

The Invention of Memoirs in Renaissance France

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## ABSTRACT

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This dissertation investigates the emergence of the memoir genre in France. Commynes, the author generally regarded as the first memoirist, initially conceived his memoirs as a collection of personal notes to be used by the Latinist Angelo Cato for a more elaborate history of Louis XI's reign, but gradually came to consider it an independent, firsthand account. The second half of the sixteenth century witnessed the appearance of an unprecedented and closely-knit group of firsthand historical narratives, circulating in manuscript form or published as memoirs. These texts were responding to the standards set by a new Renaissance historiography, which sought to transform traditional history into a science with political applications. As the early modern paradigm of historiography based on firsthand narrative sources faded away in modern times, memoirs lost their historiographical status and became part of French literature. Most scholars deem Renaissance memoirs rudimentary forms of autobiography that only fully matured in the age of Louis XIV. It is within and against this teleological literary scholarship that my thesis is situated. By re-placing Renaissance memoirs within their original rhetorical context, I argue that the author's quest for individual self-expression, which has been considered a defining characteristic of memoirs, is an anachronistic and retrospective projection. My dissertation shows that memoirs were originally a collective enterprise and that communal values prevailed in Renaissance self-memorialization. The first formal group of memoirs appeared in the wake of civil and religious wars that endangered traditional forms of social and political representation. Their authors addressed relatively new topics such as the court favorite, reason of state, and national unity. However, all the evidence suggests that their life-writings did not mark a watershed between medieval corporatism and Renaissance individualism, as has been previously thought

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## Introduction

François de la Rochefoucauld's *Mémoires* of the rebellion known as the *Fronde* (1648-1653), in which he had been one of the leaders, were printed allegedly without his consent officially in Cologne, but in reality in Amsterdam, in 1662. The memoirs bore his acronym (M.D.L.R.) and contained a mixture of authentic and inauthentic narratives ("relations") and documents ("pieces"), inserted therein as if he had effectively written them ("comme si effectivement il les avait composées"); displeased that one should abuse his distinguished name ("parce qu'il n'est pas a souffrir qu'on abuse du nom d'une personne de sa qualité"), La Rochefoucauld himself sent a letter to the Parisian Parliament asking for the book to be censored, a decision which became effective in September the same year (La Rochefoucauld 771; "Extrait des Registres du Parlement"; ed. Martin-Chauffier).

His contemporaries were outraged. Saint-Simon, the most famous memoirist of the following generation, recounted how his father had suffered a fit of pique when reading that he had broken his promise to the prince of Condé:

Mon père sentit si vivement l'atrocité de la calomnie, qu'il se jeta sur une plume et mit à la marge [of La Rochefoucauld's apocryphal *Mémoires*]: *L'auteur en a menti*. Non content de ce qu'il venoit de faire, il s'en alla chez le libraire, qu'il découvrit, parce que cet ouvrage ne se débitoit pas publiquement dans cette première nouveauté. Il voulut voir ses exemplaires, pria, promit, menaça et fit bien qu'il se les fit montrer. Il prit aussitôt une plume et mit à tous la même note marginale. On peut juger de l'étonnement du libraire, et qu'il ne fut pas longtemps sans faire avertir M. de La Rochefoucauld . . . (1: 83-84).

Besides the request of censorship sent to the Parliament, La Rochefoucauld dispatched letters to friends, wherein he tried to assure his contemporaries that the memoirs he had actually written originally contained no injurious remarks. When nineteenth-century scholars finally established more authentic manuscripts and editions of La Rochefoucauld's memoirs, they managed to prove that more than half of the clandestine edition, printed in 1662, was not authored by La Rochefoucauld; nonetheless, in the parts that were authentic, the duke was quite outspoken (La Rochefoucauld 2: I-XXVII; ed. Gourdault). Indeed, there was nothing more offensive to a gentleman than the accusation of perfidy and disloyalty. The third person masculine pronoun in the subordinate clause ("qu'il ne fut pas longtemps sans faire avertir M. de La Rochefoucauld") must refer to the bookseller from the main clause. If my interpretation is correct, the bookseller himself informed La Rochefoucauld about the incident involving Saint-Simon's father vandalizing these memoirs. The bookseller was probably displeased at having the value of his book diminished. Why would he report that to La Rochefoucauld, who, according to the letter he had sent to the Parliament, was outraged that somebody would abuse his distinguished name? Did Saint-Simon fabricate this story? And why would Saint-Simon do such a thing? In order to answer these questions one needs to explore the cultural parameters surrounding the memoir genre within which La Rochefoucauld and his co-writers worked.

The Parliament's interdiction to sell and publish La Rochefoucauld's pirated memoirs had no effect, and they continued to be reproduced from 1662 to 1672. However, the apocryphal edition of 1662 was not the first time somebody had tried to publish La Rochefoucauld's memoirs during the author's lifetime, and again, allegedly without his consent. Other more "authentic" editions appeared, in fact, only posthumously, in 1689.

La Rochefoucauld had first given the manuscript of his memoirs to Arnauld d'Andilly, brother to the more famous Antoine Arnauld, so that he could correct it specifically with regards to "purity of language," in the words of Jean Renault de Segrais, La Rochefoucauld's friend and Madame de La Fayette's secretary (La Rochefoucauld 2: VII; ed. Gourdault). Arnauld d'Andilly then sent the memoirs to the count of Brienne, who wanted to print them in Rouen; but La Rochefoucauld, who in the meantime brought changes to his initial project, managed to prevent their clandestine printing by buying back (!) the furtive copies of these memoirs from the printer based in Rouen, as Segrais informs us. This initial lost edition was not, according to the same Segrais, entirely faithful to La Rochefoucauld's manuscript; nor was this first edition identical to the other supposedly nonconsensual edition printed in 1662, in Amsterdam/Cologne.

In short, La Rochefoucauld himself sent multiple versions and fragments of his memoirs to his friends so that they could help him with questions of style; these friends and their friends made both stylistic and content-based modifications, and did not shy away from printing the memoirs without respecting the exact letter of the manuscripts entrusted to them. La Rochefoucauld publicly denied being the author of the pirated editions, although, in private, he seems to have been perfectly aware of their modifications and printing. If Saint-Simon's version is correct, La Rochefoucauld himself oversaw the distribution of his inauthentic memoirs in Paris.

In 1804, Renouard published a manuscript containing La Rochefoucauld's autograph corrections and Segrais's notes; multiple critical editions, refining the quest for an ideal handwritten document reflective of the author's mind, followed in the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century is also the most prolific moment in the history of the memoir genre; monumental collections of memorial writings appeared in France differing from previous memoir collections in size and method. Pierre Nora counts more than five-hundred volumes (359).

Especially during the Restoration (1814-1830), the vogue of memoirs was so high that both apocryphal and completely fabricated life-writings were published in France (Zanone 21-60). Nineteenth-century ghostwriters of memoirs exploited the Romantic sensibility to local color, confessions, and scandal that still informs our own mass culture of life-writing. Alongside the mass publication, fabrication, and consumption of memoirs, there was also a new impulse to edit memoirs critically in accordance to modern philological standards.

Collections of memoirs existed in the early seventeenth century as well, but there was no preoccupation with the establishment of an authentic text based on an ideal, autograph manuscript. Ghostwriting was also a widespread practice in this time, but it had very little to do with mass culture. Seventeenth-century sellers of rare and dangerous books notwithstanding, La Rochefaucauld, Arnauld d'Andilly and whoever actively helped write La Rochefoucauld's memoirs, at the author's explicit request or not, were not necessarily interested in mass printing these memoirs for profit.

If questions of authorship in the Renaissance have been amply studied and some of its assumptions challenged most notably in disciplines such as book history and the sociology of texts, the origins of the memoir genre has received, at least in France, little scholarly attention thus far. The stakes are high, however, because all modern critical editions of early modern memoirs assume that authors of autobiographies strictly controlled their manuscripts and publications. The scholarly assumption is grounded in a grand narrative of the Renaissance man discovering his subjectivity and asserting his unique individuality. According to this view, one of the most privileged forms of individual self-discovery was the birth of autobiographical genres such as memoirs. Another aspect of self-awakening was the affirmation of authorship and intellectual property.

In the first and most influential comprehensive study on the topic of Renaissance memoirs, *Se dire à la Renaissance* (1997), Nadine Kuperty-Tsur construes them as subjective depositions by noble individuals defeated by a ruthless absolute monarchy. The study adopts notions regarding the objective development of the early modern state and the subjective awakening of the individual from Jacob Burckhardt's famous work on *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860):

In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness – that which was turned within as that which was turned without – lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion, and childish prepossession, through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, a party, family, or corporation – only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an *objective* treatment and consideration of the state and of all the things of this world became possible. The *subjective* side at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis; man became a spiritual *individual*, and recognized himself as such (Burckhardt 129).

When applied to Renaissance memoirs, this interpretation, as we shall see in the following chapters, does not resist close examination. Authors and editors still thought of themselves as members of a family, race, people, etc., and one can argue, on the contrary, that the emergence of memoirs accounted for the vulgarization of and conscious reflection on these collectivist ideals, as opposed to a more medieval anthropology where similar values “lay dreaming or half awake.” The term “race” acquired a quasi-biological meaning in French around the same time; notions such as “patrie” and “raison d’etat,” demanding individual self-sacrifice, abounded in the self-memorialization of the Renaissance man. In this sense, Renaissance memoirs accord well with the

general argument of the essays on French Renaissance culture, recently edited by David LaGuardia and Cathy Yandell: “even the most independent of writers remained firmly anchored in the more collective conception of identity that characterized the period, and which relied upon an active practice of memory as one of the foundations of different kinds of communities” (*Memory and Community in Sixteenth-Century France* 16).

Historians do not regard memoirs as valid sources, and scholars of French literature consider the “neoclassical” memoirs, such as La Rochefoucauld’s for instance, esthetically superior to the first memoirs of the Renaissance:

Qu’ils [memoirs of the second half of the seventeenth century] soient témoignages historiques presque purs ou au contraire nettement biographiques, il s’agit en tout cas d’œuvres beaucoup plus “conscientes” que les mémoires antérieurs: on n’y retrouve plus leurs écarts et leur désordre. Les auteurs . . . s’appliquent à garder une certaine tenue littéraire, qui implique l’unité de ton et exclut ces changements brutaux de registre, du grandiose au familier, si fréquents dans des textes plus anciens (Démoris 74-5).

Démoris takes an esthetic ideal developed in the age of classicism in France (1660-1715), and applies it in the evaluation of memoirs produced in the Renaissance and the Baroque. This procedure can lend itself to caricature: “Ils [Jeannin, Talon, and Molé’s memoirs] représentent à nos yeux l’embryon d’une forme dont les stades ultérieurs seuls retiennent notre attention, occupant en quelque sorte par rapport aux Mémoires la position du cerveau reptilien au creux de la masse cérébrale” (Charbonneau 13). Conversely, historians may overemphasize the classical ideal of memoir writing in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and use it as a criterion for negatively discriminating nineteenth and twentieth century memoirs, as Pierre Nora does in his

essay “Les Mémoires d’Etat: de Commynes à De Gaulle.” However, as Jean-Louis Jeannelle argues with regard to twentieth-century memoirs:

Les catégories sociales, les pratiques d’écriture, les enjeux politiques et historiques ne sont plus les mêmes qu’à l’époque classique, mais les récits publiés n’en constituent pas moins une mémoire en exercice portant sur des événements d’intérêt collectif, contribuant à part entière aux processus contemporains de remémoration et de commémoration (12).

This judicious intercession on behalf of modern memoirs applies perfectly to the other end of the history of this genre in France and in Europe. In order to understand and appreciate sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century memoirs, we need to take into account the writing practices that shaped them, their social context, as well as their political and historical stakes. My basic contention is that memoirs were not, originally, conceived as autonomous works of “literature” and that they were not so much about individual self-expression. My hypothesis is that they were produced and read within the rhetorical category of the eyewitness testimony. Because of that, memoirs had an ambiguous status as authoritative texts informing historiography but they were also suspected for being partial and unrefined. Therefore, friends, relatives, and publishers could modify memoirs quite freely to respond to common expectations regarding history writing, which was being theorized around the same time in Italy and France.

In light of the argument, we can understand better the disorderly appearance of many early modern memoirs. The disorder reflected the stylistic explorations common to a new form of writing, however many a time it was also the result of the multiple textual strata and hands involved in the composition process. Even so, the resulting “inauthentic” autobiographical histories lacking in autonomy were widely read by distinguished readers such as Montaigne because they

conformed to an esthetic that prized variety, very common in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance: “Dignitas est quae reddit ornatam orationem varietate distinguens” (*Rhetorica ad Herennium* 274; bk. 4, ch. 13). In order to avoid boredom, the classical manual of rhetoric recommended a certain degree of *varietas*, meaning controlled shifts in style and digressions that Christian authors reinterpreted as *diversitas* or mixture, which allowed for the mixing of styles and apparent disorder (Carruthers, “*Varietas: A Word of Many Colours*” 11-32). The earliest French memoirs belong to a Christian “medieval” esthetic. The Age of Louis XIV rediscovered a “purer” classical model of writing, which promoted the non-mixing of styles and the subordination of the parts to the whole.

I propose a reading of the origins of memoirs as a genre that responded to the problems of its day. As a privileged form of history writing, a memoir was supposed to prepare gentlemen for courtly, in political, and military life. Additionally, it gave their authors, those authors’ families, and their courtly readership the feeling that they were part of an imagined national community with a common history and shared values.

The corpus I have chosen comprises mostly memoirs dealing with the French Wars of Religion (1562-1598). The only exception to this is, of course, Philippe de Commines (1447-1511) because the publication of his *Mémoires* in the mid-sixteenth century marked the beginning of a generic awareness regarding memoirs, which cannot be found in medieval eyewitness histories. I have further limited my inquiry to memoirs authored by government officials and military commanders who experienced temporary or permanent disfavor at court. Although all Renaissance memoirs were directed at a courtly audience, it was only the topic of disgrace which fully highlighted court society and its problems. Thus, the authors most quoted in this dissertation are: Philippe de Commines (1447-1511), Blaise de Monluc (c. 1502-1577), Philippe de Hurault-

Cheverny (1528-1599), Nicolas de Neufville-Villeroy (1543-1617), Henri de Mesmes-Roissy (1523-1596), Jean de Saulx-Tavannes (1555-c. 1629), and Théodore-Agrippa d'Aubigné (1552-1630). The appendix provides short biographies of the lesser known authors.

All scholars of Renaissance memoirs have noted the proximity between civil wars and memoir writing. While this connection was not necessary, the typical focus of Renaissance memoirs on warfare generally made them consecutive to great internal turmoil. More specifically, the first systematic and large production of memoirs in France and in Europe occurred in the second half of the sixteenth century during the Wars of Religion. The tension between individual freedom and reason of state transpires in a few memoirs, although the deeply religious nature of the struggle is absent from most, if not all, memoirs. This has to do with a certain Renaissance dialectic of the individual and society, in which the latter usually has the upper hand, but not without some paradoxes that each of my chapters explores.

Thus, the first chapter considers the paradox posed by the anti-rhetorical rhetoric of memoirs. I argue that it originated in a conception of memoirs as a type of eyewitness testimony, which had been theorized in rhetorical textbooks as being outside of the art of rhetoric. For the first readers and theorists of memoirs, the unity of these disparate texts, some containing life stories, others mostly eye-witnessed events and public negotiations, lay in their shared qualities of testimonies authored by men who were skilled in the arts of war and/or of government. They could stand alone and be read as such, or they could be transformed and integrated into more artful, historiographical discourses.

The place testimonies held within rhetoric and the rhetoric of testimonies that developed in the memoir genre accounts for the very common practice of professional writers, friends, and relatives actively intervening in the writing of an author's memoirs. The unfinished and perfectible

nature of testimonies made possible the custom of helping a memoirist remember things and polish his style (during his lifetime or posthumously). Renaissance culture displayed no fetishism for the autograph manuscript, nor did it conflate authorship and authority. The authority of an author rested on one's character, and this character was built discursively, but not necessarily entirely by the nominal author. Somebody else could intervene in the expression of one's personal lived experience in order to harmonize it with common expectations and values.

This need to integrate one's life into acceptable social representations bears the mark of a time of great changes. The royal court became the main center of politics, culture, and wealth in the kingdom. The literary type of the parasitical courtier that had its origins in the Middle Ages was greatly enriched during the Renaissance and had a lasting influence on memoirist representations. Chapter two examines the paradox of the memoirist as anti-courtier courtier. All Renaissance memoirists claimed to hate courtiers, and yet almost all of them had struggled to be in the proximity of the princely courts. The most spiteful of memoirists, writing either in disgrace or after having experienced it, intended their memoirs to be read by courtiers and princes. Instead of interpreting their discontent as a reaction to the crown domesticating the nobility, I propose to read it as a conventional form of negotiating court patronage.

Chapter three uncovers a reason of state language that high officials and former rebels conceived as legitimate when the preservation of the body politic was at stake. In writing their memoirs, leading actors of the Wars of Religion imagined their political actions as part of a naturally shared sovereignty that considered legitimate both the use of extraordinary measures and a right to disobey, under certain circumstances. Rather than ascribing their motivations to ideals of mixed monarchy and a constitutionalist resistance to absolutism, it is more profitable to examine

the authors' views on traditional values such as honor, when confronted to relatively modern political problems such as reason of state.

