de Ruhlière in 1753 called the members of the coin de la reine *géomètres* who had no idea about music: "They are to music what a man is to art who knows that green is the combination of yellow and blue." *Jugement de l'orchestre de l'Opéra*, Denise Launay, *La Querelle des Bouffons. Textes et pamphlets* (3 vols.; Geneva, 1973), I, 441.

<sup>48</sup> Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire*, II, 144-45.

The *Querelle des Bouffons* was also a disruption between the philosophes and salonnières who sided with the pro-French party.<sup>49</sup> The women's pro-French stance in the *Querelle des Bouffons* was nothing new, as they supported the French operatic genre earlier in the century in the polemical exchange between Lecerf de La Viéville and Abbé Ragueneau, and in the Lullist-Ramist dispute. However, while women's association with the pro-French party was then a matter of course, not of judgment, during the *Querelle des Bouffons* the meaning of this association changed dramatically and the condescending tone directed at women as supporters of the French opera appeared for the first time. While Lecerf de La Viéville at the beginning of the eighteenth century supported his arguments in favor of the French opera by quoting the stance of *honnêtes* women, and Elie Fréron did the same during the *Querelle des Bouffons*, the philosophes would argue that the pro-French stance demonstrated women's ignorance, superficiality, and obscurantism. For Rousseau, for example, Parisian women clearly showed the lack of good taste in their admiration for the French operatic genre, which he considered bizarre and extravagant.<sup>50</sup> Grimm attributed the anti-Italian stance of Parisian women to their lack of knowledge of the Italian language.<sup>51</sup> D'Holbach, on his part, argued that women like to attract attention and never like the same music as men.<sup>52</sup>

Eighteenth-century eulogies of the salonnières issued by the philosophes best demonstrate the change in the attitude toward salon women in comparison with the seventeenth century. Rather than judge (in this respect they should follow their leaders, the philosophes), salonnières were expected to focus exclusively on manners and propriety. The very relegation of salonnières to the sphere of politeness rendered their potential judgments ridiculous (as not based on any knowledge of rules, sentiment or intuition, but exclusively on the rules of politeness) and provided further arguments against such ventures. Morellet wrote that Mme Geoffrin, during her apprenticeship in Mme de Tencin's salon, strictly followed such rules if the circumstances forced her to take a stance.

One talked [with Mme Tencin] about two men of letters, Mr Glover, the author of the poem *Léonidas*, and Mr Algarotti, Italian, who left in his language and in ours agreeable works. The first, a cumbersome Englishman with no courtesy and no manners; the other an amiable person of the best style. "I never read the works of these two authors"—

<sup>49</sup> See my "Gender as a Political Orientation: Parisian *Salonnières* and the *Querelle des Bouffons*," *Canadian Journal of History*, 32 (1997), 405-14.

<sup>50</sup> Rousseau, *Lettre sur la musique française*, 64.

<sup>51</sup> Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire*, II, 408.

<sup>52</sup> "[Les femmes] veulent être regardées, et ne goûteront jamais une musique que les hommes écoutent." [D'Holbach], *Lettre à une dame d'un certain âge sur l'état présent de l'opéra* (Paris, 1752), 9.

she [Mme Geoffrin] said—"but I strongly tend to believe that those of Mr Algarotti are better." "There we are"—said Mr de Fontenelle—"the judgment of a lady."<sup>53</sup>

While in eulogies women were praised for their manners and the tactful guidance of a salon conversation, elsewhere they were scolded for their attempts to judge. This is what made it possible for the same authors, such as d'Alembert, to write both eulogies and criticism of Parisian women. The latter is explicit in d'Alembert's *Fragment sur l'opéra*, published shortly after the *Querelle des Bouffons*, where he expressed the view that French women were particularly poor judges of music. "I am offended at this agreeable sex who sets itself up as critic, especially in France, in supreme judgment of everything concerning taste; but I have seen in Paris only a few women who understood music."<sup>54</sup> It was not the technical aspects of music that women were unable to judge. In fact, d'Alembert admitted, there were a lot of women in Paris educated in music who knew the rules; but only a few were experts when it came to musical expression, to distinguishing nuances, the truth, and contrary meaning (*contresens*).<sup>55</sup> The generic use of the category of "women" made d'Alembert's criticism less specific and allowed him to use the condescending tone about women's ability to judge and at the same time frequent Mlle de Lespinasse's salon.

