

Queer Community Strategies: Diversity and *Honnêteté* in Choisy's *Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville*

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Often considered a story about cross-dressing lovers, *Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* has proven to be a text whose publication history and attribution seem almost as complicated as the varied and paradoxical interpretations that it inspires.¹ Published for the first time in February 1695 in Jean Donneau de Visé's *Mercure galant*, the *Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* tells the adventures of youths who live their genders contrary to normative sex-gender pairings, ending with the happily ever after of the couple's marriage. The story was published a second time in the same periodical in August and September of 1696, with some additions to the text. In 1723, the tale was published in a separate edition, containing two additional scenes that were neither in the 1695 nor 1696 versions.²

This essay envisages the successive additions to the *Histoire* as indispensable to understanding its novelty and complexity in terms of gender and gender experience as a cultural product of 17th-century France. The critical tendency of scholarship around the *Histoire*—commonly attributed to François-Timoléon de Choisy—has been to consider the tale as either one of cross-dressing or, more recently, as an early modern formulation of transgendered personhood.³ These considerations tend to center on the protagonist's—Mariane, the little Marquise's—experience. By contrast, my essay foregrounds the text's preoccupation with secondary characters, a preoccupation that animates

¹ I would like express my gratitude to the two anonymous readers of this essay's submission to this journal for their time, valuable insights and revisions, and their reactions which I found productive not only for this article but for my scholarship going forward.

² For a history of the publications of the text, see the MLA Texts and Translations edition of the tale, edited by Joan DeJean, published by the Modern Language Association of America, 2004, pages xxvii-xxviii. The two 1723 additions referenced in this essay are included in this edition of the *Histoire* as appendices A and B (62–64).

³ For the *Histoire* as a tale of cross-dressing, see Joseph Harris's article "Novel Upbringings: Education and Gender in Choisy and Lafayette" and Joan DeJean's *Ancients Against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle* where she refers to the *Histoire*'s characters as "cross-dressers all" (119). For the *Histoire* understood as transgendered text, see Lewis Seifert's chapter "Border Crossings: For a Transgendered Choisy" in *Manning the Margins: Masculinity and Writing in Seventeenth-Century France*.

the serial additions to the story. Inasmuch as the second and third editions of the tale are distinguished by a growing fascination with characters other than the little Marquise, the publication history of the *Histoire* points to another aspect of the tale's contribution to the history of early modern representations of sex and gender—namely, the construction of a community organized around various lived relations to gender. The secondary characters who inform this study include the lover and eventual husband of the little Marquise, the Marquis de Bercourt, whose character is further developed in the scenes added to the tale in its 1723 form. As the most significant addition to the tale's reprinting in the *Mercure galant* in 1696, the Prince Sionad—a prince who intermittently goes off to war and then comes back to grace society with his presence bedecked in female attire—provides key insight to this essay. Finally, this essay attends to the nameless narrator who introduces the tale in the 1695 version and affirms it to be a production of her own pen. This spokeswoman stands apart from the regular epistoler/narrator of the *Mercure galant* and plays a role in the broader community constructed in the *Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* through its successive permutations.

The tale's publication in Donneau de Visé's *Mercure galant* further accentuates the *Histoire*'s orientation towards community. It is within the pages of the *Mercure galant* that the instructive paratext introducing the narrative appears.⁴ Scholars have noted the interactive nature of this periodical (whose own narrator invites its readers to write in and contribute) and the ways in which such a participatory medium interpellates and organizes a community.⁵ A further objective of this essay is, therefore, to consider the *Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville*'s various and diverse characters (both secondary and paratextual) as part of the public of readers, writers, and characters grouped around and through the *Mercure galant*. That two of the tale's three original permutations appear in this "société de papier" (to borrow

⁴ This prefatory text is not included in the most recent 2004 MLA Texts & Translations editions of the text (in both French and English). It does appear in some contemporary editions of the text, however, including the 1995 Éditions Ombres' *Mémoires de l'abbé de Choisy habillé en femme, suivi de Histoire de la marquise-marquis de Banneville* and its reprinting under the title of "The Counterfeit Marquise" in the collection *Wondertales: Six French Stories of Enchantment* first published by Oxford in 2004.

⁵ See, for example, Monique Vincent's *Le Mercure galant: Présentation de la première revue féminine d'information et de culture, 1672 – 1710* and Christophe's "Le *Mercure galant* : un recueil interactif" as well as his more recent *Un entrepreneur des lettres au XVIIe siècle: Donneau de Visé, de Molière au Mercure galant*.

Christophe Schuwey's catchy moniker) not only indicates the greater span of the *Histoire*'s inclusivity ("Le *Mercure galant*" 57). It further suggests, as Schuwey would have it, the "merit" of those portrayed therein (*Un Entrepreneur des lettres* 4). The *Histoire* articulates a positive stance toward gender play in its textual community. Through narratorial or diegetic pronouncements of judgement, *Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* enforces something of an ethics—a sense of propriety informed by gender inclusivity that organizes (or seeks to organize) the community it envisions. By examining the development of the tale over its different early modern iterations, I offer an approach to questions of sex and gender within this text that advances the *Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* as an example of queer community building *avant la lettre*.

Duly Duped: Cross-dressing and the Morality of Deception

Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville tells the tales of a physically "male" child who is raised by her mother as female. Mariane, known as the "little Marquise," falls in love with a man she sees at the theater, the young Marquis de Bercourt, and the two begin a courtship.⁶ As their relationship progresses, her mother becomes concerned and refuses when the little Marquise begs her repeatedly to consent to their marriage. Eventually, the mother is forced to reveal to the little Marquise that she (Mariane) is, indeed, *not* a girl, and can therefore never get married (the night of consummation would reveal her "true" sex and produce scandal and the threat of same-sex eroticism). Despite the shocking revelation, the little Marquise soon recovers, continuing to dress and live as a girl, and continuing to frequent the Marquis de Bercourt. After her mother dies, she and her love, Bercourt, finally marry. Once arrived at the marriage bed, however, Bercourt begins sobbing, and tells the little Marquise "je ne puis rien pour vous, puisque je suis femme aussi bien que vous" (*Histoire* 60). In response, the Marquise "lui causa la même surprise" by throwing herself into the arms

⁶ In this essay, I espouse the definitions proposed by Susan Stryker in her *Transgender History*. I use the term "sex" to refer to sex as assigned at birth, according to genital configuration, which in this context includes the female and the male sexes. I use the term "gender" to designate the social categories, which are often considered linked, although they are in fact distinct, from the "biological" categories of sex. Sexuality, linked as it is to gender, is also distinct. Stryker affirms that sexuality "describes how (and with whom) we act on our erotic desires" (16). Thus, sexuality is often understood to include sexual acts. In the modern context, it is nuanced by sex as well as by gender, but is not interchangeable with these.

of Bercourt. In the end they happily find that, despite their worries, they “fit.”⁷ The two consent to continue to live their lives each as their opposite sexes, move to the country, conceive a child, and live happily ever after—the reason for which the *Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* is often compared in criticism to the contemporaneously burgeoning genre of the fairy-tale.⁸