One of the ways to solve occasional conflicts between the right to self-preservation and the duty to preserve the body politic was to write down a personal memory that was publicly acceptable. Chapter four looks into the conceptions of memory these forms of life-writing shared. It attempts to explain how certain events, like the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre, were either forgotten or blurred in order to create the image of a national community.

## Chapter I. A Genealogy of Memoirs

The duke of Saint-Simon started writing what are probably the best known French memoirs of the *Ancien Régime* in 1694, at the age of nineteen (1: 17). An avid reader of history and, “above all, of particular memoirs” going back to the last years of Francis I’s reign (1: 16-17), the duke seems to have lived his life in order to write his memoirs. Such was the prestige the memoir genre acquired in France at the end of the seventeenth century that a distinguished gentleman thought of his posthumous glory and carefully fashioned his image for posterity well before he could boast of any achievements in public affairs.

The memoir genre is a distinguished topic within French literary history as well, and much has been written on Saint-Simon and on the memoirs of Louis XIV’s court. However, the early history of the genre – the memoirs that had inspired Saint-Simon – has received surprisingly little attention.

This chapter will trace out the origins of the memoir genre in France and its evolution until the beginning of the seventeenth century. Since it is impossible, at least for some memoirs, to establish the exact year of their publication and give a precise timeframe, I will limit my study to memoirs narrating events occurring between the reigns of Louis XI and Henri IV, with a special focus on the period between the creation of the League of the Public Weal (1465) and the Edict of Nantes (1598). The timespan covers the cultural period of Renaissance France. From the point of view of political ideas, the period is usually associated with the formation of the early modern French state, for both Louis XI and Henri IV successfully reunited their kingdoms after devastating civil wars.

The few scholars who have studied the pre-classical history of memoirs disagree upon the origins of the genre, its unity, and some even contest the existence of a memoir genre as such. Marc Fumaroli situates its beginnings with the publication of Comynnes's memoirs in the mid-sixteenth century ('Mémoires et histoire' 21-24). However, Yuval Harari finds precedents in medieval first person historiography and postulates a continuum of memoirist practices (187-195). Other scholars consider that the poetic heteronomy and diverse authorial intention of the various writings labeled as "memoirs" argue against any unity of the genre (Jouhaud 23-88).

This study aims to accommodate the conflicting scholarly interpretations regarding the origins of the memoir genre in France, its reception, self-representation, and authorship. I will show that disagreements over the status and history of memoirs originate in some modern assumptions about what memoirs ought to be, and in unclear theories of genre.

## **1 What is a Memoir?**

According to one common scholarly assumption, the memoir genre appeared during the Renaissance as an expression of the growing importance given to the individual and to the self (Kupert-Tsur 9-17). The growth in individual self-expression paralleled an esthetic progress: the refined society of the mid-seventeenth century polished the stylistically and literarily imperfect proto-memoirs of the fifteenth and sixteenth century (Fumaroli, 'Les Mémoires au carrefour' 183-216). The absolute masterpiece arrived at, in this process of literary purification, was Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, whereas Charles De Gaulle's *Mémoires* represented, within this teleology, the swansong of a moribund genre that had exhausted its creative reservoir (Nora 355-400).

This grand narrative betrays the importance the author and her/his literary self-expression play in the way we judge autobiographical literature today, as we witness the rebirth of the author. It does not reflect the way people wrote, published, and read texts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Moreover, the printer's hand did not always reproduce exactly the author's mind (Chartier 73-86). Instead, I will demonstrate that the creation of early modern memoirs was a process in which a few individual life-writing papers became memoirs mostly by collective intervention. I claim that many early modern life-writings can be partially attributed to multiple authors, or that their initial authors were not responsible for the form under which their testimonies were edited *qua* memoirs. This also explains why some memoirs seem unrefined and unfinished. While it is true that the image of the author contributed to the establishment of a truth protocol with which the genre was associated from its beginnings, this image has little to do with introspection and individualism.

In Latin *memoria/memoriae* and in late-medieval French *memoire/memoires*, when referring to scriptural practices, can mean anything from the record of a deposition for preliminary legal inquiry, or the summary account of events useful to historians, to daily records of affairs for family use (Kleber 37-50). Montaigne, for instance, sometimes used *memoires* to refer to a book of reason (*liber rationis*) – i.e. a family register of private affairs – such as the one his father had kept (230; bk. I, ch. 33). Books of reason appeared in France in the fourteenth century but developed considerably in the early modern period (Mouysset 16).

In another essay, Montaigne employed the term synonymously with public archives: “ceux de la ville de Saïs, ont des memoires par escrit, de huict mille ans” (607 ; bk. 2, ch. 12). In fact, the semantic field of *memoria/memoires* may extend to incorporate all written tradition: “Traditum

est memoriae”; Robert Estienne’s *Dictionarium latinogallicum* translated this as: “Il est mis par memoire, Il est escript.”

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, in his *Dictionnaire universel*, Antoine Furetière gave the first dictionary entry designating memoirs as an autonomous genre: “MEMOIRES, au pluriel, se dit des Livres d’Historiens, escrits par ceux qui ont eu part aux affaires ou qui en ont esté témoins oculaires, ou qui contiennent leur vie et leurs principales actions: Ce qui répond à ce que les Latins appelaient Commentaires. Ainsi on dit les Memoires de Sulli, de Villeroy, du Cardinal de Richelieu” The definition sums up some commonplaces that had been circulating, as early as the fifteenth century, with regard to a type of historiography singularized by the political experience of the authors, by autopsy or by autobiography. Significantly, the dictionary employs a non-exclusive disjunction (“ou”) and, as I will show in the following pages, the order was hierarchical: the most important aspect was the author’s character, then his eye-witness quality, and, finally, his life story. In good humanist fashion, the *Dictionnaire universel* also placed the origin of the genre in Antiquity. After all, Caesar wrote the history of his own deeds, and Polybius before him recommended that history be written by experienced statesmen and by those who took part in the events (Ligota 7-9). But a late-medieval author like Commines never read Polybius, and it is doubtful that he had direct knowledge of Caesar’s *Commentaries*. Was Commines rediscovering an ancient genre, possibly from his diplomatic missions in Italy where the *commentarii* was practiced anew as a historiographical genre? It is doubtful that Leonardo Bruni’s erudite Latin commentaries had any impact on Commines’s knightly vernacular memoirs. In fact, later sixteenth-century memoirists and humanists found this connection between memoirs and *commentarii* because of some structural similarities. However, before answering such questions, we need to explore briefly the theory of “genre” because the disagreements over

the early history of memoirs stem mostly from misunderstandings and unclear notions about writing genres. Antoine Compagnon's course *Théorie de la littérature: la notion de genre* shows, however, that the theory of genre has a complicated history, and that literary fashions usually predetermine the type of questions and criteria used to advance the arguments of a theory. Therefore, the best way to propose a solid theory of genre is to ask basic questions about generic criteria.

In his *Qu'est-ce qu'un genre littéraire?*, Jean-Marie Schaeffer rightly point out that the meanings of "genre" depend on the classifying criteria used. He describes four: the "exemplification of a property" – e.g. *La Princesse de Clèves* is a narrative; the "application of a rule" – e.g. Baudelaire's *Le parfum* is a sonnet; a "genealogical relation" – e.g. Lucian of Samosata's *True Histories* influenced Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*; and an "analogical relation" – e.g. a seventeenth-century Chinese writer's story resembles a European novella (180-181). When we ask the question about the origin of the memoir genre we need to specify the generic criteria with which we define it: this has rarely happened in the secondary literature on Renaissance memoirs, hence the sterile debates.

Yuval Harari, for instance, observes that memoir writing was a common practice among non-European peoples: Tamerlane had written memoirs in the early fifteenth century and he had also inspired his Mughal successors to commission similar life-writings (188). Furthermore, even the name "memoir" is not of French origin in European languages, as most dictionaries suggest: one can read a couple of *Memorias* in the Spanish late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century works of Fernán Alvarez de Albornoz and Andrés Bernáldez, respectively (189). Harari's entire approach to the memoir genre consists in analyzing structural similarities between texts coming from different linguistic areas and historical periods to prove that memoir writing had been universal in

the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, both inside and outside Europe. Implicitly, Harari overemphasizes an analogical criterion, in his history of military memoirs, and refutes previous histories of the genre whose authors (Fumaroli, Kuperty-Tsur and Nora) use, to various degrees and confusedly, the three other generic criteria. Harari's approach is of little use for a scholarly history of the memoir genre: if one follows his method to its principles, one can argue that memoir writing, in the sense of self-fashioning and memorialization via the telling of a story in which one took part, is something like a universal mental category. To a historian of ideas, it is more profitable to establish real textual filiations and social networks in order to grasp the specificity of the object of inquiry within a cultural field. Therefore, the history of early modern memoirs is meaningful only when we can establish "genealogical relations" between the textual objects transmitted as memoirs.

Hermann Kleber's work comes closest to this latter approach when he proposes a history of the genre based on Jauss's reception theory and on Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance (*Familienähnlichkeit*). As such, the history of the memoir genre is the history of a family, and it starts with the family's baptism: the publication of Commynes work as *Mémoires* in 1552 (28). But Kleber labels the memoir genre "a literary genre" (*eine literarische Gattung*), implying a literary esthetic ideal, when all early modern readers considered memoirs a type of historiography written from a particular point of view as opposed to a universal historiography ideally written from a conjunction of all the available particular histories.

In his literary reading of memoirs, Kleber traces out their evolution from historiography to personal literature. He observes that Commynes did not fully eschew the model of royal historiography, for the author rarely referred to himself, never to his family, and his protagonists were Louis IX and Charles VIII. In the 1570s, Monluc was bold enough to make himself the main

character of his *Commentaires*. At the end of the sixteenth century, Cheverny frequently interrupted his memoirs to inform his readers about his family and his private life. We can easily notice that “literary” means for Kleber the gradual differentiation from historiography and the discursive emergence of the self and of the author’s private life. But Monluc was writing within a Renaissance historiography that made autopsy (eyewitness testimony) the major criterion for trustworthy historical sources, and he was merely reinforcing the veracity of his narrative by highlighting how he had participated in the events, and how skilled a warrior he had been. Furthermore, Kleber, like all the historians of the Renaissance memoir genre, ignores the manuscript and editorial tradition of memoirs: Cheverny’s references to his private life are the result of his son’s posthumous interpolation of a *livre de raison* into his father’s original memorial testament, a question that I will discuss later in this chapter.

The discursive birth of the self and of private life are retrospective illusions that perpetuate an entire ideology of French history of national literature present especially in the works of Marc Fumaroli and Pierre Nora on the subject. Within this ideology, there is a line of great Frenchmen who made French history and wrote memoirs that became monuments of national history (representing their public persona) and literature (representing their distinct individuality). Even though the influence of the novel genre has been established for late seventeenth-century memoirs, all early modern writers and readers considered memoirs a type of history; their esthetic function was of secondary importance, and it does not correspond to our expectations. In other words, we read memoirs as part of an esthetic literary history because our modern attention shifted from their historical and pragmatic orientation to their stylistic and poetic value. Furthermore, the success of life-writing genres today tends to inform our interests towards the (auto)biographical and personal elements of early modern memoirs.

The first consistent generic use of the term *mémoires* to designate a type of historical writing, in which the author claims to have witnessed most of the events narrated and to have partaken actively in them, occurred within the Burgundian historiography of the fifteenth century (Emerson 21-32). Memoirists such as Olivier de La Marche and Jean de Haynin were vassals to the duke of Burgundy whereas Commynes deserted the duke to serve Louis XI.

In the prologue to his projected history of Louis XI's reign, Commynes wrote:

Monsr l'arcevesque de Vienne, pour satisfaire a la requeste qu'il vous a pleu me faire de vous escripre et mettre par memoire ce que j'ay sceu et congneu des faitz du roy Loys unziesme, a qui Dieu face pardon, nostre maistre et bienfacteur, et prince digne de tres excellante memoyre, je l'ay fait le plus pres de la verité que j'ay peu ne sceu avoir souvenance (1).<sup>1</sup>

Only the last word (“souvenance”) indicates memory as a mental faculty, whereas the couple “mettre par mémoire”/ “digne de mémoire” signifies a writing practice. Commynes claimed to be writing a factual summary account (“mémoire”) of Louis XI's reign and offered it to the archbishop of Vienne Angelo Cato, a humanist doctor in the king's service, for further elaboration in Latin. He reproduced the common expectations regarding historiography as royal biography: an ornate discourse in Latin supposed to glorify and perpetuate the memory of the French king. However, later in his narrative, Commynes contradicted these expectations with at least three transgressions: he inserted his own public life into the royal biography, he addressed his *mémoires* (plural) directly to a distinguished audience, and he continued the narrative well after Louis XI's death. Commynes was fashioning himself as the author of an autonomous work of historiography

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<sup>1</sup> All references to Commynes are taken from Blanchard's critical edition.

that he called, with false modesty, *mémoires*, a set of straightforward factual accounts (Dufournet, “Philippe de Commynes et l’invention des Mémoires” 17-33). The plural acquired eventually the meaning of a distinct historiographical genre (see Furetière’s definition above).

The Burgundian culture of historiography developed in the fifteenth century in emulation of French royal historiography as yet another sign of a multi-generational effort by the dukes of Burgundy to acquire sovereignty and independence from the kingdom of France and from the Holy Roman Empire. Burgundian memoirs participated in the historiographical endeavor to glorify and legitimize the duchy of Burgundy.

The relatively new memoir genre transcended the boundaries of medieval historiography in several respects: the authors claimed immunity from official pressure, they employed first person narratives, and they founded their truth claims on personal experience. The author-as-witness was credible by virtue of his employment and social position: a contractual agreement bound the vassal memoirist to his duke, but the vassal was not a common servant, a dependent paid to eulogize his master, and he could have independent opinions. In his dissertation *L’émergence de l’auteur dans l’historiographie médiévale*, Mihai Cristian Bratu analyzes the medieval tradition of histories written by knights who witnessed most of the events they narrated; Robert de Clari, Villehardouin, and the better-known Joinville wrote firsthand histories, but the authors do not seem to possess an awareness of their writings’ specificity, and it is unclear whether they had any influence on Renaissance memoirs. Commynes, on the other hand, had a tremendous popularity in France and in Europe during the Renaissance.

On the night of 7 to 8 August 1472, Philippe de Commynes left his suzerain, Charles the Bold, and crossed into Louis XI’s camp. With his expertise, the fugitive aided the sovereign in his struggle against the unruly House of Burgundy. After his beloved king’s death, he was subjected

to a series of trials that diminished his estate and at times took away his freedom. Banished from court, Comynes started writing his memoirs from the perspective of a French subject. This approach encompassed a wider audience/readership than the initial group of Burgundian memoirs enjoyed.

A Protestant, Johann Sleidan, first published the Latin translation of Comynes's work under the distinguished title of *Commentarii*, in 1545, setting the framework for a humanist reception of memoirs as a revival of Caesar's military autobiography (Méniel 205-220). The practice migrated subsequently in the vernacular as well: Blaise de Monluc, for instance, called the discourse of his life both *Commentaires* and *Mémoires*. If Caesar's direct influence on Burgundian memoir writing remains unclear (Blanchard, *Comynes l'Européen* 354-7), quite a few late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century memoirists read his *Commentaries*. Robert Gauguin translated the *Commentaries* possibly as early as 1486, but explicit references to him were absent from Burgundian memoirs and appeared only within the French humanist re-appropriation of the genre. The poetics of Caesar's commentaries differed from that of early modern French memoirs in that he focused on military strategy and was indifferent to questions of knighthood that were essential to French memoirists. Rather than an actual model, Caesar remained, throughout the early modern period, mostly an authority cited to ennoble the act of writing memoirs.

In his preface, Sleidan eulogized Comynes's style and objectivity, proposing the Franco-Flemish author as a model for a new Protestant historiography seeking to legitimize the emerging religious movement and its political ideal of a reformed Europe. The Protestant assimilation of the genre indicated its permeability to new religious and political ideas. Sleidan used the same title (*commentarii*) eleven years later for his own history of Protestantism, *De statu religionis et*

*reipublicae, Carolo Quinto Cesare*. He justified his title choice by employing some characteristics he had found in Comynnes's work, namely plain style, refusal of demonstrative rhetoric and dispassionate objectivity:

Haec omnia, nude, simpliciter, et bona fide, prout quaeque res acta fuit, recito: nec enim de meo quicquam addo, nec nullum interpono iudicium, sed id lectori liberum relinquo. Nulla etiam utor rhetoricatione, nec in ullius hominis invidiam aut gratiam aliquid scribo, stylum accommodo solum, meisque verbis utor, ut perpetua et aequabilis ubique sit oratio, et in suum quaeque locum digero, sicut ordine consecuta sunt (fol. 4vo).