Judgment required knowledge which women did not have; they did not have it because it was not needed for the roles they were supposed to play in society. According to the *Encyclopédie*, woman was to be ensconced in domesticity; the boundaries of her existence determined by her role as daughter, wife, and mother.<sup>56</sup> "A woman is made to please a man"—was Rousseau's statement in the matter, which sounds like a variation of the recipe for the perfect salonnière:

A woman's education must therefore be planned in relation to man. To be pleasing in his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood, to tend him in manhood, to counsel and console, to make his life pleasant and happy, these are the duties of women for all time, and this is what she should be taught while she is young.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> André Morellet, "Portrait de Madame Geoffrin" in *Éloges de Madame Geoffrin, contemporaine de Madame du Deffand, par MM. Morellet, Thomas et D'Alembert, suivis de lettres de Madame Geoffrin et à Madame Geoffrin et d'un Essay sur la Conversation, etc. etc., par M. Morellet* (Paris, 1812), 14.

<sup>54</sup> "Fragment sur l'opéra," in *Oeuvres et correspondances inédites de d'Alembert*, ed. Charles Henry (Geneva, 1967), 161-62.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>56</sup> See Terry Smiley Dock, *Woman in the Encyclopédie: A Compendium* (Madrid, 1983), 101-11.

<sup>57</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, tr. by Barbara Foxley (London, 1972), 328.

Thus, while for seventeenth-century “feminists” such as Jacques Du Bosc, the women’s lack of formal knowledge was a source of their superior intuition and therefore of insightful judgment in matters of taste, for the philosophes in the mid-eighteenth century the lack of knowledge was the main reason for the exclusion of women from the circle of legitimate judges. Good taste was no longer gendered female.

IV. In the *Querelle des Bouffons* the philosophes were not recognized as leaders of the nation in matters of taste; the choices were made without consulting them and the Italian troupe was expelled from Paris by royal order. However, the question of who had the authority to judge resurfaced in the 1770s, during the quarrel between the supporters of Gluck’s operas and those of Piccini; the former representing the pro-French and the latter the pro-Italian party. While during the *Querelle des Bouffons* the philosophes maintained a consistently pro-Italian stance (against the pro-French one of polite society), during the Gluckists-Piccini controversy this consensus collapsed: the philosophes were now badly divided into pro-French and pro-Italian factions bitterly arguing with each other (while polite society did not change its pro-French orientation). Moreover, there was a significant reversal of views among the heirs of the philosophes supporting the Italian opera, in comparison with the *Querelle des Bouffons*: while the philosophes advocated in the *Querelle* that the aesthetic judgment should be based on reason, the pro-Italian philosophes in the Gluck-Piccini dispute claimed that judgment should result from sentiment.

Further, there was no consensus among the philosophes as to their exclusive right to guide the nation in matters of taste, which they arrogated to themselves during the *Querelle des Bouffons*. Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Suard, in an article of March 1777 defending Gluck’s music, advocated that, although men of letters have the right to issue their opinions about music,

The public is the natural judge of all the arts to the extent that a certain portion of the public, arriving at a spirit naturally more subtle, more just, more energetic than that of the common man, has perfected its natural faculties through use, reflection, analysis, and comparison of the different objects which pertain to taste, imagination and understanding.<sup>58</sup>

Through his convoluted style, Suard directly referred to the traditional notion of taste as an attribute of polite society opposed both to the common man and to the philosophes and thus excluded most of his opponents from this group. Several months later, Suard further clarified his point by questioning the

<sup>58</sup> “Seconde lettre de l’anonyme de Vaugirard [J. B. A. Suard] aux auteurs du *Journal de Paris*,” *Journal de Paris*, 25 March 1777; in François Lesure (ed.), *Querelle des Gluckistes et des Piccinistes* (2 vols.; Paris, 1781), I, 127.



pro-Italian philosophes' real interest in music and thus their right to judge it. In a letter to Gluck he wrote:

Our men of letters, except for very few, like the arts very little, they do not cultivate them, they do not live with the artists. They go to listen to a new opera as they go to see the pictures in the Louvre, to talk and to dine, to rank the artists, and to prove that with *esprit* one can talk about everything.<sup>59</sup>

Later in his letter Suard explained that the confusion over Gluck's music and the negative position taken by the men of letters was caused by the fact that music was the domain of the senses and the imagination rather than of *esprit* and reason. Not surprisingly, wrote Suard, the men of letters evaluated music according to their rational principles. Unfortunately, they imposed their judgment on the public from the position of this self-appointed superiority, while in reality, the arts were made for the public; they should be equally pleasing for both the ignorant and connoisseurs and both had the right to have their opinion and to express it.<sup>60</sup>