This final coincidence leads some scholars such as Joseph Harris to maintain that the tale is heteronormative; the double cross-dressing means that the marriage of Mariane and Bercourt “re-establish[es] the heterosexual norm” (7).⁹ Moreover, scholarship on the *Histoire* has tended to regard the tale as simply pertaining to the question of transvestitism. Elizabeth Guild reads further into Choisy’s literary cross-dressing to note how his representations of the body in the *Mémoires de l’abbé de Choisy habillé en femme* and the *Histoire* fall “both within and across the dominant sexual economy and politics of their time” and therefore destabilize the very systems of interpretation by which the sexed body is understood (180). Guild shows how what she calls Choisy’s cross-dressing upsets *vraisemblance* and thereby disrupts notions of not only what was considered natural, but also of what was representable.¹⁰ However, as the two youths are unaware of the “incompatibility” of each other’s lived genders with regard to their bodies (their sex), this argument disregards the complexity of desires represented throughout the tale. Thus even as scholars have signaled the disruptive potential of Choisy’s characters beyond the terms of gender

⁷ This language of complementarity is not to imply that heterosexual couples are the only possible nor the only desirable pairing. Rather, this reflects the implicit investment the novella has in such heterosexual pairings, affirmed at end of the tale. Indeed, the Marquis and Marquise’s corporeal difference from one another is what allows for the “happy ending” to be carried to (quite literal) fruition with the birth of an heir to inherit their fortune and carry on their family line.

⁸ The genre of the fairy tale is invoked explicitly within the text: as the Marquise converses with her friends, Charles Perrault’s “La Belle au bois dormant” is mentioned in conversation (*Histoire* 50–51).

⁹ See “Novel Upbringings: Education and Gender in Choisy and La Fayette”: “Choisy’s Little Marquise gives in to her passion and weds her suitor Bercourt, who—to the reader’s probable lack of surprise—then turns out to be a woman dressed as a man, thus re-establishing the heterosexual norm” (7).

¹⁰ Guild aptly defines *vraisemblance* as “a term which bears meanings ranging from verisimilitude, and the natural, to generally accepted probability, and operates in powerful and often covert conjunction with notions of the proper and of decorum” (182). For a discussion of the *Histoire*’s use of nature, see Seifert’s chapter “Border Crossings: For a Transgendered Choisy” in *Manning the Margins*, esp. 236–242.

(including notions of *vraisemblance* and the natural), the critical tendency to reduce its unconventional gender expressions to notions of cross-dressing or transvestitism serves to reiterate dominant comprehensions of sex/gender pairings and undercuts the complexity of the tale on its own terms. Readings that reduce the gender play of the *Histoire* to cross-dressing alone do not take into account the possibility of an authentic identification with the feminine gender on the part of the Marquise, nor of an authentic identification with the masculine gender on the part of Bercourt. By “authentic,” I wish to draw attention to the importance of the affective and the emotional for individuals that identify as trans, a fact that has been made clear by contemporary work in the domain of transgender studies.¹¹

Lewis Seifert departs from this trend by choosing to consider Choisy’s writings in terms of “transgender[ism]” (210). In the face of arguments that the sex-gender split did not emerge as a concept until the mid-20th century, Seifert argues, one must note the ways in which “Choisy’s cross-dressing narratives explicitly rely on this distinction” (211). In other words, Choisy’s novella specifically and deliberately calls attention to the severability of gender and sex, even beyond terms of dress. Indeed, it is not simply a discontinuity between the clothing and body that characterizes the Marquise and her little friends’ gendered subjectivities, but also their lived and affective experiences as their respective genders.

It might not come as surprising to the modern reader that a tale including cross-dressing relies upon a distinction or incoherence between sex and gender. Yet, to consider Choisy’s *Histoire* as solely one of cross-dressing is to betray the various figurations of the relation between sex and gender in the community constructed in its pages. It is with this in mind that this study, drawing on Seifert, considers the text and its characters with an eye to the possible formulations of discontinuity in sex and gender that could fall under transgender experience. While recognizing that the similarities between certain configurations of sex and gender within the *Histoire* and modern notions of transgender personhood are productive, we must remain attentive to differences in

¹¹ For example, Yv E. Nay proposes integrating affect into trans politics as a means to make room for varied and diverse trans* experience and embodiment in their article “The Atmosphere of Trans* politics in the Global North and West.” Hil Malatino similarly attends to affect with an aim to diversify trans representation and politics in *Side Affects: On Being Trans and Feeling Bad* (2022).

order to avoid transposing contemporary formulations (be they pertaining to sexuality, sex, or gender) and their understandings to the past, a gesture which neglects the complexity of figurations of sex and gender identities and their capacity for change throughout time.¹² Although the Marquis's and Marquise's relationships to their gender may resemble what we today call transgenderism, we cannot equate them as such. Rather, the identities portrayed in the *Histoire* might be considered in terms of how such formulations play into something similar to what Eve Sedgwick termed "the unrationalized coexistence of different models [of desire]"; we might then contemplate what these subjectivities bring to a genealogical consideration of the web of various early modern relations to and with sex and gender (47).¹³ Indeed, by approaching the text through the lens of transgender theory, Seifert notes, we might resist "the moralizing and pathologizing bent that has often typified discussions of Choisy's cross-dressing" and move beyond the "often facile comparisons with the performability of gender" following Judith Butler's theorization in *Gender Trouble* (211).

DeJean's analysis of the *Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* demonstrates the way scholarship, through an emphasis on cross-dressing, has linked unconventional gender expression within the tale to questions of duplicity. She notes how Thomas Laqueur's single-sex model does not satisfactorily explain the sex-gender system present in the tale, arguing that the text is rather a poignant example of the

¹² This capacity for change and variation should be acknowledged in the present as well as the past. Collapsing the complexity of modern categories into one "catch-all" name fails to acknowledge the un-capturability that characterizes sex and intimate affiliations in *all* periods, and leads to the (perhaps inadvertent) characterization of modern configurations as stagnant, readily identifiable forms representing the end of "teleological" developments of past configurations. Seifert also is vigilant to qualify his use of "transgender" *apropos* of the tale, as he considers some characters of the *Histoire* as well as of Choisy's *Mémoires* as "what might be considered forerunners to transgendered existence" (212). The productivity of connections between contemporary and past configurations of gender have been acknowledged by both historians and literary scholars of sex and gender. For an insightful evaluation and synthesis of the different approaches to sex, gender, and desire in historical texts, see Ari Friedlander's "Introduction: Desiring History and Historicizing Desire" in the *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, spring 2016. For different approaches to "thinking trans" in periods predating the advent of modern conceptions of sex, gender, and desire, see the 2018 special issue of *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* entitled *Trans*historicités*.

¹³ *Epistemology of the Closet*, 1990.

emergence of the sex/gender split in the seventeenth century (121-122).¹⁴ DeJean maintains that:

The story should not be misread... as simply reaffirming in the end the triumph of biological difference and “core gender identity.” “Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville” proclaims... a more modern view: since no fundamental incompatibilities and absolute rules govern sexual categories, a person can have it all at the same time—biological identity, core gender identity, and his-her own “naturally” constructed identity. (122)

Yet DeJean tends to categorize Choisy’s work as a text that deals primarily with cross-dressing, rather than with a sense of a felt, authentic identification on the part of the little Marquise or of the Marquis de Bercourt to their lived genders. While arguing that one should not read the novella as “simply reaffirming... the triumph of biological difference and ‘core gender identity,’” DeJean uses a vocabulary of transvestitism throughout her discussions of the *Histoire* in her introduction to the MLA Texts & Translations edition of the text and in her discussion of the tale in *Ancients against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle*. DeJean’s emphasis on the rhetoric of cross-dressing—most evident at the moment when she describes the *Histoire*’s main characters as “cross-dressers all”—belies her more nuanced claims for a mutable relationship with and between body image, the body, and gender expression (119).