The superior truth claim associated with memoir writing was thus also an important reason for the title *commentarii* and *mémoires* being put to diverse purposes, by professional historians such as Jacques de Meyer in his *Commentarii sive Annales rerum Flandricarum Libri septendecim*, published in 1561, and Jean du Tillet in his innovative history based on archival sources, *Les Memoires et Recherches...Contenant plusieurs choses memorables pour l'intelligence de l'estat des affaires de France*. Some political and religious, mostly anonymous pamphlets of the religious wars also bear the name *memoirs* and *commentaries*, such as *Memoires des occasions de la guerre, appelee Le Bien-public, rapportez a l'Estat de la guerre presente* (1567). What this diverse para-memoirist production has in common with Comynnes's memoir is its truth claim based on an explicit dismissal of rhetorical elaboration. What distinguishes them is precisely that scholarly memoirs and pamphlet-memoirs do not focus on the figure of the author and his network as the ultimate source of knowledge. However, these formal distinctions should not be overemphasized in tracing out the characteristics of Renaissance memoirs so that they correspond to our received notions of what memoirs ought to be. In fact, Renaissance readers and writers of

commentaries saw a certain unity between erudite commentaries on a given historical event or on an author and Caesar and Monluc's autobiographical *Commentaries*. They both recounted memorable things: one could write about memorable passages in an author such as Virgil or one could write about memorable events that befell oneself. Jean Céard keenly observes that if Renaissance authors distinguished between the two and still kept the same name it is because they thought of both as participating in the same paradigm. Juan Luis Vives called the one *commentarius in aliud* and the other *commentarius simplex*, and Etienne Pasquier wrote later:

Montluc a intitulé son oeuvre commentaires ce qu'en nostre langue un Commines et après luy un Martin du Bellay voulurent appeler memoires: car, pour bien dire, sans nous eslongner de nostre vulgaire françois, apres avoir recité chaque memorable exploit par luy fait, il apporte tout d'une suite un beau commentaire (Céard 103).

The assimilation of Renaissance memoirs into an ancient model – Caesar's *Commentaries* –, and their association with humanist commentaries (themselves largely indebted to medieval annotations) were part of a general distrust Renaissance scholars had towards novelty. It is all the more surprising then that Denis Sauvage claimed, in his preface, that Commines was the originator of the memoir genre, when he published Commines's *Memoirs* (with this title) in 1552. This rechristening of Commines's text popularized memoirs in France and abroad. Most French memoirs afterwards exhibited a distinctive trait clearly distinguishing them from medieval eyewitness histories: their authors quoted and read each other, and they displayed a group awareness that was largely absent from medieval precedents. French memoirists of the second half of the sixteenth century created a tradition and minimized its novelty in common humanist fashion

by referring it back to Caesar in Antiquity, and to Joinville in the Middle Ages, although their main model and impulse was Commynes's oeuvre.

Thus, François de Rabutin published his *Commentaires* first in 1555 and his dedicatory epistle summoned the figure of Caesar as a source of inspiration (389) whereas, in his *Proeme*, he reproduced some of Commynes's claims:

Par ainsi, le default mien de ne sçavoir bien au vif représenter la louenge et le blasme, je desire estre jugé par la presumption precedente, et ma simplicité estre excusée, si en escrivant mon histoire je n'ay usé d'artifices ny enrichy mon stile, pour plaire à plusieurs oreilles delicates qui se delectent en l'ornement de langage; parce que suivant la verité, qui est la fin et l'ame de l'histoire, j'ay esté contraint d'escire les affaires nuëment, comme elles sont advenuës (393).

In his attack against paid historians, Commynes had excluded demonstrative rhetoric from memoir writing as well: "Les chroniqueurs n'escripvent que les chouses a louenges de ceulx de qui ilz parlent, et taisent plusieurs chouses, ou ne sçavent par aulcunes foiz a la verité; et je me delibere de ne parler de chose qui ne soit vraie et que je n'ay veue ou sceue de si grans personnaiges qu'i soient dignes de croire, sans avoir regard aux louenges" (371-2).

Commynes's imitators multiplied erudite references to ancient historians in order to dignify their enterprise. In the dedicatory epistle to King Charles IX, René du Bellay placed his relatives Martin and Guillaume du Bellay's posthumous memoirs alongside the histories of Thucydides and Caesar, from the ancients, and to the books ("livres") written by the "captains" Joinville, Olivier de la Marche, and above all those by Philippe de Commynes (100). Their official duties and their quality as witnesses, they argued, placed them above ordinary chroniclers. René du Bellay also

deplored the lack of worthy captains in the French nation who had written histories thus presenting memoir writing as a national knightly duty: “Il y a eu peu de capitaines qui ayent daigné mettre la main à la plume . . .” (100). Martin du Bellay proposed similar commonplaces in his prologue. Their meta-textual abundance indicates that by the second half of the sixteenth century the memoir genre was well-established in France as a subfield of historiography and that a new horizon of expectation mediated their production and intelligence: “Die neue historiographische Gattung ‘Mémoires’ existierte zwar 1552 erst im paradigmatischen Erwartungshorizont und in diesem einen übertragendem Gattungsexemplar, sie sollte aber bald weitere Exemplare aufweisen” (Kleber 54).

The textual objects that fell within the Renaissance memoirs’ horizon of expectation do not always match their modern counterparts that focus on a public figure’s life story. We have seen that the term “memoir” could be used to describe a variety of historiographical and testimonial practices whose unity rested on truth claims, lack of embellishments, and on a conventional critique of demonstrative rhetoric. Consequently, the poetic unity of the genre has been contested (Jouhaud 23-88). But should we abandon the idea of a memoir genre altogether in making sense out of these texts? Early modern scholars referred to a corpus of historiographical writing as *memoires* distinguished by the quality of their presumed authors: they were both describing and inventing objects that became, by the second half of the sixteenth century, a memoir tradition. Hence, we need to focus next on how humanist scholars read these texts.

## **2 The Humanist Reception**

In reading history, Renaissance humanists employed the rhetorical categories at the core of their education, even though many (Montaigne being the best known) ritually disparaged eloquence and claimed to be writing outside of it. Modern scholars have not sought to classify

memoirs according to the rhetorical categories in which they were first produced. I aim to show in this section that Renaissance writers and readers conceived of memoirs as testimonies, and testimonies had a special and ambiguous place in rhetoric (Cicero, *Topica* 442-3; XX.77).

Any Renaissance schoolboy knew that a testimony was a type of external argument. Invention, in the technical sense – i.e. the first part of rhetoric dealing with finding arguments –, contained two “regions” (*sedes*) of “places” (*loci*) for arguments: internal to the nature of the subject matter like definition and etymology, and external ones, “brought in from without” (*extrinsecus*), like testimonies (Cicero, *Topica* 386-7; I. 8; transl. Hubbel). A testimony as an external place was also called a “extra-technical argument” (*inartificialis argumentum*) and was thought to reside outside of the art of rhetoric; its persuasive force came from authority or the opinion one had of its author: “Quae autem assumuntur extrinsecus, ea maxime ex auctoritate ducuntur” (Cicero, *Topica* 396; IV 24). On the contrary, “artful” arguments were wrought by experts – orators or dialecticians – on a number of internal places (*loci*) like cause, effect, etymology, etc.; their probatory force rested on their “logical ratiocination” (Serjeantson 202-3). External and internal topics had relative values, depending also on the domain of application, but it was their effective combination that brought about persuasion and permitted the establishment of truth, in matters that depended on human faith.

When Renaissance writers and readers of history lauded authors of memoirs for their political or military experience and for their artless histories, they included memoirs within the rhetorical paradigm of external places for extra-technical arguments; they placed memoirs within a “region” of arguments among others, but insufficient by themselves, and not necessarily the most truthful. This is important for understanding the ambiguous reception of memoirs in the sixteenth

century: they were both praised for their authority and suspected for their partiality and imperfection.

I will consider some of the most prominent Renaissance readers of memoirs in France to verify if the proposed hypothesis is correct. Before proceeding, it is necessary to answer a possible objection: that memoir writing as a historiographical genre should not be concerned with arguments but with describing how things really happened. This type of historiography did not exist in Renaissance epistemology. According to a commonplace inherited from Antiquity, reading history prepared men for political life:

But in fact it is hardly an exaggeration to say that all of my predecessors . . . have made this central to their work . . . by claiming not only that there is no more authentic way to prepare and train oneself for political life than by studying history, but also that there is no more comprehensible and comprehensive teacher of the ability to endure with courage the vicissitudes of Fortune than a record of others' catastrophes (Polybius 3; transl. Waterfield).

History was pragmatic: one searched for practical examples and arguments in order to orient real political action. And the best histories, according to this ancient maxim, were written by experienced statesmen. According to Montaigne:

Les seules bonnes histoires sont celles qui ont esté écrites par ceux mesmes qui commandoient aux affaires, ou qui estoient participans à les conduire, ou au moins qui ont eu la fortune d'en conduire d'autres de mesme sorte. Telles sont quasi toutes les Grecques et Romaines. Car plusieurs tesmoins oculaires ayans escrit de mesme

subject . . . s'il y a de la faute, elle doit estre merueilleusement legere, et sur un accident fort douteux (439 ; bk 2, ch.10).

Renaissance memoirs perfectly match these criteria inherited, in Montaigne and his contemporaries' opinion from the ancient world, which also provided the criteria for judging good histories. Montaigne recalls how Asinius Pollio, for instance, criticized Caesar for his lack of prudence in ignoring some of his troops' movements and for his ready acceptance of dubious information. Therefore, in order to establish truth in history it is insufficient to accept at face value a firsthand testimony: one has to confront, in the manner of a judicial investigation ("à la mode d'une information judiciaire"), several testimonies. Carefully avoiding any rhetorical jargon, Montaigne clearly envisaged firsthand narratives as extra-technical arguments needing confrontation and ratiocination in order to ascend to general causes and valuable ideas for moral-political philosophy. It is worth underscoring here, for the general argument of my dissertation, that, unlike us, Montaigne was not exactly interested in the unique autobiographical experience contained in a history, nor did he consider that an authentic account of an experience carried any intrinsic value. This is why, among the moderns, Montaigne eulogized with some moral reserves Guicciardini, for having written truthful histories in which many a time the author himself fared honorably ("en la plupart en a-il esté acteur luy mesme, et en rang honorable"); the essayist then praised his "dear" Comynnes for his naiveté and truthfulness, for his objectivity and lack of demonstrative rhetoric, all of which revealed a man of noble birth and an experienced statesman.

The essayist read according to a well-established horizon of expectations regarding Renaissance memoirs that are partially aligned with our present ideas about what memoirs ought to be and differ sharply in at least one point. He used indistinctly the term *memoires* and a particular type of *histoire* written by experienced politicians who witnessed the events or learned

of them from credible sources. This indicates clearly that, even if he was highly preoccupied with the author's character, he did not consider it necessary that the author participate in all or most of the events narrated nor that the author tell his life story. The essayist paired freely Guicciardini's *History of Italy*, which modern scholars would not classify as a memoir, with Commines's memoirs. An author's authority, so to speak, derived from his competence when allotted public charges. And a comparison with other testimonies, written or not, was needed to establish its persuasive force.

As we have seen, Montaigne acquired his historical canon from Polybius, who was a central authority for historical learning in Renaissance Europe; lectures on his *Histories* were given at the Collège Royal and he rapidly became fashionable among French scholars by the mid-sixteenth century (Dionisotti 179-200). But Montaigne also wrote with an eye on a new form of rich literature on how to write history that was known in early modern Europe as the *ars historiae* or *ars historica* genre.

The *artes historiae* first appeared during the fifteenth-century Italian Renaissance, came to the fore of European historical scholarship in the middle of the sixteenth century, and were canonized by 1579 when influential anthologies were published (Grafton 21). If humanists initially considered history for writing purposes, by the mid-sixteenth century the attention shifted to historical hermeneutics: in the 1560s François Baudouin and Jean Bodin wrote *artes historiae* that dealt mainly with the question of how to read histories (Grafton 21). The French writers of the *artes historicae* are essential to the study of early modern memoirs, for the *artes historicae* in France offered the first explicit reading and theories of the memoir genre; one would look in vain for conceptualizations of memoirs within Renaissance *artes poeticae*.

A great admirer of Polybius, François Baudouin also thought that it was preferable to read historians who had witnessed the events and who took part in them: “Equidem optarem, ut scriptores ea demum narrent, quae viderunt, quibusque interfuerunt. Quod et Polybius profitetur” (54). But Baudouin broke with the ancient historiographical tradition in at least two significant ways: he postulated the necessity of conjugating historiography with legal studies, and he widened the scope of historical inquiry by incorporating religious history and, more significantly, travel narratives, noting the ancients’ ignorance of geography. Julian Franklin, Donald R. Kelley, George Huppert, and Anthony Grafton, most notably, have amply studied the specificity of Renaissance historiographical scholarship. I will discuss Baudouin’s programmatic text only in as much as it touches upon memoirs.

Baudouin’s theory argues for the necessity of inquiring into legal history for contextual interpretation, and incorporates legal methods into the establishment of truth. The historian would investigate, for instance, the veracity of sources in a similar fashion to a legal scholar. He would first verify the reliability of documents based on their historical proximity to the events narrated and he would carefully evaluate the witnesses’ (“testes”) credibility through a confrontation of testimonies. The historian would privilege firsthand documents and primary actors/authors (“*primi auctores*”) over copies and secondary sources (“*rivuli deducti*”), in the reconstruction of facts. Consequently, statesmen’s testimonies are of the highest interest for such a history. Therefore, Baudouin praised ancient authors of memoirs (*commentarii, vita sua*):

I would truly praise the great dignity of History if I added three princes: Sulla, Caesar, Augustus, that she celebrated to such an extent that she not only obliged them to herself, but herself to them with respect to benefits and to merits. I say those three greatest men – if anybody was ever great – in the greatest Republic, the

noblest of men both because of their practical science and because of the glory of their deeds, wearing the gown with equal dignity as the armor, at home and abroad, the best in both genres, let's acknowledge, I say, history as their teacher, with which they adorned themselves when they both brilliantly did what was to be written and wrote what was to be done.<sup>2</sup>

History obliges or bound (“devincta”) herself to authors of histories who also acted as leaders and lawmakers for the value of their practical knowledge. Done correctly, history would become the best political science for the good administration of the state. Adapting Cicero’s praise of agriculture, François Baudouin believed history to be a royal science useful not only for kings, but for anybody taking part in governing the state (146).

When Baudouin considers medieval historians (“auorum nostrorum aetatem”), he mentions first Philippe de Commynes whom French and Flemish knights (“equites Galli et Belgae”) esteemed worthy of comparison with ancient historians (“quem iactabant et gloriabantur cum veteribus historicis esse comparandum”), although Commynes’s legal scholarship was lacking: “Ego sinceræ bonæque fidei laude Cominaeum, alios literarum gloria excelluisse agnosco. Utinam vero maiorem in iis Jurisprudentiam laudare etiam possem” (148). Commynes’s lack of interest in legal matters had characterized the historiography of his day. Baudouin’s own age thrives in legal historians such as Paolo Jovio and Andrea Alciato.

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<sup>2</sup>“Verum historiae magnum decus laudavero, si tres principes adiunxero, Sullam, Caesarem, Augustum, quos illa tantopere celebravit, non eorum minus erga se, quam suis erga illos beneficiis meritisque devincta: illos dico tres maximos in maxima Republica (si quis unquam magni fuerunt) viros, et admirabili rerum sive gerendarum scientia, sive gestarum gloria nobilissimos: ac quidem in toga non minus quam in sago: domi (inquam) et foris: quo magis in utroque genere magistrum eorum agnoscamus, quam et illi vicissim exornarunt, cum quidem praeclare et facerent scribendam et scriberent faciendam” (141). All translations, unless otherwise specified, are mine.

In setting the goals for a more legalistic historiography, *De Institutione historiae universae* also anticipated a generic trend for memoir writing: towards the end of the sixteenth century, more and more magistrates wrote memoirs that allied narratives of military campaigns to political and legal matters.

Jean Bodin further elaborated this program in his *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* five years later. His ideal of a plain history solely concerned with truth and devoid of the rhetoric of praise and blame closely echoes the expectations regarding memoir writing ever since Sleidan and Sauvage brought Commynes to the attention of learned readers. The best historian, according to Bodin, took part in state affairs, and was both naturally prudent and trained in jurisprudence. Memoirists perfectly embody this ideal. Marc Fumaroli considers that Bodin gave the “first definition of memoirs” by writing down its three main criteria: the historian’s independence, his competence based on experience, separation of history from demonstrative rhetoric and from moral philosophy (“Les Mémoires, ou l’Historiographie royale en procès” 228). However, Bodin warned against a pitfall of firsthand narratives: writing shortly after the events might influence the author in depicting his friends favorably and his enemies unjustly. Thus, even if Bodin praised Commynes’ competence, he pointed out precisely the Burgundian fugitive’s partisanship in portraying Louis XI and his animosity towards his former suzerain, Charles the Bold. Bodin also dismissed the Flemish historian Meyer’s opposite narrative disparaging Louis XI as a tyrant and Commynes as a traitor. Instead, the author of the *Methodus* praised a foreigner, Paolo Emilio, who, not having been born in France and not having been directly implicated in the events, satisfied with his writings the conditions of a good history that Tacitus had theorized in his *Annals* (Bodin, *Methodus* 125).