In a similar vein, Abbé Arnaud called the pro-Italian party represented by the philosophes "pedants ... who wish to make the artist follow the path of an artisan."<sup>61</sup> Gluck, who himself entered the battle of articles, reacted to the attacks of Jean-François de La Harpe by arguing that it was not necessary to be a savant to decide the value of music, it was the "public" (understood by Gluck in the numerical sense) that ultimately determined it:

You prove to me that it is sufficient to be a well-read man, in order to speak about everything. Now I am convinced that the Italian is the most excellent, the true music ... I sincerely beg the forgiveness of the gods of taste for having deafened the hearers of my operas; the number of their representations and the applause the public has been good enough to bestow on them do not prevent my seeing how pitiable they are.<sup>62</sup>

Regardless of the position taken and arguments used, the Gluckists-Picciniists dispute was a male affair. Salon women again took a pro-Gluckist stance and

<sup>59</sup> "Réponse de l'anonyme de Vaugirard à M. de Chevalier Gluck," *Journal de Paris*, 23 October, 1777, in Lesure, *Querelle*, I, 285.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 286-87.

<sup>61</sup> François Arnaud, "La soirée perdue à l'Opéra" in *Oeuvres complètes* (3 vols.; Paris, 1808), II, 389.

<sup>62</sup> *Journal de Paris*, 12 October 1777, in *The Collected Correspondence and Papers of Christoph Willibald Gluck*, ed. Hedwig and E. H. Mueller von Asow, tr. Steward Thomson (New York, 1962), 100.

the reasons why they did it were interpreted in non-musical terms; in fact, as a result of their allegiance to polite society. For the author of an anonymous pamphlet of 1777, defending the Italian operatic genre, it was the excessive attachment to manners, social prejudice, and the lack of true knowledge that motivated Parisian women to take the pro-Gluckist stance. Gluck was fashionable, well-mannered, and, most importantly, supported by the court and by polite society. Women's choice in favor of Gluck's operas was motivated by the same reasons as their pro-French stance in the earlier operatic quarrels: it fit the traditional salon philosophy both aesthetically and politically.<sup>63</sup> (Interestingly, according to the same pamphleteer, the Abbé Arnaud supported Gluck because he was protected by Marie-Antoinette.) In this way the arguments against the validity of feminine judgment used in the *Querelle des Bouffons* were brought back: salonnières were not legitimate arbiters because, as members of polite society, they represented the type of criticism based on intuition and the knowledge of relations within society rather than on formal knowledge and commitment to the truth.

In the midst of the dispute between the Gluckists and the Piccinists, Baron d'Holbach reformulated the old argument, known from the seventeenth-century *querelle des femmes*, that women were unsuited for abstract thinking but they excelled in sensibility. D'Holbach located women's place in sensationalist epistemology in his *Ethnocratie* (1776):

Women, due to the weakness of their organs, are not susceptible to abstract knowledge, profound studies and the like which are appropriate for men; but the sensibility of their souls, the liveliness of their mind, mobility of their imagination, made them very susceptible to adopt with eagerness the sentiments of the heart.<sup>64</sup>

However, in contrast to seventeenth-century authors, the supremacy of women in the realm of feelings was not enough for d'Holbach to make them arbiters of the arts. It was the solid education that they lacked to render proper judgment, as judgment was not a matter of feelings but of reason.

Usually women feel very sharply [wrote d'Holbach], but they reason very little. This fault comes from the fact that the education does not make them used at all to reflect, does not give [them] ideas of proper judgment by moderating the phantasies, the sudden gushes of their imagination, their changeable humors.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> *Problème qui occupe la capitale de la Monarchie Française ou demande si Mr. Glouck est plus grand Musicien que Mr. Piccini* (n.p., 1777), in Lesure, *Querelle des Gluckistes et des Piccinistes*, II, 243-44.