The diction of cross-dressing suggests the existence of a core or stable identity, an essence that persists and hides beneath the social performance of these characters who (whether intentionally or unintentionally) work to “deceive” those around them: “‘Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville’ is a tale in which the central characters, cross-dressers all, alternately dupe their public and are in turn duped by other practitioners of their art” (119). This vocabulary of deception implies that a character’s biological sex is more authentic, even more important, than his/her gender presentation. It undercuts an

¹⁴ Laqueur’s “one-sex” model has been critiqued by contemporary scholars. See, for example, Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park’s article “The Hermaphrodite and the Orders of Nature: Sexual Ambiguity in Early Modern France” and Leah DeVun’s recent book-length study, *The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance*.

understanding of gender identity based on the lived, affective experience of the character in question.

A preliminary outline of the more complex vision of gendered personhood expounded by the *Histoire* can be drawn from additions appearing in the 1723 version of the tale that map out an understanding of “deception” quite different than the one scholarship has been ready to ascribe to the tale. In these expansions, the secondary character of Bercourt rehearses many of the preoccupations around morality, gender, and “gender deceptions” that we see in the scholarship on this text. However, in doing so he comes to a different conclusion. It is true that Bercourt invokes the notion of deception at two points in the *Histoire*. At one point, speaking to the little Marquise, he references his “extérieur souvent trompeur” (41). More notably, just before revealing his true sex to Mariane at the end of the tale, Bercourt exclaims: “je vous ai trompée. Approchez et voyez” (60). Yet one of the two significant additions to the 1723 version significantly encumbers the conflation of Bercourt’s self-proclaimed deceit and the deception perceived in cross-dressing. His use of the language of deception complicates, rather than affirms, any conception of “true” gender identity as linked to the body hidden underneath the clothing. The added scenes of 1723 center on the Marquis de Bercourt and his relationship to his gender. In the first of these two additions, Bercourt describes a morality of cross-dressing and the possibility of duping of the public. Thereafter, he also points to his own relationship with cross-dressing—through a gesture to feminine attire. In so doing, Bercourt forestalls his tidy inclusion amongst those who cross-dress (just as he does, however implicitly, for the little Marquise).

The first scene added to the 1723 text is the episode where Bercourt pleads in favor of cross-dressing:

Qu’y a-t-il en effet de plus innocent que de vouloir plaire?
 ...qu’un jeune homme se plaise aux habits et aux
 ajustements des femmes, et qu’il s’en serve pour réjouir,
 pour faire la belle, pour être aimé et courtié, qu’il s’en
 serve souvent, que ce soit même son habillement le plus
 ordinaire, que tous ses amis, ses parents le connaissent
 pour ce qu’il est, qu’il se réjouisse seulement à tromper
 par ses doux charmes des étrangers ou de provinciaux, il
 n’y a rien de criminel à tout cela. (*Histoire* 62)

There is no harm in cross-dressing, so long as the only people a man “fools” in doing so are those removed from the society in which he lives—foreigners and country dwellers. Here, Bercourt organizes his ethics of cross-dressing around a sense of community. He delineates an urban circle of intimates that are not to be tricked and a larger group of strangers, whom one can deceive without condemnation. Bercourt’s pronouncement of the innocence of cross-dressing (inasmuch as it only dupes those outside the cross-dresser’s urban social domain) would suggest that there may be something criminal in deceiving those who are close to a person, and those that compose his or her community. In the sense that the elite, *mondain* society Bercourt and Mariane frequent is not privy to the discontinuity between their individual sex and gender identities, Bercourt’s declaration of the innocence in cross-dressing would not seem to apply to his, nor Mariane’s (albeit extendedly inadvertent), “cross-dressing.” As such the text raises the question as to whether or not Bercourt and Mariane’s comportment would be worthy of condemnation. Yet Bercourt’s pronouncement leaves room for flexibility in its ambiguity: as long as “tous ses amis, ses parents le connaissent pour ce qu’il est,” there is nothing reprehensible in cross-dressing. The lack of specificity of “ce qu’il est” leaves room for interpretation because it leaves unclear what part of one’s identity is representative of “what one is.” The difficulty of applying Bercourt’s ethics to his and his future wife’s experiences is consequently resolved by Bercourt’s further ruminations of just what would, for him, constitute cross-dressing.

The passage cited above is preceded by Bercourt’s questions concerning a man’s potential tendency to wear feminine attire: “Qu’y a-t-il en effet de plus innocent que de vouloir plaire? et puisque les femmes sont faites pour cela, n’est-il-pas naturel aux hommes de se servir de cette espèce de *mascarade* pour gagner les cœurs, et à qui un pareil *déguisement* peut-il faire du mal” (*Histoire* 62; my emphasis). Bercourt here draws attention to the deceptive nature of cross-dressing, “déguiser” being a near synonym for cross-dressing in the 1694 edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*: “Travestir, accommoder une personne de telle sorte qu’on ne la connoisse point, qu’on la mesconnoisse” (“travestir”).¹⁵ At one level, then, Bercourt’s explanation suggests the existence of a core essence, which the deceptive exterior makes difficult to recognize. Nevertheless, Bercourt distances himself

¹⁵ To distinguish parenthetically between dictionaries, definitions pulled from the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* are indicated by *DAF*. All definitions are from the 1694 edition of the dictionary unless otherwise indicated.

from the term (*déguiser/travestir*) even as he evokes it. Just as Bercourt utilizes the language of disguise and deception to describe hypothetical cross-dressers' habits, he suggests that he does not count himself among those who cross-dress. Bercourt continues to admit his penchant for feminine-coded accessories, describing this inclination as a foible. What he perceives as weakness is the attachment he has to the clothing that is generally attributed (as inferred at the end of the tale) to be that of his "true" sex, that is to say, the feminine sex:

Pour moi, j'avoue mon faible, si faible y est après de si grands exemples; j'aime les ajustements des femmes, et à moins que cela ne déplaise à la personne que j'aime, je mettrai toujours des pendants d'oreilles et des mouches.
(*Histoire 63*)

The reader, having read the complete text, would recognize these accessories, the earrings and beauty patches, to be in fact details associated with the sex that Bercourt admits at the end of the story. Yet by intimating these attributes to be marks of his cross-dressing, Bercourt affirms his identification with his lived masculine gender. He insists that it is women's clothing that is not suitable for him, no matter how much he may enjoy feminine accessories, suggesting that in his mind and in his lived experience, Bercourt understands himself as a man. As such, his day-to-day masculine attire and way of living would not feasibly enter the realm of cross-dressing. If Bercourt participates in any (albeit partial) cross-dressing, then, it would be through his feminine accessories. That, or his penchant for wearing earrings and *mouches* simply indicates what he calls his "manières un peu efféminées" (61). Bercourt does not consider himself a cross-dresser, least of all one who would succeed at duping anyone—strangers or intimates—through his donning of earrings and *mouches*.