Incidentally, Paolo Emilio was a professional historiographer, an *artis expertus*, author of a *De Rebus gestis Francorum*, the type of rhetorically elaborated history Commynes claimed, in his prologue, to be contributing to with his inexpert testimony (*memoire*). Autopsy (eye-witnessing) always exposed memoirists to the suspicion of partisanship. Memoirs needed the competent historian's judgment, who would treat them as depositions and compare them to other testimonies. Thus, by the 1560s, when memoirs became a fashionable genre with a newly found ancient noble tradition, theorists of history both encouraged their writing and considered them scientifically insufficient, because they implicitly categorized them within the region of external arguments.

At the turn of the century, the Protestant historian Lancelot du Voisin de La Popelinière published a series of theoretical and practical vernacular works on historiography, *L'histoire des histoires*, that drew significantly on Baudouin's and Bodin's methods; La Popelinière, however, believed that a "perfect" (meaning accomplished) history should be both eloquent and truthful. One of La Popelinière's most original traits is his insistence on the importance of writing a national history, whereas previously, Baudouin and Bodin explored the possibilities of a universal cosmopolitan historiography.

In La Popelinière's opinion, there had been no good history of the French people ("histoire des François") because of the previous historians' incompetence: most of them functioned as ecclesiastics without any military or political experience. Reprimanding noblemen, magistrates and even men of finance (*financiers*) for neglecting to write histories appropriate to their social role and professional skill, the theorist nevertheless commended the clergy for its interest in writing and financing histories. In doing so, La Popelinière was referring to one of the classical criteria for good testimonies as external arguments, namely that the most authoritative were those given by the best skilled in their own art: "Ad humanam auctoritatem haec pertinent: consuetudo, fama,

antiquitas, *testimonium peritorum in sua arte*, iudicium sapientium, aut plurimum, aut meliorum” (Du Moulin 154-5; Serjeantson 203; my it.).

Thus, the Protestant historian singled out Commynes for his objective description of Charles VIII’s Italian campaigns, praised his “noble race,” and criticized that which for Bodin would have been a quality: Commynes’ sacrifice of eloquence in his quest for faithfulness (80). In the Protestant historian’s opinion, Monluc, a Catholic zealot from Gascony, failed to write a faithful history due to his hatred of Huguenots and wrote his discourse disorderly and in a soldierly fashion (“à la soldade”): La Popelinière advised gentlemen, who wished to pass down to posterity the memory of their deeds, not to emulate him (83).

A huge gap separates the late sixteenth-century theorist from Montaigne who preferred above all the “parler...soldatesque” (178; bk.1, ch. 25), the inartificial manner of speaking that Caesar best exemplified in his *Commentaries*. La Popelinière seems to have taken a step back, if we were to use a teleological approach, with regard to the *artes historicae* of the 1560s, which customarily denied any preoccupation with polished style wary of losing sight of truth. But he did enlarge the scope of historical sources so as to include testimonies from all social strata towards a new national history. This was the logical consequence of viewing testimonies within the traditional topical paradigm of the “inartificial” external argument: the testimonies of the wise and of the experts in each art should prevail in informing a “perfect” authoritative history. But memoirs, prominent statesmen’s testimonies, offered only a partial worldview centered on the authors’ experience and personal network; they were, according to La Popelinière, incomplete histories. However, in the hierarchy of available historical narratives, La Popelinière placed them very high. The Huguenot theorist classified historical narratives according to their authors’ public offices. The authorial socio-political competence determined in turn the truthfulness of the history:

. . . les dressees [the histories] par autres [other than religious authors], se trouveront d'autant plus desvoyees de leur perfection et solide louange, que l'Autheur aura esté poussé d'une plus ou moins louable fin. Comme le noble sera d'autant plus croiable que le Justicier, que l'eguillon d'honneur, l'aura plustost poussé à la verité et autre devoir que le Justicier, lequel n'aura esté sollicité que d'un vil profit: Et cestui-cy que le Medecin et tous autres qui butent au seul et entier profit plus qu'à autre fin (21).

Historical examples abundantly prove this. Caesar, Augustus and Tacitus, men of distinguished public careers, were always preferable to Livy. Among the moderns:

...aucun ne deniera l'avantage au sire de Jonville, à Philippes de Comines, à Guillaume et Martin du Bellay entre les François sur Froissard, Monstrelet et autres qui les ont suivy. Non plus qu'à Guichardin ayans des principales charges de proviseur en l'armee du Pape sur tous les Ecclesiastics, Orateurs, Pedantes et autres de petite estofe des Italiens (21-22).

La Popelinière, like the best legal scholars of the previous generation, applied here a basic forensic principle: the witness's character mattered more than the testimony. One's social function influenced most significantly one's character and credibility. The great division among historians, as it is clear from the binary examples that La Popelinière put forward, occurs between gentlemen and ignoble men of letters: histories should take into account testimonies from all social strata, but their authority depended on their authors' social status.

Although humanists disagreed on the value of ornate style and rhetorical devices, they all adhered to the practice of reading memoirs as a historiographical genre that pertained to the larger

category of testimonies as external arguments. As such, memoirs were valuable sources and they primarily inspired credence or diffidence not because of the internal evidence and the authenticity of the experience narrated, but because of their authors' character.

### **3 Character, Autopsy, and Author**

Memoirists typically refuse, at least declaratively and with false modesty, to employ figures of style and the rhetoric of praise and blame in their works. Yet they fully exploit the most important part of rhetoric: the author's character. Aristotle defined, for the first time systematically, the notion of *ethos* or moral character in his art of rhetoric:

Of means of persuading by speaking there are three species: some consist in the character of the speaker; others in the disposing of the hearer in a certain way; others in the thing itself which is said, by reason of proving, or appearing to prove the point. Persuasion is effected by means of the moral character, when the speech shall have been spoken in such a way as to render the speaker worthy of confidence, for we place confidence in the good to a wider extent, and with less hesitation, on all subjects generally; but on points where no real accuracy exists, but there is room for doubt, we even entirely confide in them. This feeling should arise by means of the speech, and not by reason of its having been preconceived that the speaker is a certain kind of man. . . . moral character nearly, I may say, carries with it the most sovereign efficacy in making credible (12; transl. Th. Hobbes).

In this view, *Ethos* is the most efficient part of persuasion, superior to both *logos* and *pathos*, and the discourse itself should inform the speaker's moral character regardless of any extra-discursive idea the audience might have about the orator. While modern theorists disagree upon the discursive

or extra-discursive construction of ethos, Aristotle's definition describes perfectly the question of character in early modern memoirs.

Early modern readers rarely ventured beyond the memoirist discourse to check the author's credibility. Only in the late nineteenth century, and more systematically in the first half of the twentieth when narrative sources were met with suspicion, did historians start to favor archival evidence when estimating authors' credibility and corroborating their narratives. In this fashion, a modern historian, Karl Bittmann, concluded that Comynes was very imprecise if not counterfactual as a historical source, a view that Joël Blanchard has challenged in his works. On the contrary, in the sixteenth century, readers would compare different testimonies on the same subject, and they evaluated circularly the other testimonies based on their character as well, as we have seen in the previous subchapter. Bodin and Montaigne judged the author's character based on what the memoirist had omitted in his story and the way he had placed himself vis-à-vis his political patrons. Most of the time, the author's self-representation in his narrative and previous readers' favorable judgment sufficed to render him credible. Since the early modern critical readership of memoirs has been discussed in the previous subchapter, it is essential to turn now to the authors' self-representation in memoir writing.

Comynes's prologue introduces the author as a privileged witness in his former quality of chamberlain to Louis XI:

Du temps de sa [king Louis XI's] jeunesse ne sçauroye je parler, sinon pour ce que je luy en ay ouy parler et dire; mais depuis le temps que je vins en son service, jusques à l'heure de son trespas, où j'estoye present, ay fait plus continuelle residence avec luy, que nul autre de l'estat à quoy je le servoye, qui, pour le moins, a tousjours esté de chambellan, ou occupé en ses grandes affaires (1).

The narrative would focus only on events he had eye-witnessed. Such a declaration should not be taken for granted: all memoirists claim to be writing only what they had seen, but they introduce information they know from secondary honorable sources as well, and all of them reproduce private direct speeches they could not have possibly heard (Harari 27-42). Cheverny, for instance, forced to retire to his estate at Esclimont, rendered, in his memoirs, the queen mother's direct speech behind closed doors, one might assume, to her son King Henri III after the latter had the duke of Guise assassinated: "Mon fils, Dieu veuille qu'ainsi soit, et que vous vous en trouviez bien: ne perdez temps d'y bien soigner, je vous prie, car aux choses faictes les conseils en doivent estre pris" (85).<sup>3</sup> Cheverny claimed, of course, that all this information had been faithfully reported to him, but what other rhetorical device could render a discourse more dramatic and more fictional than direct speeches? Autopsy and testimonies were clearly highly conventional rhetorical claims.

Memoirists build their persuasive force on the representation of the author as witnesses. Comynes offered his memoirs to Angelo Cato as a deposition, retaining one of the most basic meanings of the word *mémoire*. When Henri de Mesmes modestly claimed to have grouped together in a continuous narrative several short accounts ("seulement ay-je remis par ordre ces petits memoires"), the magistrate implicitly suggested that his *memoires* deserved credence because he founded them on authentic papers transcribing the events immediately after they had occurred (fol. 17 recto).<sup>4</sup> He merely applied to the history of his life a basic principle François Baudoin had outlined: good histories should look into authentic documents produced in temporal proximity to the events narrated. Agrippa d'Aubigné's choice of adopting a third person narrative,

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<sup>3</sup>Unless otherwise specified, all references to Cheverny's memoir are taken from the first edition published in Paris, in 1636. Nineteenth-century critical editions are unreliable: in the passage quoted above, for instance, Michaud and Poujoulat read "songer" instead of "soigner" (491).

<sup>4</sup>Unless otherwise specified, all references to De Mesmes's memoir are made to his autograph manuscript: MS français 729. In the only modern edition, Edouard Fremy reads, in the passage quoted above, "ai-je réunis" instead of "ai-je remis" (127). The edition abounds in misreadings.

in a quest for a semblance of objectivity, might have well been an imitation not so much of the Caesarian model but of the legal practice in which a third party transcribed, in the third person, the witness' first person oral testimony. It is certain that D'Aubigné dictated his memoirs to a secretary and then corrected them personally, as Gilbert Schrenk notes in his edition of D'Aubigné's *Vie à ses enfants* (18).

The strategic use of authentic documents further highlights the modernity of this type of testimonial historiography. Nicolas de Neufville-Villeroy often reproduced, in his apologetic papers, letters proving that Henri III had granted his son certain privileges that the same king had denied afterwards. Villeroy also integrated speeches that he had delivered himself during his service for the Duke of Mayenne. He designed his two apologies, which editors grouped, with other papers, under the heading *Mémoires d'Etat*, as long letters to his *friends*, his political peers, Pomponne de Bellièvre and Jeannin. Letters and memoirs diverge because of their different length and content, but they both use a plain style and aim at creating the impression of authenticity. Villeroy organized his political autobiographies as testimonies to his friends, and he integrated therein written documents to serve as legal proof.

In her study of witnessing in medieval and early modern travel narratives, *The Invention of the Eyewitness*, Andrea Frisch distinguished between “epistemic” and “ethic” witnessing. The former grounded in personal first-hand experience is distinctly “modern,” whereas the latter validates itself through the social status of the witness rather than his/her factual experience. Even though one could describe the disappearance of the ethic witness as having taken place much later than the seventeenth century (as Andrea Frisch suggests), the conceptual taxonomy bears an undeniable heuristic component. Renaissance memoirists founded their truth claim on a conjugation of epistemic experiential criteria with more traditional ethic testimony that rested on

the witness's social identity and network. Memoirs are both "medieval" and "modern" in this respect, and they accommodate common expectations regarding early modern historiography.

One of the most striking features of many early memoirs was their authors' constant invitation and sometimes challenge to other honorable eyewitnesses to (dis)prove the objectivity of their narratives. If the author's individual memory and its immediate transcription – the memoir – failed him, the distinguished readers could always reestablish factual truth by consulting other gentlemen from the royal entourage: "Et la ou je fauldroye, trouverés monr du Boschage et aultres, qui myeulx vous en sçauroient parler et le coucher en meilleur langaige que moy" (Commynes 3). The invocation of a noble collective memory in the establishment of truth echoed the self-representation of the subject as honorable because of his birth and social employment. With some memoirists like Monluc, whose reputation suffered serious doubts, the appeals launched to other gentlemen sound like challenges and are ubiquitous in his narrative.

The interrelated and almost synonymous questions of good birth, distinguished services, and impeccable reputation mattered more than the *logos*, "the thing itself which is said," as Aristotle defined the third part of the art of persuasion. Most memoirists, or their editors, integrated or attached to their memoirs noble and mostly fictional genealogies of their families (Cheverny, Tavannes, Henri de Mesmes). Some were content simply to mention their immediate family's nobility, as when Agrippa d'Aubigné started his narrative by underlining his father's title ("Jean d'Aubigné, seigneur de Brie en Xaintonge") and military deeds.

The memoirist defined himself through what he did, and he availed himself of the role his birth destined him for: military and civilian services bestowed to his suzerain or sovereign. Thus, the memoirist represents his persona, to use Irit Kleiman's formula, through "a narrative of self-through-subjection" (4). Typically, the author starts his life story at the end of his knightly training:

“au saillir de [s]on enfance, et en l’age de pouvoir monter a cheval” (Commynes 4); “mis hors de page” (Monluc 30).<sup>5</sup> Once the author’s character reaches his military initiation, he naturally becomes a subject either to a great noble house or to the monarch.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century more and more magistrates, the new aristocracy of the gown or *robins*, started adopting the prestigious memoirist practice. They filled a gap – the previous memoirists’ lack of legal training – that François Baudouin had deplored with regard to Commynes and medieval historians. Some sixteenth-century *robin* memoirists (Cheverny and Villeroy) simply omitted to mention their education, preferring to assure their readers of their good birth and to begin their stories *in medias res* with their promotion to distinguished civilian offices. Thus, they bypassed the military initiation topos to represent themselves as worthy subjects. Henri de Mesmes expanded upon his legal education. He gave a detailed description of his day-to-day readings, examinations, distinguished lectures he delivered, and, most importantly, he enumerated a good number of his professors and colleagues who became public figures. Henri de Mesmes strategically elevated the *robin* group and ennobled his own social role, but his memoir could not fully eschew the genealogical and military commonplaces of knightly memoirs. Although his prologue modestly denies *robins* any place in collective memory (“ceux de robes longues n’ont moien de se recommander par faicts memorables”), Henri de Mesmes introduced himself by detailing a genealogy of his family going back to a Scottish knight who had supposedly settled down in Guyenne around the year 1200. Later, in his narrative, Henri de Mesmes mentioned that he had had a brief successful career as a military commander during his stay in Sienna, while the real commander, Blaise de Monluc, was absent. Henry de Mesmes’ official charge in Sienna had

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<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise specified, all quotations from Monluc’s *Commentaires* are taken from Courteault’s critical edition.

been that of *chef de justice*, on Henri II's behalf. The *robin* memoirist, like other men of justice, mimicked gestures associated with knightly values in a quest for legitimacy and self-promotion.

Agrippa d'Aubigné, exceptionally, made a synthesis of *robin* and military strategies of character formation in *Sa vie à ses enfants*. The introductory pages to his life story offer an image of a child prodigy fluent in classical languages and skillful in difficult and doctrinally dangerous arts such as astrology. His self-portrait as a young man brings together the encyclopedic dimension of his education with a natural warrior instinct so powerful that neither his father nor his tutors could quell it: his curator's opposition notwithstanding, he escaped through the window by himself and participated, as an adolescent, in the Second Religious War where he received his military baptism.

The authors' positive self-representation as competent, noble eyewitnesses were reinforced by a systematic denigration of chroniclers, and the image of the professional historian suffered an unprecedented attack. René du Bellay believed that some paid historians stole the honor from worthy gentlemen and attributed it to undeserving people, and that, in their lies, not only misled a judge and a few individuals like common false witnesses did, but also wronged posterity in the process. He quoted his deceased relative Martin du Bellay as saying that false historians should receive double the sentence reserved for common false witnesses:

Il me souvient luy avoir ouy dire maintesfois (lors qu'il détestoit les mensonges et adulations d'aucuns historiographes de son temps) que ceux qui escrivoient faux en histoire, devoyent estre punis au double des faux tesmoins; et avoit raison d'ainsi le dire, car, bien que l'histoire ne soit autre chose qu'un tesmoignage de ce qui s'est passé en chacun siècle, la conséquence de la fauceté d'icelle est d'autant plus grande, qu'elle ne circonvient un juge au dommage de quelques particuliers,

comme le faux tesmoignage, mais abuse ceux du temps présent et la postérité, qui recevront par ce moyen le faux pour le vray, estant en ce faisant l'honneur desrobé à qui il appartient, et donné à qui ne le mérite (100).