<sup>64</sup> P. H. T. d'Holbach, *Ethnocratie* (Amsterdam, 1776; repr. New York, 1973), 105.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

Although coming from different premises, Rousseau and d'Holbach created an inescapable framework for the exclusion of women from the circle of arbiters of taste in eighteenth-century France: while one advocated a limited education for women, the other excluded them from things public precisely because of this limited education. Later eighteenth-century authors merely followed one of these avenues of thought or the other. Joly de Saint-Vallier, for example, argued in his *Traité sur l'éducation de deux sexes* (1783) against formal education for women: because of their inherent limitations, women were incapable of enduring the same intellectual efforts as men.<sup>66</sup> In a similar vein, an editor of the *Bibliothèque Universelle des Dames* (1785-97) expressed the view that

Women are not at all destined by nature, and even less by our social institutions, to make a public exercise of their eloquence, to speak from our tribunes, from our pulpits, from our barristers' benches. But the conversation among ourselves is a lyceum of both their esprit and their heart; this is where the delicacy of their thoughts develops as well as the charm of their sensibility.<sup>67</sup>

Restif de la Bretonne echoed Rousseau by emphasizing the necessity to "inculcate in young girls [the notion] that they are destined for a man, who is the master and sovereign of society."<sup>68</sup>

It should not come as a surprise that women were not welcome as participants in the dispute between the Gluckists and the Piccinists. Allowed to behave in their own way, women were viewed as a nuisance and the epitome of an ambiguous influence of things public. Even Marmontel, who, as an experienced *salonard*, owed so much to his cautiousness in contacts with "the great, the wealthy, and the ladies," did not avoid a condescending tone in speaking of the influence of women on public taste regarding music. Pro-Italian Marmontel attributed the vanity and corruptibility of the *parterre* in the Parisian Opéra to the "effeminizing" influence of the loges; having no women in the pit, he believed, the taste of the *parterre* might be less delicate, but it was also "less capricious, and above all more manly [*mâle*] and more firm." The pit, then, was the perfect masculine mixture of instinct and reason.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Joly de Saint-Vallier, *Traité sur l'éducation des deux sexes* (London, 1783), 90.

<sup>67</sup> French original quoted by Vivienne Mylne, "The *Bibliothèque Universelle des Dames* (1785-97)," in *Women and Society in Eighteenth-Century France, Essays in Honour of John Stephenson Spink*, ed. Eva Lacobs et al. (London, 1979), 129.

<sup>68</sup> Restif de la Bretonne, *Les Gynographes*, in *Oeuvre de Restif de la Bretonne*, ed. H. Bachelin (9 vols.; Paris, 1930-32), III, 95.

<sup>69</sup> Jean-François Marmontel, "Parterre" in *Supplément à l'Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers* (Amsterdam, 1777), as quoted by Jeffrey S. Ravel, "Seating the Public: Spheres and Loathing in the Paris Theatres, 177-1788," *French Historical Studies*, 18 (1993), 192.

In salon practice it meant the same as had been the case earlier in the century: the only acceptable role for a salonnière was to navigate the conversation tactfully, without letting their own views be known. Amid many eulogies praising salonnières for what they did (as opposed to what they did not do), there is the explicit account of Sébastien Mercier indicating precisely what interests us here: what was the expected role of a salonnière as a judge *versus* that of her male guests. In the chapter on the “Ton du grand monde” in his *Tableau de Paris* (1781-88) Mercier wrote that women who run salons in Paris perfected their wit through contacts with enlightened men, that is, were intellectually dependent on men they received in their salons. It was not pedantic knowledge that salon women represented but a specific ability to think and talk properly, based primarily upon their study of men.<sup>70</sup> According to Mercier, no judgment was expected from a salonnière, as she was not supposed to have anything to say that would differ from the opinion of her master and guide, the philosophe, regardless of her own opinions and feelings. (To be sure, the salonnières had no aspiration to judge. Julie de Lespinasse probably best incarnated the ideal outlined by Mercier: although deeply moved by Gluck’s operas and convinced of their superiority, she kept her opinion to herself and believed that she had “neither intelligence, nor knowledge, nor the folly to assign the places and the ranks to talents.”<sup>71</sup>)

The highly publicized disagreement between the pro-French and pro-Italian factions of the philosophes in the Gluckists-Piccinnists dispute, their conflicting appeals to the “public” as the ultimate judge (no longer automatically identified with the opinion of the socially powerful), and the contradictory criteria of the validity of aesthetic judgment advanced by each party involved in the dispute—all these indicate a fragmented, rather than a unified musical public in the 1770s. The supporters and the opponents of each operatic genre were divided not only along aesthetic and gender but also political lines (Gluck, supported by the majority of the public, enjoyed also the support of both the court and polite society, and was generally identified with the establishment).<sup>72</sup> Considering this division, there is little ground to claim that the Gluckists-Piccinnists dispute witnessed the emergence of public opinion independent

<sup>70</sup> “Plusieurs femmes ayant perfectionné leur esprit par le commerce d’hommes éclairés, réunissent en elles les avantages des deux sexes, valent mieux à la lettre que les hommes célèbres dont elles ont emprunté une partie des connoissances qui les distinguent. Ca n’est point un savoir pédantesque, capable de décréditer toute connoissance, c’est une maniere propre d’oser penser et parler juste, fondé sur-tout sur l’étude des hommes.” Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris* (12 vols.; Amsterdam, 1783-88), IV, 105-6.