Bercourt elucidates an ethics of cross-dressing that morally circumscribes the ability to deceive: as a member of the cross-dresser's intimate social arena, one mightn't fear being hoodwinked. Indeed, as Bercourt infers, his outward appearance does not aim to fool anyone. The additions to the tale in 1723 indicate that he identifies much more with his lived gender than his physical sex. Bercourt convincingly lives his male identity in the novella, but if his being, taken at his word, dupes anyone, it is the critics and readers who would assign him the label of cross-dresser. Alongside the foil of Prince Sionad, Bercourt's character

shows that *Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* is not only about cross-dressing or transgender personhood, but about building a narrative community around varied gender expressions that, read through the inclusion of secondary characters, includes both/and.

Problematizing the Paradigm: Towards a Multiplicity of Motivations and Perspectives

As previously shown, Bercourt displays a deeper connection to his lived and embodied gender than the sex he reveals at the end of the tale. Seifert has convincingly expanded upon this notion arguing that the characters of the novella—Mariane, Sionad, and Bercourt—express an identification with their lived genders in which their subjectivity is rooted: “their impulse to cross dress, and, more fundamentally, to live out a body image at odds with their assigned sex is part of and is inseparable from their very being” (239). His analysis shows how the *Histoire* does not privilege biological sex as one’s true “nature,” but in fact elaborates a notion of the natural that can be modified or “corrected”: it is thus that Mariane’s mother “se mit en tête de corriger la nature” in order to raise and educate her child as a daughter (*Histoire* 4). Extending Seifert’s reading, I now move to nuance the portrayals of the tale’s various secondary characters. Where Seifert sees the grounding of the characters’ gender presentations “in their very being,” I differentiate between their experiences to point to the range and quality of gendered embodiment—from affective, habitual, pleasurable, to incidental—that the tale builds through its sequential renditions.

The Marquis de Bercourt signals a feeling of being accustomed to being a boy and links this feeling to an affective attachment to his masculine gender. At the end of *Histoire*, he accentuates the ease with which he accomplishes tasks that are generally understood as masculine. Explaining his decision to continue to live as a young man to his new wife, he remarks, “Et moi... j’ai mis l’épée à la main plusieurs fois sans être embarrassé” (*Histoire* 60). The fact that Bercourt draws attention to repetition (“plusieurs fois”) suggests that he also considers these tasks to be a habit, one of which he does not want to rid himself. His use of the word “embarrassé” to express by litotes (“sans être embarrassé”) the ease he feels in using his sword is significant in that it helps us to understand the affective relationship that Bercourt feels to his lived gender. The word evokes confrontation, both physical and/or mental, that may cause an affective response. First, to encounter an *embarras* is to confront

something that incites emotional distress—what the 1694 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* describes as “peine d’esprit” and Richelet’s 1680 *Dictionnaire françois contenant les mots et les choses* as “trouble, desordre qui paroît sur le visage” (“embarras”).¹⁶ The word expresses something felt, a pain of the mind that acts much like contemporary notions of affect: a mental movement or intensity that registers itself on the level of the body (here, “le visage”).¹⁷ Second, embarrassment evokes obstacle, something that inspires confusion or irresolution, as the other definitions suggest:

Rencontre de plusieurs choses qui s’empeschent les unes les autres dans un chemin, dans un passage... La confusion de plusieurs choses difficiles à debrouïller... L’irresolution dans laquelle on se trouve souvent lors qu’on ne sçait quel parti prendre. (DAF “embarras”)

Bercourt is without embarrassment; he does not feel his chosen gender to be obstructive in his life. In this sense, the word also holds a more concrete connotation—it is not with irresolution or difficulty that Bercourt handles his sword (that classically phallic symbol). Indeed, despite his more effeminate qualities, Bercourt is able to maneuver dexterously his weapon: though, we come to find out, Bercourt was born biologically female, he is not only able but adept in his sword fighting. This ability not only invokes his status as a member of the nobility but also troubles or pokes fun at early modern notions of what a man—and only a biological man—is or should be able to do.¹⁸ As the scene where

¹⁶ Richelet’s entry for the adjectival form employs terminology more readily identifiable with 17th-century vocabularies of emotion: “Troublé, agité de passion” (“embarassé”). For a discussion of what Dejean terms “the early modern (literary) obsession with emotionality” see her chapter “A Short History of the Human Heart” in *Ancients Against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle*.

¹⁷ My understanding of Bercourt’s lack of encumbrment or obstacle in his enactment of these gendered activities as an affective response is informed by various scholars’ analyses of shame as an affective reaction to a short-circuit or failure in the feedback loop of self-affirmation and interpersonal comprehension. The lack of encumbrment or mental pain can be interpreted as an affective opposite of shame—Bercourt recognizes himself and is recognized by others in his performance of these activities. See, for example, Sedgwick and Adam Frank’s “Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins” and Sedgwick’s “Queer Performativity: Henry James’s *The Art of the Novel*.”

¹⁸ Scholars have pointed out the weight of gender presentation in the early modern period. Will Fisher’s *Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*, for example, contributes to the ongoing scholarly problematization of the

Bercourt is challenged by a jealous count proves, the Marquis is more than capable of “measuring swords” with another (presumably, assigned male at birth) man.¹⁹ In this way, we understand Bercourt’s affective attachment as pertaining not only to the clothing and accessories that make him legible as a man, but also to his lived experience as such.

In studies of transvestitism and cross-dressing in seventeenth-century French literature, the motive behind episodes of a member of one sex donning the attire of the other has been shown to be fundamental to narrative development. Harris points out that “in many transvestite texts, indeed, cross-dressing is quite simply the stuff of the narrative itself” (99). Harris shows that the reasoning behind the donning of a cross-gendered disguise often serves as the basis for the events of the plot, and that its removal (or the moment when the character’s true gender is revealed, a moment Harris terms “anagnorisis”) frequently incites the closure of the narrative (99, 102). Notably, female-to-male cross-dressing is typically depicted as a utilitarian means-to-an end.²⁰ Women fleeing unwanted or unworthy marriages, using male attire to protect themselves in travel, women donning masculine-coded garb to fulfill the role of an absent or incompetent loved one to serve King and country, women escaping death or abandonment in infancy as they are unfit to inherit their families’ estates as female: tales depicting women dressed and living as men generally stage cross-dressing as a practical measure to circumvent a societal or familial problem.²¹ Men dressing as females

sex/gender distinction common to contemporary thought by positing gender attributes more likely to be viewed nowadays as accessorial or supplemental (such as the handkerchief of the codpiece) as constitutive elements in the materialization of gender identity.

¹⁹ The count, envious of the affection Bercourt receives from Mariane, also seems to be motivated by a refusal to accept that a man who likes to “faire le beau” could indeed handle himself in a fight. The Comte D’Al... decides to challenge Bercourt, “le croyant trop beau pour oser mesurer son épée contre la sienne” (*Histoire* 40). I’d like to thank and credit the writer of an external review on an earlier permutation of this article for this insight.

²⁰ For a discussion of female to male cross-dressing in 17th-century *contes de fées*, see Gillian Avril Weatherley, *Avatars of Gendered Societal Constructs in Seventeenth-Century Contes de fées*, 2014, PhD dissertation.