The memoirists' negative views of chroniclers also explains the ambiguous representation of writing in memoirs. The written word is both a sign of power and an object of ridicule. Commynes proudly portrays himself as head of the king's intelligence service writing letters with the power to direct and control agents all over the kingdom and beyond. Monluc epitomizes the more humorous side of the portrait of the memoirist as a writer. Although he acted himself as head of the secret service in Guyenne, and had many informants, Monluc remembers:

J'ay toute ma vie hay ces escritures, ayment mieux passer toute une nuict la cuirasse sur le dos que non pas à faire escrire, car j'ay esté mal propre à ce mestier. Il y peut avoir du deffaut de mon costé, comme j'ay remarqué aux autres qui s'en soucient trop, ayments mieux estre dans leurs cabinets, qu'aux tranchées (607).

He then caricaturizes the duke of Guise who preferred to write orders by hand instead of having them dictated to an ordinary secretary. The narrator caustically adds that the duke would be fit to replace Jean du Tillet in the Parliament. The reference might also be a hidden attack against Jean du Tillet's project of scholarly memoirs, a competing historiographical subgenre. Monluc is also one of the rare memoirists to state openly that he dictated, not written his *Commentaires*. Even though dictation was, probably, the actual dominant practice for composing memoirs, authors would usually not care to mention it. But the impoverished knight from Gascony felt particularly threatened by the growth in power of a new competing social group, *la noblesse de robe longue*, whose strength rested precisely in the written word of the law.

Magistrates particularly highlighted in their memoirs the power inherent in writing down and countersigning royal edicts and treaties. They acted as technocrats trying to inform and to adapt royal orders to the policies and constitution of the kingdom that they alone governed (Sutherland, *The French Secretaries of State* 186). Literacy in Latin became gradually invested with courtly prestige. During the 1570 marital negotiation between Charles IX and the Emperor's daughter, Cheverny accompanied the duke of Anjou, the future Henri III, to welcome the princess whom the archbishop of Mainz, an imperial elector, was accompanying. The archbishop spoke only Latin, and Cheverny played the role of entertaining the distinguished guest: “. . . et je reconnus lors que, mesme à la Cour, bien que les sciences et cette langue y soient mesprisees, quiconque en peut avoir la capacité, en doit conserver quelque usage facile, pour ne demeurer court et s'en servir aux occasions” (22). Cheverny's literacy is in sharp contrast with Commynes' excusing himself for his Latin illiteracy. By the seventeenth century, the political power of literacy was so strong that some memoirists like Jean de Saulx-Tavannes delivered vituperative discourses in their memoirs against the use of Latin in public affairs, considering it a weakening of the “old” feudal aristocracy.

In spite of the attack against rhetoric, present in all memoirs, and the attack against Latin literacy, present in some military memoirs, all the authors praised classical and even some medieval authors. Commynes mentioned Boccaccio, but also Livy, who was also one of Monluc's favorite authors together with Caesar and Guicciardini. Contrary to their professed ignorance of rhetoric, memoirists greatly profited in their own writing from their readings. Monluc would inform his *Commentaires* with elaborate direct speeches in the style of the historian of the Roman Republic, and he would even render the local color of his speakers in a quest for decorum, as when he reproduced Lautrec's Gascon dialect: “Monluc, mon amic, iou n'oublideray jamai lou service

qu'abes fait au Rei, et m'en souviera tant que io vivrai" (39). Early modern memoirists read and quoted Cicero, Tacitus, Sallustus, Plutarch, and, obviously, Commynes in a movement that afforded more authority to their own histories. Commynes already envisaged his memoirs as a guidebook for princes and noblemen, and all memoirists adopted the utilitarian claim to prepare nobility for military and civilian charges: "Et aussi faiz mon compte que bestes ne simples gens s'amuseroient point a lire ces Mémoires, mais princes ou gens de court y trouveront de bons advertissement a mon advis" (Commynes 210). All this indicates their authorial intention of creating an autonomous work rather than a witness's deposition needing further elaboration.

Nevertheless, the question of authorial intention should not be overemphasized: memoirs appeared in an early modern cultural setting that had little respect for the autograph manuscript and for the real author's intentions. The social group that read, distributed, and refashioned these testimonial writings played a key role in the emergence of the memoir genre, sometimes independently of the nominal authors' will. The quality of witness was reinforced by representing the author's strong ties to a leading social group and his vocation to be a public servant. The memoirist would represent himself alongside his friends, peers and relatives. And, as I will show next, the same friends, peers, and relatives sometimes actively intervened in the writing and editing of the memoirs.

#### **4 Authorial Ghosts**

François de Rabutin, author of the first French memoir after the publication of Commynes' work, recollected an interesting story in his dedicatory epistle that scholars of the memoir genre have neglected thus far. Fearing that the commentaries he initially conceived would not be worthy of publication, Rabutin consulted the Master of Requests Barthélemy, who, after proofreading them, praised them and recommended him to his friend, the professional historian Pierre Paschal.

The latter offered initially to improve Rabutin's style and to put the memoirs in good form ("bonne forme"), but was too busy writing a Latin history of France and so further referred Rabutin to another humanist and good friend of his, Guy de Bruès, who was too occupied as well to rework Rabutin's entire memoir, and only "retained" ("retint") Book VI. The insecure memoirist finally decided to consult a friend of his, Bernard du Poey de Luc en Bear, and requested "qu'il daignast tant prendre la peine pour moy, que me secourir en ce qu'il cognoistroit y defaillir de propriété de langage, liaison de sentences, et autres choses" (389). Four humanists, therefore, corrected Rabutin's memoirs and at least two of them intervened actively in the writing process. The nature of their modifications remains unclear: in Rabutin's own words, they made stylistic adjustments and "other things." To what extent then can we consider Rabutin the author of his *Commentaires*? Is this apparent collective authorship particular to Rabutin's work?

The only peculiarity here is that the "author" explicitly names his friendly cowriters. Collective authorship accounts, I claim, for many, if not most French early modern memoirs, and the main difficulty in realizing the extent of this phenomenon lies in the fact that most cowriters remain unnamed. But the available texts, their manuscript tradition, and their editorial history show traces of ghostwriting.

Before looking for genetic traces, I should perhaps specify the chosen subtitle. The term "ghostwriting" might sound too modern and linked to the mass culture of the industrial era. But the other available denominations (copyist, scribe, secretary) are insufficient and historically circumscribed. In his study on Pierre Bergeron, an expert in travel narrative rewriting, Grégoire Holtz uses the same concept (*ghost writer*) to designate Bergeron's similar co-writing practices, and he prudently notes that the "delegation of the traveler's speech (*parole du voyageur*) to a professional writer (*rédacteur savant*)" was typical for late-Renaissance travel literature, but "not

systematic” (12-13). I aim to show, in this subchapter, that ghostwriting was quite systematic, at least in memoir writing. Holtz’s study is relevant to my preoccupations because both travel narratives and memoirs fell under the rhetorical category of testimonies; they were necessarily part of the same early modern culture of testimony that privileged not so much the individual and his unique experience, but its inscription in, confirmation of, and additions to a shared reservoir of knowledge. Similar interventions of “secondary authors” happened in Renaissance pilgrim narratives, as Anne-Sophie Germain-De Franceschi shows in her book *D’Encre et de poussière: l’écriture du pèlerinage à l’épreuve de l’intimité du manuscrit*. There are of course differences: Germain-De Franceschi points, for instance, to the fact that secondary authors voice their presence in the text and correct the primary authors. Such a direct contestation of the nominal author’s authority, so to speak, is absent in memoirs, where usually ghostwriters remain silent. Nevertheless, the phenomena of collective intervention and editorial ventriloquism are certainly connected, and they need to be explained through their ambiguous status. My hypothesis holds true at least for how memoirs conceived in Renaissance France.

The early modern culture of memoirs employed at least two non-mutually exclusive ghostwriting styles: the nominal author could ask for the help of friends and relatives, or friends, relatives and editors could reorganize and modify some papers and publish them as memoirs under the name of a deceased author. But modern eighteenth- and nineteenth-century editors freely manipulated texts as well to fit preconceived ideas about memoirs being part of a general chronological history of the French nation written by great French individuals. These latter ghostwriting practices reflected a modern mass culture dominated by a Romantic sensibility, a nationalist ideology, and commercial imperatives.

An early indication of early modern memoirists' penchant for ghostwriting was arrived at by the modern editor Paul Courteault, who noticed that a speech justifying the Franco-Ottoman alliance by Monluc's learned brother that the memoirist claimed to be translating from Italian was not in Blaise de Monluc's style (81-2). Jean de Monluc, bishop of Valence had probably inserted the French version of his speech into his brother's *Commentaires*. Blaise de Monluc's brother, a diplomat and jurist well-versed in classical learning, might have helped the nominal author more than the latter would have admitted. This would explain the erudite references and the general well-wrought character of the *Commentaries*. One of the best manuscripts of the *Commentaires* (the second part of the MS français 5011 from the BnF) was owned by Henri II de Mesmes, Henri I de Mesmes's grandson. Henri II de Mesmes had obtained it by marrying Jean de Balagny's daughter in 1628 (Anselme 7: 291). Balagny, marshal of France, was the bishop of Valence Jean de Monluc's illegitimate son. The bishop of Valence died in 1579, two years after his brother Blaise de Monluc's death, and he might have reworked the manuscript he possessed during this time. The *Commentaires* under Blaise de Monluc's name contain many eulogistic references to the bishop of Valence. Even if the two were brothers, this sharply contradicted Blaise de Monluc's dislike of courtiers and men of letters. Jean de Monluc seems to have contributed consistently to his brother's *Commentaires*. But, as we will see with other cases, it is impossible to assess the extent of the intervention in the absence of autograph manuscripts and copies.

The most common memoir ghostwriting practices took place posthumously. The bishop of Chartres (1579-1620), Chancellor Cheverny's son, continued his father's memoir from the point where the chancellor interrupted it to its natural end: the death of the author in 1599. The first edition of Cheverny's memoir appeared in 1636 with the privilege given on July 7, 1635. It contained the bishop of Chartres' modifications, a genealogy of the Hurault-Cheverny family

preceded the memoirs, and two *Instructions* to Cheverny's eldest son and daughter succeeded them. Fragments of the memoirs circulated with some stylistic changes in a few allograph manuscripts, with one such text containing passages dispersed and sometimes amplified throughout the edited memoir entitled *Les Ages des enffans de Messire Philippes Hurault*. Listing the names of the distinguished people who attended the births, marriages, and funerals of Cheverny's children, the short manuscript text hesitates between a third person and a first person narrative: "Le treizieme jour de May 1566 Philippes Hurault, Seigneur de Cheverny, fut marié avec Anne de Thou" and below "Marguerite par Madame de Vibraye ma sœur" (MS BnF fr. 16963 fol. 9). Deaths of relatives and princes of the blood also appear in this register that seems to have been originally a *livre de raison*. Cheverny's account of his disgrace, followed by the duke of Guise's and his brother's assassinations, and Catherine of Medici and Henry III's deaths, end the paper telling the story of the proximity of Cheverny's family to the crown and to the political elite.

The chancellor wrote the discourse on the *Ages of Cheverny's Children* after Henri IV's coronation: parts of it are almost identical to certain passages from the edited memoir. The comparison of a manuscript entry with the corresponding edited passage will make clear the type of differences between the two texts:

Le vingt et troiziesme septembre 1572, madame de Cheverny accoucha a Paris en son logis pres St. Germain de l'Auxerrois de son premier enfant qui fut baptisé en l'eglise dudict St. Germain. Et furent parrains Monsieur le duc d'Anjou, Henry frere du roy, qui depuis a esté roy, avec Henry roy de Navarre, depuis aussi Roy, et Madame la duchesse de Lorraine, sœur du Roy Charles, qui lors regnait, et dudict Henry. Et fut nommé sur les fonds Henry, et depuis appelé sieur d'Ecclimont, qui

mourut a Vibraye en l'aage de xviii mois ou il est enterré. Et fut le premier baptesme en l'Eglise Catholique auquel avoit assisté [sic] le roy Henry de Navarre ayant esté reduit catholique le 24<sup>e</sup> jour d'Aoust auparavant audit an 1572. Et le dernier jour de may 1574 le roy Charles mourut au bois de Vicennes [sic] de la malladie du poulmon (MS fr. 16963 fol. 9 ro).

Logically, the manuscript continues with the next born child. In the published memoir, the passage corresponds to a strange interruption in Cheverny's narrative between the brief description of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre and the siege of La Rochelle in 1573:

Le xxiiii [sic] septembre ensuivant, audit an de soizante et douze, la dame de Cheverny ma femme accoucha de son premier fils à Paris, qui fut baptizé à Saint Germain de Lauxerrois, tenu sur les Saints Fonds de Baptesme par mondict seigneur le Duc d'Anjou, frere du Roy, par le Roy de Navarre et madame la Duchesse de Lorraine, sœur du Roy; il fut nommé Henry, qui fut le premier baptesme où jamais avoit assisté le roy de Navarre en l'Eglise Catholique, en laquelle il s'estoit remis et reduict depuis la Saint Barthelemy seulement. Mondit fils, appelé le sieur d'Eguemont, mourut à Vibraye en l'âge de 18 mois (*Memoires* 25).

Unlike the manuscript of the *Aages*, the printed memoir does not specify the future quality of king of France that Henry of Navarre was to acquire, and mentions Charles IX's death later on in the narrative. The memoir enumerates baptisms and funerals of Cheverny's children between a siege and an epic battle with minor or non-existent transitions. In all likelihood, somebody merged the *Aages*, which Cheverny conceived to preserve the memory of his household as a *livre de raison*, with his life-discourse, as Cheverny referred to his papers about his public career, a discourse that,

as stated in his prologue, Cheverny intended to serve as a testament and as an instruction to his son and friends.

Philippe de Hurault, abbot of Pontlevoy and bishop of Chartres, gathered his father's dispersed papers and claimed to have remained faithful to his father's reports ("memoires") and drafts ("brouillons") and to have added nothing but "quelques mots pour la liaison du discours et pour plus claire explication d'iceluy, en d'autres endroits qu'il n'avoit eu le loisir de redire et expliquer selon son intention" (339). The extent of Pontevoy's intervention is not altogether clear: he might have joined himself the domestic history, which mentioned his own noble baptism, to historical events. It is likely that the bishop did not just provide the memoir with a description of the author's death but that he was a secondary author himself. At least a third hand intervened in the final form of the printed edition because the genealogy preceding the memoir mentions the year 1636, whereas the abbot of Pontlevoy died in 1620.

The death of the author and his revival as a memoirist through family intervention characterized Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's work as well.<sup>6</sup> The extant manuscript tradition for the *Memoirs of Gaspard de Tavanès*, which was written by his son, Jean de Saulx-Tavannes, seems to copy seventeenth-century editions. Early modern editors organized Tavannes' life story topically and thematically as a manual informing military and political prudence.

The Bibliothèque Nationale de France holds under the same call number (fol. La20-30) two distinct printings, albeit in the same type and by the same printer, of the *Mémoires de Gaspard de Saulx*. No place and no year of printing are given. They both bear the arms of the Tavannes family, and they are both entitled *Memoires de tres-noble, et tres-illustre de Gaspard de Saulx*,

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<sup>6</sup> *Tavannes* is the common spelling used by modern historians, whereas *Tavanès* is the way the bearers of this name signed their documents.

*seigneur de Tavanès, Mareschal de France, admiral des Mers de Levant, Gouverneur de Provence, conseiller du Roy, et capitaine de cent hommes d'armes*. However, one contains another volume at the end, coming from the same printer: the *Memoires de Messire Guillaume de Saulx, seigneur de Tavanès, chevalier des deux Ordres du Roy, Lieutenant General pour Sa Majesté au duché de Bourgogne*. Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's brother Guillaume fought in the opposing royalist camp, and wrote a memoir himself. The volume containing both memoirs of the Leaguer and Royalist brothers displays another peculiarity in that the initial title of the first volume, *Memoires de tres-nobles, et tres-illustre Gaspard de Saulx*, changes to *La Vie de Gaspard de Saulx, seigneur de Tavanès, Mareschal de France* after the preliminary papers (letter to his children, nephews and cousins; a letter to Louis XIII; Gaspard de Tavannes' portrait). The other printing, containing only Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's memoir, bears the title *memoires* consistently throughout the entire volume, and it is safe to assume that it was published immediately after the memoir/life volume because it eliminated its title inconsistency. Columbia University Library has another in-folio edition in a different type with many errors in spelling and page numbering, which does not contain any place or year of printing either (944.029.T19). All three editions are in-folios lacking the king's privilege, indications regarding the date, the place and the bookseller's name.

From the eighteenth century onwards, historians advanced various dates for the two editions without proof. All bibliographers point to a clandestine private printing that Jean de Saulx-Tavannes supervised. But the paratactic style, the lack of unity of content and of thought throughout the memoirs, the abrupt changes in perspective, narrative, and authorial voice all suggest that the so-called *Memoirs of Gaspard de Saulx-Tavannes* are a patchwork of memoirs written from Gaspard de Saulx-Tavannes's papers, partly by Jean de Saulx-Tavannes, who inserted abundant passages about his own life, and probably a third editor: the compilation must have been

printed after Jean de Saulx's death, and at least the titles and the form were not his. The earliest references we have to these memoirs date from 1657 when a publisher from Lyon printed them without royal privilege (Spon 237).