<sup>71</sup> 31 January 1775, *Lettres de Mademoiselle des Lespinasse*, ed. by Gustave Isambert (2 vols.; Paris, 1876), II, 225.

<sup>72</sup> See Robert M. Isherwood in “The Third War of the Musical Enlightenment,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, ed. by Harold E. Pagliaro (Madison, 1975), IV, 223-46.

from or even opposed to the crown—in other words, of a public which, “asserting itself as a judge of politics and taste against the arbitrary authority of fashion, dogma or tradition ... claimed an authority apart from all established arbiters, intellectual as well as institutional, of absolutism.”<sup>73</sup> Rather, the support of the majority of the public for the musical genre identified with the establishment and the socially powerful suggests a still strong appeal of the traditional conception of taste as radiating from polite society.

V. The eighteenth-century quarrels over the opera indicate a profound change in the relationship between Parisian salonnières and their male guests and thus of the role of the salon as a specific sphere of sociability in which manners imposed by salonnières warranted an undisturbed discourse. The relegation of salonnières by the philosophes to the formal role of tactfully governing the conversation was a final break with the seventeenth-century idea of feminine superiority in matters of taste, which itself was not simply an acknowledgment that women are different from men but an assumption that the way they are different makes them unable to participate in intellectual activities on an equal footing with men, or that such participation is undesirable. In particular, this implied the denial of formal knowledge to women (the male domain) and their exclusion from the right to judge, except for some limited areas in which a judgment was based on intuition rather than knowledge. Thus, women’s lack of formal education (allegedly compensated by their intuition), a traditional object of men’s praise, could (and did) easily become an argument used by men for the exclusion of women from active participation in serious discourse.

The eighteenth-century philosophes pushed the gender-based perception of the roles of salonnières to its limits and demonstrated that the idea that women were supposed to be ignorant and judge intuitively was a trap in the first place, not only because intuition was a rather elusive concept upon which to build an authority but also because from there it was only one step to claim that women were legitimate judges of some works (simple, trivial) but not of others (complex). In trying to judge “serious” works by using merely their intuition, women rendered them (and themselves) trivial and hence they became responsible for the corruption of taste and the effeminization of the whole nation.

In effect, salon women could claim authority in artistic matters only through their identification with polite society (thus profiting from the traditional notion of artistic taste as a property of this society) rather than on the basis of either their individual connoisseurship (which was not recognized), or the conception that women are “naturally” superior to a man in their ability to comprehend the arts (which was denied to them by the philosophes). But to claim

<sup>73</sup> Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 93.

authority of judgment merely on the grounds of an alleged superiority of “polite society” at the end of the Old Regime was not only poor timing but had its dangers, too. Politeness promoted by salons and the emphasis on propriety (both of manners and of the content of salon conversations), that is, the ideals that originally were expected from salons run by women and what made them a part of polite society, could easily become the primary target of criticism, as epitomized by Rousseau. Thus, the departure from earlier ideas that allowed women to participate in intellectual activities on an equal footing with men and complying with societal rules rather than breaking them, did not ultimately help the eighteenth-century Parisian salonnières avoid criticism and rejection by men. The relegation of women to formal roles of guardians of manners and propriety, meant to ensure stability and order, made them impose restrictions in the salons which led to tensions between the salonnières and their male guests and to the emergence of exclusively male spheres of sociability. The salon became an artificial space, far removed from the reality outside it. The attempts of the salonnières to accommodate contemporary intellectual currents and the diverse opinions of their guests within the rules of politeness became more and more difficult.

The history of Parisian salons shows, in effect, a decreasing influence of the salonnières over things public. This development reached its conclusion in the first half of the nineteenth century. Salons remained primarily women’s domain, but literary men ceased coming to read their works there and to have them judged by the salon women, nor did intellectuals come to discuss their own ideas in the setting offered by a salonnière. Significantly, the Romantic *cénacles* of the early nineteenth century were almost exclusively male gatherings. The role of a salon hostess lost its symbolic meaning (however illusory it might have been) and the traditional “leadership” of women hosting social gatherings was no longer recognized.

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