²¹ Weatherly notes, for example, that in both L’Héritier’s “Marmoisan, ou L’innocente tromperie” and D’Aulnoy’s “Belle-Belle, ou le chevalier Fortuné,” the protagonists disguise themselves in male attire in service to the crown. In L’Héritier’s conte, Léonore disguises herself as her brother after he dies to act in his place in the king’s armies. In D’Aulnoy’s, Belle-Belle is the only daughter (the youngest of three) to successfully embody the qualities of a soldier and thus take her aging father’s place in the King’s service. The French literary tradition of cross-dressing as a trope employed

is another story. Most often, the feminine disguise is donned in early modern literature as a means to penetrate the intimate spaces of women as objects of desire, both physically, by entering their bed chambers, and figuratively, by usurping the role of confident(e) to gain access to women's private thoughts and motivations (for example, Honoré d'Urfé's *L'Astrée*).²² In both cases, the cross-dressing episodes are resolved with either a miraculous sex-change effected by the Gods (Isaac de Benserade's *Iphis et Iante* falls in this category), or eventual anagnorisis, as Harris aptly points out.

Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville's central couple stands apart from routine patterns of literary cross-dressing. Both Bercourt and Mariane depart from the standard of anagnorisis in their (emphatically) enduring decisions to live and love as the opposite gender. Bercourt expresses an affective rather than utilitarian attachment to his life as a man and so deviates from patterns of utilitarian female-to-male cross-dressing. Rather than a means to an end, his donning of masculine clothing seems to be (at least partially) the end in itself. Bercourt finds his espousal of his lifestyle as a man liberating; it is in these terms that he explains his choice to his bride at the end of the tale: "je jouirai de toute la liberté" of the masculine sex (*Histoire* 60). This moment in the novella insists on the experience of *jouissance*, or pleasure. This pleasure, through Bercourt's appeal to his new wife, appears as a possibility for the little Marquise's own adoption of cross-gendered living. While affirming the pleasure found in a male embodiment, whose liberty he hopes to enjoy, Bercourt encourages Mariane to find a similar gratification in continuing to live as a woman: "Jouissez, belle Marquise, de tous les agréments de mon sexe" (*Histoire* 60). It is not only the verb *jouir*, or to enjoy, that evokes affect, but also these "agréments," which signify "qualité[s] par [lesquelles] on plaist"

to drive the tale or avoid a problem dates back to at least the Medieval period, notably in the lives of Saints. One could cite, for example, the lives of Sainte Euphrosine and Saint Marin as recounted by Christine de Pizan or the thirteenth-century French romance *Le Roman de Silence* attributed to Heldris of Cornwall. In some vitae, the donning of the male disguise may allow a female to preserve her purity and avoid marriage, or to imitate Christ's life [as adult male] more closely.

²² See Vern and Bonnie Bullough's *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender*, esp. 45–68. Because of the threatening nature of such intrusions, they note, "[c]ross dressing by men is treated differently than that among women" often ending in a loss of status and a critique or stripping of their claim to masculinity.

(“agrément”).²³ Thus pleasure, this “sentiment agréable excité dans l’ame,” underlies the decisions made by the Marquis de Bercourt and the Marquise de Banneville to continue their habitual ways of living (“plaisir”). As such, the couple undoes the paradigmatic motivations for literary cross-dressing. Bercourt’s choice to live as a man comes from the domain of feeling affect and Mariane joins Bercourt in the lasting decision to live their genders contrary to their sexes.

For the little Marquise, it is in the beginning her mother’s choice that leads her to live as a girl. Influenced by the death of her husband in battle, Mariane’s mother hopes to avoid a similar fate for her child by raising her baby boy as a girl. While a parent’s decision to raise a child as another sex does fit into literary paradigms for cross-dressing in this period, the *Histoire* diverges from the standard by recounting the tale of a male child who is raised as female, rather than the other way around. In the end, the Marquise states it is habit that inspires her to continue to live as a young woman: “Pour moi... je suis trop *accoutumée* à être fille, je veux être fille toute ma vie. Comment m’y prendrais-je à porter un chapeau?” (*Histoire* 60, my emphasis). The mother’s original practical choice has grown into her own embodied preference. By indicating the fact that she is accustomed not only to dressing as a girl (“Comment m’y prendrais-je à porter un chapeau?”), but also her desire to continue to live as such (“je veux être fille”) the little Marquise draws attention to her habit as a series of repeated, embodied gestures to which she has developed an affective connection as well as that which makes it implausible that her body might be capable of donning the masculine, of wearing a hat. The difficulty that she perceives in changing her way of life is akin to the obstacle of embarrassment Bercourt invokes (but does not feel) when he describes his desire to continue to live as a man, magnifying the transgender facet of the text by emphasizing the affective aspect of not only his way of living and dressing, but also that of his wife.

Pleasure ties together these different characters’ experience of gender, a positive affect that leads these individuals to pursue either their transvestite lives or their trans lives—the pleasure of feeling comfortable

²³ *Agréments*, translated in the English MLA edition as “pleasures” also signifies pieces of ornamentation, and thus may also refer to the clothing, jewelry, and other accoutrement associated with the female sex. The meaning listed above is taken from the *Dictionnaire vivant de la Langue française*, The ARTFL Project, University of Chicago, for which I use the abbreviation *DVLF* in my parenthetical citations.

in one's own skin and in one's appearance, the feeling of comfort inspired by habit. The inclusion of the cross-dressing character, Prince Sionad, amongst the adventures of the young transgendered couple further accentuates such affective delight. However, his tale's framing in a gender-critical voice complicates the community-making efforts of the narrative. The story of Prince Sionad appears in the text with the second publication of *Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* in 1696. The narrator/editor of the *Mercure galant* emphasizes the pleasurable aspect of the addition by telling his readers that he offers them "L'histoire du beau Sionad" in order to avoid depriving them "d'une lecture qui assurément vous sera très agréable" (*Mercure galant* 1696; 8: 172). This foreign Prince comes from the north, sent by his father to France to receive a good education.²⁴ One day, Sionad is chosen to play the role of a princess in a play. The Comtesse d'Aletref, who recounts this intercalated story to the little Marquise, made the decision to help the prince to play the part well: "J'étais entêtée du jeune Comte et voulais absolument qu'il réussit à tout ce qu'il entreprendrait" (18). At first, Prince Sionad's transformation was a necessity, a challenge, that he took on: as the Comtesse recounts, "je lui demandai si ce personnage lui ferait plaisir, et il me dit qu'il n'en savait rien" (17). Nevertheless, this obligation comes to bring the prince joy, and it is then that Sionad enters into an affective relation with the act of cross-dressing: "Il faisait au commencement toutes ces petites choses parce qu'on lui disait de les faire, mais bientôt il y prit goût" (18). The word "taste" (*goût*) carries with it affective weight. As the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* indicates, "il se dit aussi de l'inclination qu'on a pour certaines personnes, pour certaines choses, de l'empressement avec lequel on les recherche, & du plaisir qu'on y trouve" ("goût"). The Comtesse describes the pleasure Sionad takes in his cross-dressing as a sort of narcissism. According to her, the young prince falls in love with the act of cross-dressing, while falling also in love with himself: "Hélas, je me reproche de lui avoir mis dans la tête l'amour de lui-même" (17). Sionad's pleasure, moreover, is linked to sight: "Il ne savait pas qu'il était beau, je l'en fis apercevoir" (*Histoire* 17). Sionad, according to the Comtesse, takes pleasure in hearing his beauty lauded at those instances when he dresses as a woman: "il... prenait grand plaisir à s'entendre louer sur sa beauté" (18-19). With what the Comtesse identifies as a sort of exhibitionism, Sionad seems to delight in bringing the masculine-