Jean de Saulx-Tavannes conceived the curious (auto)biography after his forced retirement following Henri IV's coronation in 1594. He continued it until his death, and its aim was to justify his past actions in the Catholic League fighting against Henri IV, while trying to regain Louis XIII's favor. One of his inheritors probably published the memoir after Jean's death, and thought that by inserting headings and subtitles he would give an impression of unity. The memoir could have not been published during Jean's life, as all editors affirm. The ghost editor often made mistakes concerning names and dates probably because he was not a professional historian and because the last actors of the memoirs, Jean and Guillaume de Saulx, had not been alive for some time (they died c. 1630s). Bibliographers such as Jacques-Charles Brunet claim that the clandestine editions were orchestrated by Charles de Neufchaises, Gaspard de Saulx-Tavannes's nephew (5: 149); allegedly this nephew tried to obtain a royal privilege in 1653 (cf. *Imprimeries privées françaises*). Charles de Neufchaises had already published *Instruction et devis d'un vray chef de Guerre ou General d'armée, recueilly des Memoires de feu Messire Gaspard de Saulx, Sieur de Tavanés, et Mareschal de France* sixty-nine years earlier! Charles de Neufchaises must have died before May 1598, for his father-in-law appears as tutor to Charles' two sons in a contract around this time, as Henri Chevreul has established in his Introduction to Neufchaises's *Instruction* (VI). Could there have been another mid-seventeenth-century Charles de Neufchaises distinct from the sixteenth century one who was also passionate about keeping the memory of his beloved great-uncle, Marshal Gaspard de Saulx-Tavannes?

Perhaps a mid-seventeenth-century Tavannes became interested in printing his predecessors' memoirs as if they had been published by a relative who knew personally these glorious Tavannes during his lifetime, a relative who enjoyed the favor of both the Valois and the Bourbon kings (from Charles IX to Henri IV). Charles de Neufchaises, who had published in 1574 the military discourse, based on Gaspard's life, which he had dedicated to Charles IX, fitted perfectly this profile.

It might be that Jacques de Saulx-Tavannes (1620-1683), Gaspard's grandchild and Jean's grandnephew, published, possibly in the 1650s, his distinguished relatives' memoirs before working on his own memoir detailing his participation in the *Fronde* (published posthumously in 1691). After all, Jacques de Tavannes rebelled against the crown and never regained favor at court, just like Jean and Guillaume de Tavannes before him. Bringing back the memory of Marshal Gaspard de Saulx-Tavannes and his services to the crown, the story of Guillaume's unrelenting fidelity, and Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's dignified apology could have only supported his cause. It is beyond any doubt that a third party close to the Tavannes family and interested in their reputation compiled, organized, and edited Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's *Memoirs of Gaspard de Saulx-Tavannes* posthumously.

The Tavannes' ghost editor tried at least to give the papers a semblance of unity, and extrapolated the utilitarian dimension of memoir writing adding marginal and internal subtitles to guide the reader. At the end of the memoirs, the editor offered two thematic tables: a *Table des preceptes de guerre contenus en ce present livre* and a list of *Maximes d'Etat qu'on peut colliger de ce present livre*, clearly imitating a fashionable sixteenth- and seventeenth-century practice of using history to produce maxims for military and political action. Pierre Mathieu, for instance, also "collected" a series of maxims from Commynes's *Mémoires* in his *Histoire de Louis XI*:

“Maximes, jugemens et observations politiques de Philippes de Commines, seigneur d’Argenton, Sur la vie, le regne, les actions de Louys XI et autres diverses occurrences” (573-604).

The editorial making of memoirs was at times less elaborate: it sufficed to give a collection of papers the title *Mémoires* for them to become associated with the genre. Nicolas de Neufville-Villeroy wrote a number of political papers for various reasons, mainly apologies explaining his versatile career: he held the office of secretary of state until Henri III dismissed him, then joined the Catholic League, and was one of the duke of Mayenne’s main advisors until Henri IV offered him an office in his government. The first edition appeared in Paris, in 1622. It contained several papers attributed to Villeroy. The editorial tradition added many other papers Villeroy had never written, some of them fake historical documents, in order to illustrate an epoch and give the memoirs an air of authenticity. For instance, the discourse on the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre, attributed to Henri III, and reproduced even in nineteenth-century editions, is completely fictional.

Villeroy was very active in writing self-defenses that he addressed to his friends, but he does not seem to have published any during his lifetime, contrary to what many historians believe. The large number of seventeenth-century manuscript copies suggests that Villeroy and then his family had been very careful in spreading these copies among their clients and patrons, potential and real. The first edition was dedicated to Alexandre Faucon de Ris, president of the Parliament of Normandy, Villeroy’s political ally. Du Mesnil’s dedicatory letter to Faucon named Villeroy’s disparate papers *memoires* because they were written, he noted, by an experienced statesman who had also participated in the events narrated, the typical early modern definition of memoirs. The popularity of memoirs at the beginning of the seventeenth century influenced the editors’ choice of arranging some testimonial papers into memoirs.

The process of inventing memoirs continued well into the nineteenth century. Gaspard de Saulx-Tavannes's papers became memoirs through the intervention of his son, Jean, and a later editor, possibly, his great-grandson Jacques. This latter editor gave them a topical aspect relating them to the competing genres of political theory and war manuals. By the late eighteenth and in the nineteenth century, modern editors eliminated anything that did not fit their ideas about what memoirs ought to be: eye-witnessed chronological historical narratives of interest due to their illustration of the mores of the French nation's forefathers, but no longer for their pragmatic thrust. Starting with the *Collection Universelle des Mémoires particuliers* in 1787 (Vols. 26, 27, 28), Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's memoirs of his father were considered bizarre and in need of corrections. Therefore, the digressions were either erased or put into footnotes. The marginal and internal subtitles of Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's *Memoir*, as well as its various tables at the end of the first editions disappeared. Modern editors added dates, divided the memoirs by reigns, and sometimes eliminated digressions. The horizon of expectation regarding memoirs clearly changed. The most striking difference was the modern editors' distaste for commonplaces. History ceased to orient action and was becoming a literary monument by the end of the eighteenth-century.

Some Renaissance memoirs were only invented in the nineteenth century. Edouard Fremy produced a partial and faulty edition of Henri de Mesmes's memoir that he presented as a continuous narrative. The autograph manuscript (MS BnF fr. 729) contains an unfinished life story and also a collection of distinct papers, mostly autograph, ranging from a learned topographical discussion on Caesar's *Commentary* to Latin prayers. It appears to be a notebook, parts of which were written at various times and to different ends, going from royal pedagogy and counseling to life writing and devotional literature. Whether Henri de Mesmes himself grouped them together or his son Jean-Jacques remains unclear. Henri de Mesmes wrote two inter-related papers dealing

with the history of his life. He first began a continuous narrative, albeit full of erasures and additions, narrating his life until shortly after Henri III's death (fol. 17-29), which I would call his memoirs. He then wrote a collection of thoughts about fortune and disgrace (fol. 31-32) that he reinserted in his memoirs through marginal notes (starting with fol. 25 vo).

Henri de Mesmes used both the term *mémoires* and the parallel, though undistinguished, term *vie* to refer to his project. He might have had in mind a wider audience of gentlemen, and he conceived of memoir writing as a duty towards nobility and national history: “Un temps fut, que les homes de valeur escrivoient volontiers leurs vies ou de ceux qu'ils avoient aimez” (fol. 17 ro). However, the modern editor Fremy chose the title and the form of the memoir, creating the illusion of an exemplary work within the genre. It is impossible to tell what Henri de Mesmes originally intended his life story to be.

Collective authorship and the posthumous invention – both in the modern sense and in the rhetorical sense – of memoirs was quite systematic. It reflected group and family interests, but also a highly rhetorical conception of human sciences in which individual testimony needed to be accommodated to collective representations.

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This chapter investigated the origins of the memoir genre in France. Rather than adopting an ahistorical, essentialist approach, the study focused on the genealogical and intertextual links between a number of texts edited early on as *mémoires* and *commentaires*. It also avoided the pitfall of a teleological construction of literary history by relying on the earliest reception of memoirs within the Renaissance genre of the *artes historiae*. Despite their many debates and attacks on rhetoric, all humanist readers conceived memoirs as testimonies, a type of external topic

for discovering arguments, whose major truth criterion rested on authority. Since judgments of an author's character were based on his discursive self-representation, the discursive image of the author occupied the central place in memoirs. But, contrary to some received notions about authorship in the Renaissance, the final part of the chapter showed that, in reality, authorship was often collective. The early modern memoir corpus displays traces of ghostwriting and collective intervention. The chapter suggests that the memoir genre appeared in an encyclopedic age that still privileged a "culture of the commonplace" (Holtz 13) over the author's individuality.

## Chapter II. The Court and Its Discontents

In the well-known study *The Civilizing Process*, Norbert Elias has analyzed a sequence of drawings dating from around 1477 to 1480. Coming from the circles of Charles the Bold and of the future emperor Maximilian, they celebrate the latter's marriage to Mary of Burgundy. The drawings depict knights in the countryside inflicting unrestricted acts of violence onto peasants, jousting with other warriors, and freely courting ladies. The sociologist considered the drawings emblematic of the knightly aristocracy of medieval feudalism: only a more powerful warrior could limit a knight's freedom. Around the same time, Elias claims, the social type of the free feudal knight was transitioning to the more restrained figure of the courtier. Elias interprets the transition by referring it to a "civilizing process." By this he means that central institutions increasingly controlled affects and social differentiation from the Middle Ages to the early modern period in Europe (172-182).

The laboratory of the civilizing process was the court. In his other great study *The Court Society*, first published in 1969 but written in 1933 as his *Habilitationschrift*, Norbert Elias reads Saint-Simon's memoirs and draws a bleak picture of a long series of French kings, from Francis I to Louis XIV, gradually domesticating nobles. According to this well-known story, that informs traditional scholarship on French court society, the successive kings lured gentlemen to their court, and made them spend lavishly until eventually they depended entirely on royal favor: the court finally became a gilded cage during King Louis XIV's age.

Norbert Elias's ideas have been met with significant criticism ever since these two books were translated into English in the early 1980s. Jeroen Duindam's *Myths of Power* summarizes, in a comparative study of European courts, the weaknesses of Elias's theses, and argues for a less

oppositional history between a dying feudal nobility and an absolutist monarchy consciously building the modern state. Numerous case studies disprove the basic tenets of Elias's theory. James B. Wood, for instance, follows the economic and political fortunes of the provincial nobility of Bayeux, from 1463 to 1666, and proves that the "old" nobility survived and adapted quite well to the early modern state. Historians like William Beik show the benefits nobles derived from state centralization.

However, Elias's theory continue to fascinate historians and literary scholars (Snyder 23-41). Indeed, some ideas cannot be easily dismissed; scholars generally agrees that Renaissance courts grew significantly in size compared to the Middle Ages, that royal courts gained precedence over vassal courts, and that the feudal system was replaced by a patron-to-client social interaction.

For his *Court Society*, Norbert Elias relies almost exclusively on Saint-Simon's memoirs, ignoring the fact that the disgruntled duke of Saint-Simon was an avid reader of Renaissance memoirs. Within this genre, representations of disfavor and expressions of discontent were quite conventional. They were linked to the instability of court patronage, and denouncing other courtiers was a form of searching for new patrons. This is not to say that Saint-Simon's dissatisfaction with how Louis XIV treated court nobility was not real. The reality of his resentment and the process by which he generalized his own minor fall out of Louis XIV's good graces to reflect the state of all nobility were mediated by a set of cultural conventions grown out of more than two centuries of memoir writing. This chapter proposes to explore this tradition of writing discontent in memoirs. I contend that writing about the corruption of the court and expressing discontent with the court life were already highly conventional in Renaissance memoirs and reflected the ongoing negotiation of a "point of contact," in Geoffrey R. Elton's felicitous expression, between the crown and its subjects. Even the most traumatic experience of disgrace

was codified in an impersonal process of generalizing one's misfortune to an entire social order, and to the body politic. If the previous chapter has examined the creation of a memoirist ethos, this chapter analyzes representations of the court society against and within which this ethos was built.

First, I discuss the specificity of the French Renaissance court and the problem of the court favorite. Then I explore the exchanges between the memoir genre and a rich anti-courtier literature with long roots in the Middle Ages. I show next that these negative representations coexisted with more neutral, functional views on court society as a necessary point of contact. Finally, the chapter proposes an analysis of the topic of disgrace that created the tradition in which Saint-Simon wrote his own memoirs.

## **1 The French Court and the Problem of the Court Favorite**

Historians of the memoir genre in France tend to overlook memoirs of the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century as esthetically underdeveloped, knightly ancestors of superior late seventeenth-century memoirs that exhibit the influence of refined courtly conversation (Fumaroli, "Les Mémoires au carrefour des genres en prose" 183-216). The assumption here is that court society was not a preoccupation in Renaissance memoir writing and that Renaissance court culture was quite underdeveloped. Part of this belief rests on the way Renaissance memoirists depicted themselves (knights and statesmen who felt only contempt for courtiers), and on the preponderance of feats of arms in their narratives. In reality, most memoirists had participated, to various degrees, in court life, and they had been actively courting the royal entourage throughout most of their lives:

. . . the only definition of the Court which makes sense in the sixteenth century is that it comprised all those who at any given time were within 'his grace's house'; and all those with a right to be there were courtiers to whom the fact, and the

problems, of the Court constituted a central preoccupation in their official lives and in the search for personal satisfaction (Elton 45).

Renaissance memoirs present to their readership the paradox of the anti-courtier courtier. What social and cultural pressures account for these memoirists' anti-courtier representations when they were, it would seem, courtiers themselves?

In order to answer these questions, we must acknowledge first that the court itself was not a new phenomenon of the Renaissance. In his *Courtly Culture . . . in the High Middle Ages*, Joachim Bumke demonstrates that the medieval courtly culture was quite sophisticated well before the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. The Renaissance court, however, became more centered on the king's person, who became the wealthiest man in his kingdom. But this court society was very diverse in Europe, as the following anecdote from Commyne's memoirs teaches. Before the Anglo-French peace talks, Louis XI sent his cupbearer's valet to the English camp to serve as his herald of arms. The French sovereign had met the terrified and unwilling valet only once before entrusting him with the important mission:

Et quant il sembla au Roy que nostre homme fut en bon propos, il envoya par ledict grant escuyer querir une banniere de trompette pour luy faire une cote d'armes, car ledict seigneur n'estoit point cerimonieux, ne acompaigné de heraulx ne de trompetes comme sont plusieurs princes (Commyne 272).

Chamberlain Commyne and the "grant escuyer" dressed the valet, made him a decent coat of arms and attached to his chest an armorial plate that they had borrowed from another herald. By contrast, at the rival Burgundian court, the office had become so formalized and respectable that a candidate had to train for seven years before serving as herald of arms (La Marche 4:68). A former

Burgundian courtier, Commynes merely intimated, somewhat ironically, a difference in court formality. The specific expressions of court etiquette differed from one prince to another, reflecting both local customs and, to a certain degree, personal taste. The apparent lack of formality characterized the French court from the late Middle Ages until the middle of the seventeenth century.

As a courtier to both the duke of Burgundy and then the king of France, Commynes experienced two approaches to being at court: a vertical one reinforcing the prince's majesty through highly formalized offices (Charles the Bold's court), and a more horizontal one (Louis XI's) where familiarity meant unrestricted access and closeness between subjects and sovereign. One inspired awe, the other friendship. The more "absolutist" court of Burgundy disappeared with Charles the Bold, whereas the more "knightly" French court thrived well after Louis XI. If we judge solely by court etiquette, we see no discernable transition from the knightly society of feudalism to the court society of absolutism, as Norbert Elias has proposed. Some scholars even doubt that the splendid court of Burgundy served as a model for the rest of Europe (Paravicini 69-102). More than a century after Louis XI, Henri IV still acted as if he was at court among friends. A crowd of courtiers typically surrounded the French monarch, and there were little restrictions to his person. All of his acts (eating, sleeping, etc.) were visible to the public, and specific favors granted to some courtiers, like sleeping in the same room or sometimes in the same bed with the king, appalled Italian ambassadors who had very different standards of civility. This only reflected different conceptions of socially accepted behavior, as Marc Smith suggests (193-232).

Attempts to change the French court etiquette were not uncommon. Nicolas Le Roux and Robert J. Knecht describe how Henri III tried to operate the most significant changes in traditional French court etiquette. The king elaborated ordinances in 1578 and 1585, formalizing and limiting

the access to him both by organizing the physical space – for instance, rooms were added, at the Louvre, to make the access to the king’s chamber literally longer –, and by implementing measures reinforcing the king’s right to choose whom he wanted to see. Henri III paid attention to and reprimanded his courtiers on questions of personal hygiene and dress code that had been largely alien to the traditional French court. More so than his predecessors, Henri III elevated a small number of mignons to positions of great authority in the kingdom. Reacting to the factional struggles of the Religious Wars, Henri III tried to reinforce personal authority by closely controlling his court and by eliminating courtiers that his mother had placed there or that he had inherited from his brothers. He eventually failed. The court favorite attracted the most discontent during Henri III’s reign, and to this day the last Valois king is remembered for his mignons in popular culture.