²⁴ "[N]é dans les glaces du Septentrion" (*Histoire* 15).

coded desire for battle home, something that is conveyed in the first sentence in which his name appears in the nouvelle:

[L]e beau Sionad qui, après avoir vaincu les ennemis du roi par la force de son bras, venait sous des habits de femme disputer au beau sexe et remporter au jugement des connaisseurs le prix de la souveraine beauté. (13)

Masculine aggression in tow—narratively—Sionad is presented as one whose feminine attire is simply a costume (a kind of armor?), one that inspires Sionad’s joy and others’ admiration.

The fact that Sionad’s tale is told through the voice of another adds to the complexity of the tale’s gender-bending community of characters. The intercalated story of the Northern prince inserts the first note of antagonism towards gender play in the inclusive society built by the tale. The Comtesse d’Aletref is the only character to express a negative judgment of Sionad’s habitual cross-dressing, diagnosing it as an expression of excessive “amour propre.” Furthermore, the countess intimates the potential threat of male-male desire that accompanies such a presentation: “ces beaux garçons s’aiment et n’aiment qu’eux” (25).²⁵ The depiction of Sionad presented within the *Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* therefore relies upon a modicum of trust; to take his story at its word (or, more accurately, as the countess’s word) is to accept her as a reliable narrator. It is only through giving credence to the Comtesse d’Aletref’s judgment that we can arrive at the conclusion that all these little things that he learns to do only serve to make him *appear* as a woman: “Sa démarche était toute changée, et jusqu’au ton de sa voix, il l’avait adouci pour paraître entièrement fille” (18). Unlike Bercourt, the *Histoire* does not offer insight into Sionad’s own thoughts and feelings, besides the intercalated narrator’s avowal that he has expressed a sense of pleasure in his cross-dressing activities.²⁶ Sionad is not presented as one who thinks of himself as a woman, but rather as one who dresses in order to provide women with a capable adversary in the

²⁵ Seifert notes the potentially upsetting ambiguity of her pronouncement: “These handsome fellows love themselves [each other] and only themselves [each other] [...] The phrase the Comtesse uses is highly ambiguous, indicating either narcissism (the ‘beaux garçons’ love themselves) or homoeroticism (the ‘beaux garçons’ love each other)” (243).

²⁶ The Comtesse recounts that Sionad professed to her such a pleasure, saying “c’est un fort grand plaisir pour moi d’entendre dire partout où je vais, ah la belle fille! Quelle jolie enfant! Qu’elle est admirable!” (22).

domain of beauty. In the end, it is the pleasure of cross-dressing and of the gaze of others that inspires Sionad's seasonal adoption of feminine attire—yet one might question the viability of this presentation as it itself is constructed through the gaze of another. The purportedly superficial nature of his penchant for a female presentation contrasts with the more deeply rooted affective attachment to the feminine gender experienced by Bercourt, as well as with the little Marquise's embrace of her life as a girl. Sionad thus appears (or is presented) as the only cross-dressing character in the tale. While adding in this way to the diversity of the range of characters portrayed in the *Histoire*, Sionad's story also critically gestures to questions of the judgment or acceptance of gender play that underlie the ethics of participating in its community.

A New Decorum: Revising *bienséance* and *honnêteté*

The novella features and accommodates a spectrum of different ways of living and being where affect, just as much as habit and performance, can have a significant role in justifying one's lived gender. In this context, the text's first publication venue, the pages of Donneau de Visé's *Mercure galant*, takes on added significance.²⁷ In his article "Le *Mercure galant*: un recueil interactif," Christophe Schuwey explains that Donneau de Visé aims not only to share news but also to recognize, or even to celebrate, the good character and reputation of the individuals that figure within the pages of the periodical:

[L]'enjeu semble être moins de rapporter les faits – 'ce qui se passe' – que d'enregistrer et publier les mérites personnels: 'qui fait quoi'... ces nouvelles semblent constituer une façon d'enregistrer les mérites individuels.
(55)

²⁷ The *Mercure galant* (1672-1710) presents itself as a series of letters from an unnamed man (presumably, Donneau de Visé himself) living in Paris to a female correspondent recently relocated to the countryside. The man hopes to keep his correspondent informed of the happenings and goings-on of the capital, inserting such information alongside descriptions of the newest fashion trends, reviews of literary and artistic productions, games, riddles, poems and novellas. To this end, the narrator of the *Mercure* invites his readers to write in with that which they deem worthy "d'estre sçeu" ("to be known"), thus inviting his audience to collaborate with him as he compiles what forms the body of Donneau de Visé's literary enterprise. See *Observatoire de la vie littéraire* (OBVIL), "Le Libraire au lecteur," (*Mercure galant* 1672; 1: 1-8).

The appearance of the Marquise de Banneville and her friends within this “société de papier” serves to validate the merit of their persons as well as to assure a place for them within the community of the *Mercure galant*’s worldly and meritorious readers. Indeed, as the *Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* gradually expands the purview of characters and gender relations included in the society it outlines, it also sets up a particular decorum to govern its community. Through the figure of the anonymous female narrator who purports to have written the tale in the 1695 version and through a scene added in the 1723 iteration, the tale demarcates the morality that presides over the interactions between the characters of the community it envisions.

The paratext of the first publication of the little Marquise’s story constructs a narrator who claims to be the author of the story she introduces. Largely taken in contemporary scholarship to be a textual instantiation of the tale’s writer (usually understood to be Choisy), this unnamed female has been read as complicating the attribution of authorship rather than as a piece of the narrative itself.²⁸ Interpreted in this essay to be one of the components of the *Histoire*’s shifting whole—its different iterations with their various omissions and additions—the paratextual figure adds to Choisy’s fictional community another character who plays (differently) with gender.