The growing importance of court favorites in the business of government was signaled by the appearance in middle French of specialized terms to designate this relatively new social type. By the mid-fifteenth century, the term *mignon* came to designate King Charles VII’s favorite courtiers (Contamine, “Pouvoir et vie de cour” 541-554). The word *favori* itself appeared during Francis I’s reign in the first half of the sixteenth century. The new words do not necessarily indicate a new reality, but they did mark a cultural awareness, or a *prise de conscience* (Jouanna, “Faveur et favoris” 155), regarding the social and political type of the court favorite that dominated the European political scene from the end of the fifteenth century until the 1660s (Berenger 66-92). Royal initiatives, such as Louis XI’s ennobling his barber and making him his main advisor only intensified the awareness and negative charge surrounding this social type (Boudet 5-16). This greatly angered traditional-minded gentlemen who believed in a natural hierarchical social order that was supposed to reflect divine reason. Arbitrary favor appeared to disrupt it.

Humanists fueled the general discontent and misrepresented court favorites as flatterers and social parasites, drawing, among other sources, on some classical works such as Plutarch's *Quomodo Adulator ab Amico Internoscatur* and Lucian's dialogues. They were also inspired by a rich medieval anti-courtier literature portraying courtiers as effeminate parasites, and ambitious men, in allegories such as the *Roman de Renart* and the *Roman de Fauvel* and in the vituperative letter genre, presented as a missive sent from a disabused courtier to a country gentleman, such as Chartier's *De Vita curiali*. The impious courtier and the danger he represented for the body politic sometimes came to the fore of political reflection, as in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, albeit these considerations rarely, if ever, went beyond direct moral condemnation, as Pauline Smith observes in her study of anti-courtier literature in France (47-48).

With the emergence of the memoir genre, nobles had a new and unique way of expressing their discontent and demand that order be reestablished (and thus seek favor for themselves and their families). Anti-courtier ideas could be said to be based on personal experience, as opposed to previous forms of expressing discontent in letters sent from generic courtiers to generic country gentlemen. Since memoirists tried to construct a meritorious noble ethos in order to give credence to their testimony, it is hardly surprising that the unmeritorious court favorite would be a social type from whom they wanted to dissociate themselves; only paid historiographers received a similar treatment in memoirs.

## **2 Anti-Courtier Trends in Memoir Writing**

Although their authors claimed to be writing from lived experience, the anti-courtier culture flourished to such a degree in Renaissance France that it was not necessary for a courtier to have had any significant experience at court in order to denounce courtiers and accuse them of personal misfortunes, as it is clear from the way Boyvin du Villars responded to a couple of

accusations levelled against the first edition of his memoirs. The prologue reveals how some refined people (“ces fins”) in the king’s entourage grumbled about the undignified representation of Marshal Brissac as a petit “solliciteur des finances”, and about the exaggerated importance given to the marshal’s military campaigns in Piedmont. The (auto)biographer counterattacks by underlining the courtiers’ ignorance of real warfare. From his own extensive military experience, the memoirist has learned that financial support is crucial for successful military campaigns. Had the refined men at court visited the actual battle places, they would have unfailingly recognized the geopolitical importance of Piedmont for France. But what understanding of warfare can one expect from “ceux qui n’ont jamais bougé d’un cabinet bien tapissé, ou de la suite des friandes tables de la Cour?” (13-14; ed. Michaud).

In reality, Boyvin du Villars had been entrusted with few missions of little consequence at the French court. He hated courtiers, but sought favor, for he dedicated his memoirs to Henri IV’s favorite minister, the duke of Sully. He was looking for court patronage while exploiting a set of stock formulas in order to delineate himself and the marshal from court parasites. In this sense, Villars’s text depicts Brissac as an eminent representative of a military elite solely dedicated to the service of the crown. By blocking access to the king and the effective communication of his resources, some parasitical courtiers caused Brissac’s failure in securing Piedmont for France. But the flat opposition between worthy knights and parasitic courtiers could not satisfactorily account for the troubling image of a knight vilely soliciting money. Boyvin du Villars had to introduce a principle of reality in his promotion of knighthood and military valor. Since modern warfare required extensive financial support, and fluent communication between the head of state and his armed force, disparaging courtiers for wasting public money also implied changing the medieval ideal of an independent feudal knight seeking solely honor and glory, immune to the undignifying

preoccupation with money. This apparent “realism” of noble self-representation only better underscores the topical character of the attack on courtiers in Brissac’s memoirs.

The denunciation of the parasitical courtier paralleled the topical condemnation of the professional historian paid to laud servilely his masters and blame his masters’ enemies. The courtier and the professional historian belonged to the same category of parasitical flatterers, in Renaissance memoirs. The negative courtier character conveyed a very conventional attitude, for not even the closest companion in the monarch’s entourage would have admitted, in late Renaissance France, that he was a courtier. A typical memoirist’s lifelong goal was to gain favor at court, while in his (auto)biography he would reassure his readers of how much he had detested courtiers all of his life, as Monluc’s example will make clear.

On June 1570, the lieutenant-general of Guyenne, Blaise de Monluc, received a letter from King Charles IX ordering him to invade Bearn and punish the Queen of Navarre for her reluctance to abide by the French crown’s peace terms. Surprised by the vagueness of the letter, the seventy-year old captain reminded his majesty that he needed money and supplies to raise a functional army. The crown responded by reprimanding Monluc’s long inactivity and negligence in service during the previous three years. Deeply vexed, Monluc contemplated resigning his office, but then surmised that the letter was not in their majesties’ character (“ces lettres ne venoient pas du naturel du Roy, de la Royne ny de Monsieur”); they would have never written such a caustic letter not even to their enemies, and it must have come from their court, where Monluc had no one to represent his interests: “du conseil de mes ennemis que j’ay près Leurs Majestez . . . n’ayant personne à la cour pour me deffendre” (767). The old captain realized he would soon become the perfect scapegoat for all the mistakes and failures committed in his province. All of his life, Monluc wrote, he had wrongly believed he could depend directly on the royal family, when in fact the

crown could only see and hear through the eyes and ears of courtiers. If a provincial gentleman wanted to be in his king's good graces, he needed to acquire the good will of those who were already in good credit at court. This was wrong, but impossible to make right: "cela est mauvais, mais il est impossible d'y mettre ordre" (767). Later that year, Monluc was ousted from his office and the king sent a special commission to investigate accusations of corruption and abuse of authority levelled against his former governor. The old captain lamented his lack of foresight in securing a "broker" at court, a person who could mediate between the king and the provincial governor, parties separated by distance (Kettering 4). Disabused, Monluc explicitly excluded courtiers from his ideal readership:

Ne desdaignez, vous qui desirez suivre le train des armes, au lieu de lire des Amadis ou Lancelots, d'employer quelque'heure à me cognoistre dedans ce livre. Vous apprendrez à vous cognoistre vous-mesmes et à vous former pour estre soldats et capitaines; car il faut sçavoir obeir pour sçavoir après bien commander. Cecy n'est pas pour les courtisans ou gens qui ont les mains polies, ny pour ceux qui aiment le repos; c'est pour ceux qui par le chemin de la vertu, aux despens de leur vie, veulent eterniser leur nom, comme, en despit de l'envie, j'espère que j'auray faict celuy de Monluc (833).

Monluc seems to embody a clearly divergent attitude from Commynes who, on the contrary, was inviting courtiers and princes to read his memoirs. The virulence of the exclusion only highlights the growing importance of court society and the emergence of a new social group of office-holders coming from the ranks of the gentry. It caricaturizes courtiers as well-rested people with smooth hands who derived their ideas of warfare from reading chivalric romances about fictional erring knights. The author refuses to idealize warfare and he does not reduce it to the dimensions of a

series of duels. *Commentaries* describe battles in technical, psychological and strategic terms. Their author is an expert in this matters and he never produces descriptions of jousts and tournaments, common courtly activities in Renaissance France, and even in Burgundian memoirs such as Olivier de la Marche's; and nowhere do we read about Monluc courting women.

Admittedly, values inspired by chivalric romances linger on in the *Commentaires*, which contain acts of gratuitous courteousness between gentlemen at war with each other. For exemple, while Monluc was defending Sienna against the emperor's troops, and the Sienese were reduced to famine, the besieger sent food and wine over to Monluc, during Christmas. Another element of nostalgia is the governor's dislike for firearms that allowed the most cowardly soldiers to defeat the most valorous men. Monluc's (and Boyving du Villars's) discussion regarding the virtues of knights fighting far away from the king's presence and the vices of courtiers in the presence of princes seems to be a variation on a literary motif found in medieval fictional biographies of ideal knights; an entire chapter of the knightly biography *Le Jouvencel*, written in 1466 and printed as early as 1493, deals with this question: "Comment le Jouvencel vault aller à la court; et comment on lui remonstre que l'exercice des armes vault mieulx et qu'il n'y doit point aller" (Bueil 39-56). Monluc and his memoirist peers denounced medieval fictions of ideal knights but borrowed significantly from them in terms of values. The conclusion of the deliberative discourse in the *Jouvencel* is quite optimistic: although a knight had to be away from the court, his glorious feats of arms would eventually reach the king's ears and would be rewarded, precisely the opposite of what Monluc complained had happened to him.

Ultimately, the courtier posed a threat to social order. In their memoirs, gentlemen typically denounced the separation of favor and virtue or merit congruent with good birth. In evaluating the Valois monarchs from Francis I to Henri III, Jean de Saulx-Tavannes condemned them as weak

kings indulging in the pleasures of court life, prisoners to their ladies and favorites, prisoners, that is, of their own court. Henri II, especially, had not just lived under the spell of his mistress, Madame de Valentinois, noted Jean de Saulx-Tavannes, but had made the mistake of elevating two noble houses, Montmorency and Guise, to such a degree of power that no requests from his subjects could bypass them. The king himself started fearing his mignons. Civil wars ensued after Henri II's death when the two families entered into a bitter feud disrupting the reigns of both Charles IX and Henri III. Court factions used the religious division brought about by the Protestant Reformation to gain influence and power. It was only Henri IV who succeeded in phasing out great nobles from the court, surrounding himself with people of obscure origins that he could crush without fear of retaliation because of their lack of powerful family ties:

Huë Capet ne merite los de prevoyance d'avoir osté les Maires du Palais, ayant cogneu le mal qui en estoit advenu à ses predecesseurs, non plus que le Roy Henri IV. de n'aggrandir les illustres maisons, ny par le choix qu'il fait des Gentils-hommes sans liaisons aux grandes races pour manier ses affaires, comme le sieur de Suilly [sic], Villeroy, et autres longues robbes, qui sont tousjours en puissance d'estre ruynez sans que personne s'en ressentent, et telles gens n'aspirent à la Couronne. Il est aisé de suivre ceste prudence et gouvernement de diviser les Grands, et ne rien faire pour eux, sentant et touchant encore le peril que leur aggrandissement nous a apporté (450).

Comparing Henri IV with the founder of the Capetian dynasty or "race" was not innocent. Read correctly, the parallel suggests that Henri IV, as founder of a new generation of kings (the Bourbon), was as equally cunning and probably as illegitimate as Hugh Capet had been. Tavannes formulated his political argument, in humanist fashion, as a historical lesson Henri IV, founder of

a new dynasty, learned from Hugh Capet, founder of a previous dynasty. And the irony of history was that Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's ultra-Catholic father had recommended Catherine de Medici and Charles IX to favor magistrates of obscure origins in order to prevent future political turmoil. Henri IV learned this lesson well, but unfortunately also remembered Gaspard de Saulx-Tavannes for recommending the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre to Charles IX, and Henri IV punished Gaspard's children for their father's fault. The disgruntled Jean de Saulx-Tavannes observed that Henri IV took his father's advice but applied it differently: he elevated ignoble *robins* and disgraced worthy gentlemen like himself.

Tavannes's caustic remarks elaborate on a number of anti-courtier commonplaces that culminate in a rhetoric of prostitution to describe the court:

Les Roy sont creez des peuples pour administrer la justice, et les defendre d'oppression, non pour les rançonner pour satisfaire à leurs plaisirs, et à leurs mignons: il vaut mieux estre en la Cour de chez soy, qu'en celle où l'on prostitue son ame aux mauvais desseins des Princes (382).

The over-sexualization of the court means yielding to pleasures, and abandoning reason. This is one of the most common representations of tyranny, and Agrippa d'Aubigné, a favorite of King Henri of Navarre, employed a similar image, although more literally, in representing his master's lustfulness. The King of Navarre wanted to employ D'Aubigné to court a lady in his name. A particularly skilled courtier and poet, D'Aubigné noted how he probably would have accepted such a request from a common friend ("assez vicieux en grandes choses, et qui peut estre n'eust refusé ce service par caprice à un sien compaignon"), but that he refused to serve as procurer of prostitutes ("macquereau") for his prince, and remained unmoved by the most endearing caresses and humble gestures, such as the king kneeling and begging him (95). Turned down by his courtier, Henri IV

no longer favored D'Aubigné: "Des lors desclina la faveur d'Aubigné, ce que reconnoissant ses amis, ils luy faisoient plusieurs harangues affin qu'il s'accomodast au plaisir de son maistre" (97).

D'Aubigné's vituperative language brings to mind La Boétie's *Discours de la servitude volontaire*, which describes the source and the secret of domination as the king surrounding himself with a small number of lesser tyrants who in turn create their own network of even lesser tyrants. All of them accept servitude voluntarily, in order to satisfy their greed by exploiting the populace; the prince's acolytes become: "les complices de ses cruautés, les compagnons de ses plaisirs, les macquereaus de ses voluptés, et communs aus biens de ses pilleries" (La Boétie, MS fr. 829 fol. 21). The *Discours* gloomily describes the normal system of patronage in Renaissance court society. These ideas and even his choice of words ("servitude volontaire", "macquereaus") successfully informed the way memoirist courtiers considered disgrace and a malfunctioning court. But whereas La Boétie condemned monarchy as such, D'Aubigné and Tavannes did not. They borrowed freely from La Boétie's discourse (Tavannes even plagiarized him), and transformed it into a "personal" remonstrance of a dysfunctional crown and court. They reinterpreted La Boétie's radical ideas within a more traditional political framework that they could comprehend and that served their interests.

Boyvin du Villars, Blaise de Monluc, Jean de Saulx-Tavannes, and Agrippa d'Aubigné held military offices and, consequently, operated mostly at a distance from the itinerant royal court; the "distance" itself was also the mark of a knightly literary tradition like that found in the *Jouvencel*. This real and literary distance allowed for a virulent caricature of the courtier flatterer ignorant of warfare. Officeholders and advisers to princes like Commynes and Cheverny could not invoke distance because they had to follow the court most of the time. It is within these memoirs,

I will show next, that the court received, for the first time in France, a positive or at least a neutral image.

### **3 The Court as a Necessary Contact Point**

Admittedly, Commynes's memoir shares many ideas with the anti-courtier literature of his day; it details, for instance, how certain sovereigns and princes sought to surround themselves with partners for leisurely activities like hunting, jousting (King Charles VIII of France) and courting ladies (King Edward IV of England). Even Commynes's protagonist Louis XI is too fond of his barber Olivier Le Daim, and honors him beyond what his birth should have permitted. Accordingly, Oliver fails in his negotiations with his fellow burghers of Ghent, and the gentry threatens him with drowning. The king's barber angers the Ghentish because of his ignorance of minimal etiquette (he demands to speak privately with the unmarried heiress Mary of Burgundy), and because of his rapid ascension into the ranks of the nobility (Commynes maliciously notes that the barber called himself a "count"). Nevertheless, the barber-count proves excellent in military operations, as he manages to occupy the neutral town of Tournai for the king. Clearly military values do not rank high in Commynes's system of thought.

More than courtiers, Commynes despised princes under the complete control of their mignons because he too believed that factional struggles at any princely court threatened political stability. For instance, the king's brother, who had joined the other great vassals in the War of the Public Weal against Louis XI, acted solely on the advice of his favorite Odet d'Aydie. Louis XI won over his brother's advisor by promising him a great fortune. Consequently, Odet convinced the king's brother to accept the offer, effectively separating him from his main ally, the duke of Burgundy. In other words, *Monsieur* isolated himself foolishly because he was not capable of

thinking for himself: Commynes wrote, cuttingly, that *Monsieur* was already twenty-five years of age.

The attack on *Monsieur*'s immaturity conveys a subtle eulogy of his courtier's wisdoms important to observe here how in condemning Monsieur's immaturity, Commynes eulogized his courtier's prudence. This is no longer a traditional topical denunciation of courtiers; on the contrary Commynes underscores their political competence and usefulness in the service of prudent princes. Ideally, in Commynes's system, the court is an assembly of prudent men. In reality, however, some princes (the king's brother, for instance) are immature and too dependent on prudent courtiers (Odet), while other prudent princes (Louis XI) sometimes surround themselves with inexperienced court favorites (Olivier le Daim).

Commynes described a new social reality and his ideas were seminal mostly with regards to the way *robin* memoirists. The Burgundian memoirist had served as adviser, ambassador, and intelligence agent for Louis XI. Commynes must have come under the spell of the French king somewhere around the king's meeting with Charles the Bold at Péronne in 1468, when Louis XI foolishly came into enemy territory, and was at the duke's disposal, while two of the king's ambassadors were inciting the burghers of Liège to rebel against the same duke. On hearing the news of the rebellion, the memoirist remembered, Charles the Bold bristled with anger. The duke ordered that everybody leave the room. As his chamberlain, who had unrestricted access to the duke's room, Commynes stayed and, with the help of two other valets, tried to appease his master. The French king might have been lost that day had Commynes failed to disincline his duke from harming him.