Introducing the story in the *Mercure galant* of February 1695, the narrator of the first version of *Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* announces herself as woman, naming “les Femmes” as “mon Sexe” (*Mercure galant* 1695; 2: 14). Thereafter, she affirms that even as “les Femmes se meslent d’écrire, & se piquent de bel esprit” they are

²⁸ The paratext, read as the voice of the author, perplexes the question of attribution rendered even more difficult by Donneau de Visé in the February 1696 issue of the *Mercure galant* which includes the publication of “Belle au bois dormant.” Introducing the fairy tale in the *Mercure galant*, Donneau de Visé affirms that the conte was written by the same person as the *Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville* (*Mercure galant* 1696; 2: 74). The conte’s author—ostensibly, Charles Perrault, although the collection of tales generally accepted to be his were first published under the name of his son—is rendered even more elusive as Donneau de Visé effectively refers back to the *female* author he introduces and for whom the female narrator introducing the *Histoire* in 1695 purportedly speaks (*Mercure galant* 1695; 2: 12–18). For further discussion of the complexities of the text’s attribution, see DeJean’s introduction in the MLA Texts and Translations edition of the tale, esp. x–xii. For other studies that approach the paratext in this way, see Lewis Seifert’s “Border Crossings” 234–235, and Elizabeth Guild “‘Le Moyen de faire de cela un grand homme’: the Abbé de Choisy and the Unauthorized Body of Representation.”

unable to rid themselves of the little markers of their sex, those tendencies that are linked to their sex, which are “natural” to them:

En effet, quelque guindées que nous soyons dans nos Ouvrages, on y voit la Femme en mille endroits, & les grands sentimens outrez, forcez, sublimes, ne sçauroient cacher aux yeux du Lecteur attentif une certaine mollesse, un certain foible qui nous est naturel, & où nous retombons toujours. (*Mercuré galant* 1695; 2: 14, 15)

Generalizing her situation to that of other female writers, the narrator admits to being incapable of ridding her writing of all marks of her femininity, even in the seemingly cross-dressing-like act of writing which, despite the cultural and literary influence of women writers such as Madeleine de Scudéry and Marie-Catherine Desjardins (Madame de Villedieu), was considered a largely masculine occupation in early modern France.²⁹ The narrator here, it would seem, apprehends her “donning” of writing as something not “natural” to her gender. As such, she presents herself—in and through her writing—as cross-dressed.³⁰

Were the text to be definitively attributed to Choisy, the argument could be made that the anonymous narrator of 1695 is doubly cross-dressed: Choisy writes as a woman who confesses the difficulties of her uptake the masculine enterprise of writing.³¹ Yet this argument brings with it its own theoretical (not to mention evidentiary) issues. As it stands, it is important not to ignore what Foucault termed the “modern” critical tradition in which the disappearance of the author undergirds textual analysis.³² The author-function, following Foucault, is imposed by the reader upon the text, and simultaneously inaugurates and

²⁹ The historical association of masculinity with writing was in the midst of being complicated and destabilized by French women’s salon writing and their involvement in the evolution of the novel during the course of the 17th century. See Dejean, *Tender Geographies*.

³⁰ It was not uncommon for female writers to allude to this tradition through the form of a preface or introduction to their works. See, for example, Anita Pacheco’s *A Companion to Early Modern Women’s Writing*, esp. 283, 287. What draws my attention to this particular instance, however, is how much the narrator foregrounds this bias, and its correlative connections with the *Histoire*.

³¹ Such a revelation would resemble what Madeleine Kahn terms “narrative transvestism” (2, 6). The adoption of a female voice by male authors, of course, is not revelational by any means. See Florence Dujour’s recently published study, *Le Fil de Marianne: Narrer au féminin de Villedieu à Diderot*.

³² See his essay, “What is an Author” (1969).

operates between and through a plurality of personas. Here, these “selves” might include Choisy as Author (of the *Memoirs* and *Histoire*, following general consensus) and the unnamed narrator of the tale constructed in the paratext of the *Histoire* as it was presented in the volume of the *Mercure galant* of February 1695 (Foucault 272–273). It is thus only in our recognition of Choisy as the Author of the text—an Author with a capital A, to imply the classificatory and filial power of that function—that the narrator appears to us as transgendered. In this way, she forms part of what Seifert calls the “discursive Choisy,” or “the narrative creation that may or may not have corresponded with the ‘real’ historical figure”—that is, a Choisy who is both, and alternatingly, “she” and “he” (207). Choisy’s own involvement in the composition of the *Histoire* and its accompanying anonymous narrator tantalizingly complicate this play of writing and gender.

Having introduced herself as female, Choisy’s 1695 narrator warns us of the little slippages, the softness and weaknesses which reveal her work, the *Histoire de la Marquise-Marquis de Banneville*, to be that of a woman. Thereafter, she conflates her identity with the story that is about to unfold on the following pages, advising her readers, “si vous avez passé vingt ans, je vous défens de *me lire*” (*Mercure galant* 1695; 2: 17, my emphasis). Identifying herself with the text, the narrator proclaims herself to be a being of movement, of transition, ordering those who have surpassed a certain age to “chercher quelque chose de plus solide” (*Mercure galant* 1695; 2: 17). Unlike those older women who must find more “solid” pursuits, the narrator draws attention to herself as something fluid, a notion that recalls for us the idea of a body under construction as well as the performativity Butler attributes to gender, understood as “a set of repeated acts... that congeal over time” (33).³³ Her linking of gender play or stability to age also recalls Harris’s invocation of education as a way to address what he calls the cross-dressing of the Marquise in Choisy’s novella: gender appears as something that is learned. The narrator’s identification with the text further shows that it is through her writing she is able to play with gender/sex most efficiently. Hence the attention she draws to writing as something opposed to her gender; she juxtaposes her girlhood with the authorship of one of the century’s acclaimed writers and salon-goers:

³³ It is important here to note, as Butler does, that to call gender constructed “is not to assert its illusoriness or its artificiality” but rather to help illuminate the ways in which the notion of sexual essence is false and naturalized through certain gender attributions (33).

“Croire qu’une jeune fille assez jolie, élevée parmy les rubans, soit capable d’écrire comme Mr Pellisson, c’est un abus” (*Mercure galant* 1695; 2: 15–16). By foregrounding writing as gendered the narrator calls attention to the constructed-ness of gender/sex: the *Histoire* portrays the gender/sex game as a crossing game of representation and of language, albeit a game in which some might not fully “pass,” that is, fully enact the opposite gender without those little slippages that would attest to one’s ‘true’ sex, such as the “certaine mollesse” that supposedly betrays the women who aspire to writing (*Mercure galant* 1695; 2: 15).³⁴

The imperfect passing of the 1695 narrator in her writing brings to mind the Marquis, who holds onto the effeminate manners and accoutrements for which he has an averred inclination. The first time that the little Marquise notices Bercourt, it is not only his handsomeness that draws her attention, but also his adornment of feminine-coded accessories that holds her gaze: “ce qui lui donna plus d’attention, c’est qu’il avait aux oreilles des boucles de diamants fort brillants et trois ou quatre mouches sur le visage” (*Histoire* 28). As soon as Bercourt appears in the novel, he is marked by small touches of femininity. Perhaps even more tellingly, Bercourt does not in the end rid himself of what he calls “les manières un peu effeminées que je n’ai pu quitter tout à fait” (61). Whether or not he would ever be capable of such a thing is evaded by the text as the Marquise replies, “Ah, Marquis, ne les quittez pas. Y a-t-il rien de plus aimable de savoir joindre la valeur de Mars aux agréments de Vénus?” (61). The mixing of Venus and Mars, or the inclusion of characters secondary to the Marquise such as Bercourt and the female narrator of 1695, extends the community of the *Histoire* in this way to include not only personages who are invested in embodying one single

³⁴ I use the term “passing” to signify one who is able to live their chosen, felt gender without marks of the gender generally associated with their bodies. I do not believe, however, that effeminate men and masculine women embody their gender in any way less “perfectly” than masculine men and feminine women. In *The Ellis Island Snowglobe*, Erica Rand explains how the idea of “passing women” connotes a sexual essence that underlies one’s enacted social gender, waiting to be revealed. In doing so the term “implies that first identity [here: sex given at birth] necessarily to be more authentic or true...[it] is to flatten out, obscure, and naturalize the processes by which gender comes to and through representation” (84–85). I also resist the implication that biological sex is in any way more true or valid than one’s embodied gender. The term here is simply useful to describe from the perspectives of those around those characters who resemble transgendered individuals, especially those invested in strict separation of gendered attributes. Here, I’m thinking of the Comtesse d’Aletref’s reaction to Bercourt’s gender mixing: “il fait le beau, et cela ne sied point à un homme. Que ne s’habille-t-il en fille?” (28).

gender, but also those who (either incidentally or deliberately) blend the masculine and the feminine.

Whereas such mixing of gender appears to evoke the disapprobation of certain characters in the tale, the *Histoire*'s fluctuating text works to confine these negative reactions, as it pushes them outside of the sense of decorum that governs its community. The second 1723 addition portrays an episode where Mariane decides to dress Bercourt in feminine attire that illuminates the decorum imagined by the *Histoire* around gender. The text points to the "malhonnêteté" of some young men who react negatively to the apparent cross-dressing of Bercourt: "quelques jeunes gens eurent la malhonnêteté de leur dire publiquement que de pareilles dames empêcheraient bien le monde de finir" (64). As the word "malhonnête" indicates "ce qui n'est pas dans les règles de la bienséance, de la vertu, de la civilité" its use in this context denounces the conduct of those young individuals who condemn Bercourt (Furetière). The text thus advocates for the accommodation of gender-bending individuals as part of the practices and values that comprise the social and moral ideal of *honnêteté*. The designation of these youths' comportment as indecorous tacitly signals their failure to adhere to the standards of decency envisioned by the novella. In this way, this addition of 1723 recalls the remonstrance given to Mariane by her mother in the ironic scene in which the little Marquise critiques Sionad's cross-dressing. In response to Mariane's judgmental reaction, her mother advises her: "Ne jurez rien... Contentez vous, ma chère enfant, de faire votre devoir et ne trouvez jamais à redire à ce que font les autres" (15). Through the figure of the mother who reprimands her daughter for criticizing Sionad's cross-dressing and the narrator who notes the *malhonnêteté* of unaccepting youths, the novella stages moments of judgment to reprimand or correct them in turn. In scenes such as these, the *Histoire* not only disrupts notions of *vraisemblance*, as Guild argues, but also models a new kind of *bienséance* that involves the accommodation of different forms of gender diversity and fluidity in the tale's elite and urban community. The three iterations of the *Histoire* gradually create and accentuate a space for other ways of being and outline, through protective moments of admonishment, a *honnêteté* that accommodates a range of gender expressions and would let them be without harassment.

Coda

In an era when periodicals and other genres of news were beginning to construct a feeling of “contemporaneity” as outlined by Brendan Dooley, the *Mercure galant*, in its enterprise of sharing “contemporary” news and stories with the provinces, might be considered as forming an unprecedented sense of French community between the provinces and the happenings of the end-all be-all of urban centers: Paris.³⁵ The *Mercure galant*, across its different issues and iterations of the little Marquise’s tale, invites readers to follow the narrative’s different versions as they build on and expand the decorously gender-inclusive community of characters included within its purview. Even as the city is set as the center of the *Histoire*’s narrative happenings, the reach of the *Mercure galant* extends the reach of the tale’s readership to include even those outside of Paris within the same meritorious public. The *Histoire* further safeguards the community of its characters by placing them in a temporal haven where their youthful gender-play never has to end. Alongside the sense of contemporaneity constructed by the *Mercure galant* (the venue of the 1695 and 1696 editions), this temporal gesture allows for a final indefinite expansion of the tale’s queer community.

In his book *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, Jack Halberstam asserts that “we need a transgender history, a method for recording the presence of gender-ambiguous subjects sensitive enough to not reduce them to either ‘women all along’ or ‘failed men’” (54). It is indeed vital to my reading that the Marquis de Bercourt not be reduced to a “wom[a]n all along” and that the little Marquise not be understood as a man all along. Even though the text maintains a dichotomy of sexual difference between the sexed body that can enact another gender perfectly or imperfectly, reading the tale in its successive iterations permits us to see the broad inclusivity of the queer-utopic time-space that Choisy constructs. It is in this time-space that one might escape the restrictions of heteronormative sex-gender pairings.

Extradiegetically, the tale of the little Marquise and Bercourt acts upon the present lived by Choisy (who mentions the tale in his memoirs) as well as upon our own, offering an opportunity to recuperate a representation of transgendered experience anterior to so-called late

³⁵ See *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe*, esp. Dooley’s introduction and chapter, “Making It Present.”

modernity.³⁶ This glimpse of trans personhood in an early modern text suggests the possibility of a place and time which might exist in “our” future collectively. One can read the text as a return to what José Muñoz calls the “no-longer conscious [as] an essential route for the purpose of arriving at the not-yet-here” (30). The *Histoire* avoids heteronormative time-space to undermine any epistemological certainty of sex or gender and rewrites notions of *vraisemblance* and *honnêteté* to make space for difference in gender experience and expression within its community.

The ending of the novella illuminates the utopic queer time-space as one which forever sits on the temporal horizon. The last lines of the tale are characterized by a use of grammatical tenses that serves to place the happily-ever-after of the marquise and the marquis always in the future, even of contemporary readers. Whereas the majority of the novella is written in the past (as most tales are), the last paragraph shows a temporal progression towards futurity: “Huit jours après, ils partirent pour la province, où ils sont encore dans un de leurs châteaux. L’oncle doit y aller voir et sera bien surpris en voyant naître de ce mariage quelque bel enfant qui lui ôtera tout l’espérance d’une grande succession” (*Histoire* 61). The final lines of the novella lead us away from the past tense of the tale (“ils partirent”) through the reader’s present (“où ils sont encore”) and towards a future (“sera”, “ôtera”) that remains out of grasp no matter the three hundred and some years that have passed since its first publication.³⁷ This queer temporal gesture is seconded by an ending which veers away from any normative resolution of the Marquise’s inability to carry a child and towards a queer formulation of kinship where a husband can carry a pregnancy to term. This queer kinship can itself be similarly understood as utopic or at least optimistic in its productivity: its outcome is rewarded by their child’s inheritance of “une grande succession.” Choisy leaves the reader looking towards a queer future, a fairy-tale-esque happy ending that will never quite arrive, one in which all configurations—passing or gender-

³⁶ In the *Memoirs*, Choisy refers to the sense of identification s/he felt with regard to Mariane’s character: “Je ne doute point, madame, que l’histoire de la marquise de Banneville ne vous ait fait plaisir: j’ai été ravie de me voir en quelque façon autorisée par l’exemple d’une personne si aimable” (*Mémoires* 135).

³⁷ The temporal suspension of futurity in the last line of the *Histoire* can be put in dialogue with Jennifer Eun-Jung Row’s recent book, *Queer Velocities: Time, Sex, and Biopower on the Early Modern Stage*, where she investigates “differential speeds” as a means by which to broaden notions of queerness in the early modern period (7). Row’s exciting new study came out after the writing of this article.

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mixed—of gender might play within the confines of its literary community.

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