In placating his Burgundian suzerain, Commynes was probably already pursuing his own private interests and he might have worked as a double agent from around this time, but what

seems essential in the Péronne scene is the control over his prince's emotions that Commynes exercised in his role of courtier: "Nous ne aigrismes riens, mais adouclismes a nostre pouvoir" (*Mémoires* 126). The courtiers countered the duke's natural penchant for violence – amply documented in the memoirs – with soothing words. Commynes thought of his court role as a screen for the immediate expression of the prince's disorderly passions. After Commynes left him, the duke's uncontrolled anger and lack of a propitiating entourage sealed his downfall. Before the final blow at the battle of Neuss, where he was to lose his life, the duke started drinking more wine in order to revitalize his blood circulation and he grew a beard, a sign of melancholy, according to medieval symptomatology. The duke's fear-inspiring attitude and violence left him in the end without a friend at court who could not only advise him, but soothe his bad temper as Commynes used to do.

By showing how the duke's solitude precipitated his end, the text underscores the need for a prince to have companions. The description of the devastation of the duke's solitude engendered on the once rich Duchy of Burgundy, is a strong argument in favor of a court made of wise friends with whom the prince could converse maturely. According to Commynes's political psychology, princes are prone to outbursts of violence because of their lenient upbringing. Lacking authoritative figures in their early education and being surrounded by people who only want to please them in order to gain advantages, princes risk failing to become fully grown adults; wise courtiers can check inordinate princely violence.

Even though anti-courtier themes abound in his memoirs, Commynes articulated one of the first positive images of the courtier in European thought. When describing himself, Commynes drew a portrait of the courtier as a friend and competent adviser; the other kings of Europe were less successful politically than Louis XI because they were surrounded either by incompetent,

pleasure-seeking courtiers or by ambitious flatterers interested only in advancing their own fortunes. It was up to a mature prince to choose his men wisely. The two historical kinds of courtiers to the prince were typified by humanists such as Guillaume Budé in the more traditional mirror-for-kings genre. In his *Institution du prince* (1519), dedicated to Francis I, Budé distinguished between courtiers serving the prince in public matters and friends tending to the prince's private activities; the philologist brought forward as an exemplum a classical anecdote regarding Alexander the Great's two companions Hefaiston and Craterus, between whom the emperor distinguished well (Budé 106-7).

Commynes's own self-representation as a courtier and humanist mirror-for-kings paved the way for more positive representations of the royal entourage. The most typical *robin* self-representations consisted in imagining oneself as a competent impersonal servant. Henri de Mesmes's life story shows him owing entire political career first to Henri II, Charles IX and Henri III. The first named him master of requests, even though the jurist had not been examined and was too young to occupy this position. On hearing about his brilliant studies, Henri II started favoring him, and sending him in important diplomatic missions. Upon the death of his "good master" Henri II, De Mesmes knew that the new king would also change the court:

Lors pour ce que j'avois faict grand fondement de mes services en ce bon Roy et que le changement de regne ne me promettoit que nouveaux mouvemens, je me dispois apres sa mort a moins voiaeger et a moins courtiser<sup>7</sup> et trouvois qu'il valoit mieulx me tenir a mes livres et a mon office . . . (fol. 22 vo).

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<sup>7</sup> Erased: "et ne me pas jeter aux troubles parce que je n'aimay la violence/la guerre civile."

Henri de Mesmes could not adopt Monluc's opposition between noble knights and courtly parasites. Instead, he nourished the creation of a new cultural type: the state official solely preoccupied with legal and humanistic matters (books), trying to stand aloof from the vicissitudes of courtly life. The equation between travelling ("voyager") and courtly life ("courtiser") describes the reality of the Renaissance itinerant court and points metaphorically to the political instability of factional struggles at court. More so than Comynes, Henri de Mesmes fueled the emerging myth of the state servant as a stabilizing rational force necessary to counter the irrationality of arbitrary court favor, when the two were far from clearly distinct in reality. Henri de Mesmes made this distinction in order to protect himself from the widespread dissatisfaction with the government, which was usually directed at courtiers.

First, he had to face rumors and accusations, coming from both the Protestant and the Catholic sides, that he had made a bad peace treaty in 1570, but he had only followed Charles IX's direct command:

Si diray-je, pour mon regard, que je rapportay au Roy deux choses dont il eust contentement: l'instruction qu'il m'avoit baillée secretement a part, escrite de sa main avec si bon mesnage que je n'avois pas encore tout accordé ce qu'il m'avoit permis, et la paix ou guerre a son chois, sens que rien dependist plus que de sa seule volonté, c'est a dire toutes choses en leur entier et ne sceut onq tirer de moy autre advis synon: 'C'est un coup de maistre ! je vous mets à mesme; voulez, ce qu'il vous plaira, il sera faict, car l'un ou l'autre est preparé avec tous moiens possibles.'

Il le trouva bon ainsy et opta la paix (fol. 24).

In this image of the perfect ambassador, the subject is an instrument of the crown and has no autonomous political agency. Henri de Mesmes prepared the legal framework, and let the monarch

make the final decision himself. The corollary to this total subjection to the crown's will is the self-representation of the magistrate as a perfect bureaucrat-courtier. The apparent "progress" in office functionalization, displayed in this passage, by comparison to the more patrimonial relationship we get in Commynes's work, is a symptom of the widespread fear at court that the courtier would become a scapegoat when tensions escalated. Implicitly, Henri de Mesmes's self-portrait is that of masterful self-control when carrying out public duties. Nevertheless, the elimination of subjectivity is far from complete; Henri de Mesmes's exclamation "c'est un coup de maistre!" is ambiguous, for it can mean both that the decision is to be made by the king himself and that the king can only decide one way or another because his servant Henri de Mesmes himself organized everything for him. Moreover, the exclamation "je vous mets a mesme" might be a playful allusion to his own name.

Similar displays of false modesty can be found less subtly in other *robin* memoirs. Introduced to the queen mother by the Cardinal of Lorraine, Cheverny owed his good fortune at the court to his successful efforts in compelling Parisians to obey the crown in 1563:

. . . ce qui commença à me mettre en toute sorte de creance parmi la Court, ou je reconnus aussitost . . . que les dames et favoris peuvent tout ce qui leur plaist, et que les moindres officiers de la Cour qui peuvent entrer dans leurs chambres et cabinets, doivent estre craints et considerez, pour les bonnes ou mauvaises impressions qu'ils peuvent donner des plus grands du royaume (11).

The passage reproduces a typical anti-courtier theme (lower-ranking officers and mistresses influencing kings), while proudly embracing a court identity and the political power it comes with. Cheverny's memoirs were among the first to abstain from demonizing courtly favor, and he is one of the few Renaissance memoirists to talk freely about his and his ancestors' favor at court, in

sharp contrast to military commanders like Tavannes, who asserted that favor had become synonymous with dishonor. Cheverny was aware of the negative views on office-holding courtiers, and he readily underscored the difference between knights, who had a mostly peripheral relationship with the crown by nature of their continued presence on battlefields, and high-ranking magistrates, who retained favor by administrating closely the crown's affairs. Cheverny reminds his readers, for instance, how Henri IV gave him back the seals Henri III had deprived him of two years before; Henri IV addressed his court in front of his new chancellor: "Messieurs, ces deux pistolets que je baille à M. le chancelier ne font pas tant de bruit que ceux dequoy nous tirons tous les jours, mais ils frappent bien plus fort et de plus loing, et le sçais par experience par les coups que j'en ay receus" (127). The extended metaphor (seals as pistols) identifies Cheverny's position as inferior in social prestige and superior in political power to a more traditional knightly nobility. Direct speeches attributed to patrons in memoirs are very often a way for the authors to vindicate their subjection and chant their own merits. Henri IV's speech implies that the traditional war nobility is doomed to disappear if it does not ally itself with the highest officeholders at court. But we know for a fact that Henri IV was deeply concerned with the fate of his nobility and this direct speech must be Cheverny's own creation. Its purpose was to signal quite immodestly that Cheverny was a great broker of fortunes at court.

Cheverny was not just an able, impersonal diplomat; he was also the king's friend and confidant. The chancellor taught his children that a successful career at court could profit greatly from following one's prince in pleasurable activities as well. Fearing that he would not have legitimate children, Henri IV revealed to his chancellor privately that he wanted to marry Gabrielle d'Estrée, both "for his particular preservation and for his own pleasure" (323). The king himself did not distinguish between his private pleasures (in this case his well-known love affair), and his

official position as head of state bound by the fundamental laws of succession to the throne. But God decided otherwise, as Cheverny noted, and Henri IV's mistress died in the spring of 1599; the news greatly afflicted Cheverny. He feared his family would suffer immensely because he had "participated" more in the king's "loss" and "displeasure" than any other courtier (329). Cheverny was alluding to his liaison with Madame de Sourdis, Gabrielle's aunt and confidante. He expected, through this alliance, to increase significantly his family's fortunes. Allusions to amorous liaisons, a typical courtly topic for classical memoirs, are very rare in Renaissance memoirs. Cheverny is also the first known memoirist to have written a courtly conduct book bound to the volume of his memoirs after his death. This courtly textbook bears the title *Instruction à son fils*, and its ambition was to teach his son how to behave so as to be successful at court. Most of the moral-political examples come from classical sources, and above all from Cicero, the single most influential authority in Castiglione's dialogue on the ideal courtier. A discussion about the ability to make friends and to distinguish between them and mere flatterers who sought only favor occupies the largest part of the *Instruction*.

The *Instruction* has many connections with the *Memoires*. If the latter are organized within a chronological narrative based on lived experience, the *Instruction* proposes an array of prescriptions based on historical exempla with fewer personal anecdotes. Some of the French historical examples are identical. For instance, both in his *Instruction* and in his *Memoires*, Cheverny indicted the Valois lineage ("race") for an atavistic presumption that made them alienate wise courtiers they had previously esteemed. The iterative vice ultimately caused great political turmoil in the kingdom. But whereas, in the *Memoires*, Cheverny drew this picture in order to justify himself with regard to his own downfall from Henri III's graces, the *Instruction* eliminated

most personal references, and multiplied humanist *loci* in a prescriptive effort largely inspired by Castiglione's *Courtier*, published in 1528.

Ellery Schalk has noted how the first French treaties offering a neutral picture of the French court appeared only in the early seventeenth century, whereas, in reality, the court constantly grew in importance and sophistication throughout the sixteenth century; he concludes that institutional developments and private attitudes evolved at different speeds. In doing so, however, the historian of early modern French nobility implicitly reproduces a type of teleological historiography that reads history as a goal-oriented process, the goal being Louis XIV's court. But Cheverny's *Instruction* was written and circulated at the end of the sixteenth century, and its proximity with memoirs is not accidental. Aside from the often self-contradictory statements about the private character of memoirs and how they were written for the close family of their authors, gentlemen wrote memoirs for princes and other gentlemen at court. They told the story of their authors' success at court, and of their princely favors: "Et aussi faiz mon compte que bestes ne simples gens s'amuseroient point a lire ces 'Memoires,' mais princes ou gens de court y trouveront de bon advertissemens, a mon advis" (Commynes 210).

Not even the harshest critics of courtiers could completely dismiss the necessity of the court as such. During a truce signed between Emperor Charles V and Francis I in 1537, Monluc congratulated himself on having visited the court, while proudly underlying his inadequacy in such a context: "Pendant ceste trefve, j'essayé, mais en vain, d'estre courtisant; je fuz toute ma vie mal propre pour ce mestier. Je suis trop franc et trop libre; aussi y trouvé-je fort peu d'acquit" (76). But seven years later, we read in the same *Commentaires* how Monluc had been sent to court and had been granted the great honor of serving the same king at his table. He was awarded the title of *gentilhomme servant*, an office that really meant something in those good old days, he boasted.

Again, he paid lip service to the anti-courtier tradition by pointing out he was no courtier, for he could not dissimulate. Courtiers preferred adapting to the king's moods and rarely spoke their minds. On the contrary, Monluc contradicted his majesty, in front of the highest-ranking courtiers, about his wait-and-see tactics, and convinced him to engage in battle. In his deliberative direct speech, Monluc repeatedly addressed the king as "roy soldat", and thus as a fellow gentleman; he brought his speech to life with gestures and had a high sense of theater ("Je levois lors le bras en haut, comme si c'estoit pour frapper, dont le Roy se sousrioit"); finally, he used the most colloquial discourteous words possible: ". . . vous arresterez l'Empereur et le Roy d'Angleterre sur le cul, qui ne sçauront quel party prendre" (143-5).

This was not yet another attack on court manners: Monluc's speech and deportment in front of the sovereign reveals an apt courtier with a great dramatic sense, who exploits his listener's bellicose temperament and successfully advances his private interest (war meant employment for Monluc) along with the crown's interest in the kingdom's defense. The familiar speech does not contradict court etiquette; it merely exaggerates the French court etiquette of gentlemen and princes being part of the same extended family. Francis I and the Dauphin were greatly amused and moved by Monluc's discourse; the country gentleman struck the right chord.

Far from effacing themselves like *robins*, knights like Monluc gained courtly favor by organizing their lives as a martial spectacle. Early on in his military career, Monluc engaged in dangerous feats of arms in order to impress his superiors who were observing him. His life-long goal had been to build-up a military reputation that would ideally reach the king's ears. As much as he affirmed repeatedly how he hated courtiers, Monluc recounted his entire life as a spectacle for his superiors, who were also his ideal readers. After all, Monluc was not that far away from Castiglione's ideal courtier, who carefully orchestrated his public appearances, both at the court

and on the battlefield, to catch his prince's eye. But Monluc shielded himself from confusion with men of letters, while Castiglione imagined the ideal courtier as a culturally refined knight.

Monluc gave one of the first memoirist portrayals of the impoverished country gentleman whose virtue and good birth recommended him at court against all odds. Agrippa d'Aubigné further developed this cultural type by uniting in himself both military and literary qualities. He had entered Henri de Navarre's service in 1573 when the Protestant leader was being held prisoner at the Louvre, following the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre. He was recommended to the King of Navarre because of his father's previous faithful service to the house of Navarre. Ellery Schalk has seen in D'Aubigné a reactionary seventeenth-century representative of a type of sixteenth-century French anti-courtier mentality unable to adapt to the early modern realities of court life. Quoting D'Aubigné's satire *Avantures du Baron de Faeneste*, published in 1617, in which the old-fashioned gentleman was mocking courtiers for their preoccupations with appearance, and for their servility, Schalk notes:

D'Aubigné, in fact, seems an ideal sixteenth-century noble, and his 'Faeneste,' if it came from the late sixteenth century instead of a little later, would offer perfect evidence for the arguments . . . tying together the noble anti-courtier feeling of the second half of the sixteenth century with the general medieval view of nobility held at large by nobles and others ("The Court as a 'Civilizer' of Nobility" 261).

Although Schalk does not mention Elias, the sociologist also chose Faeneste to show that "by the reign of Henry IV there was no longer any escape" from court, as if Renaissance anti-courtier commonplaces in fictional works perfectly mirrored lived experience and announced a "sociogenesis of aristocratic romanticism" (*The Court Society* 231). Admittedly, D'Aubigné's poetry teems with anti-curial hatred as well; the *Princes* section of the *Tragiques*, first published

in 1616, are particularly mordant towards effeminate princes and homosexual courtiers who also served as prostitution agents. Had Schalk and Elias ventured to consider D'Aubigné's *Vie à ses enfants*, they would have nuanced their conclusion. Agrippa d'Aubigné's memoirist self-representation, unlike his literary persona, does not fully embrace the anti-courtier attitude he remained reputed for to this day.

According to his life story, D'Aubigné acquired at the French court, following the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre, a "grande familiarité" with the duke of Guise, leader of the opposing ultra-Catholic camp, during Henri of Navarre's captivity (*Sa vie à ses enfants* 85). He created masquerades, ballets and carousels for the amusement of his Protestant prince and his Catholic friend. It was D'Aubigné who had the idea of the great comic ballet *Circé* that the queen mother refused to finance, and that would eventually be staged in 1581, during the duke of Joyeuse's wedding. D'Aubigné's unruly wit and nonchalance afforded him the friendship of the ladies in waiting. What more could have an ideal courtier aspired to? On hearing about the great "estime de la Cour" D'Aubigné was held in, Diane Salviati, the woman Agrippa d'Aubigné loved and could not marry because of her father's opposition, was stricken with a great melancholy that grew inside her until her death (88).

D'Aubigné combined literary and martial terms to describe his success at court. In proudly recounting the great familiarity between himself, the duke of Guise and Henri de Navarre, D'Aubigné suggested the court could function as a space of reconciliation and political stability within shared noble values. D'Aubigné was not so much a typical sixteenth-century anti-courtier noble as Ellery Schalk would want us to believe. He was merely promoting a type of French knightly court made up of gentlemen engaging in leisurely activities and speaking their mind "en franc Gaulois" (89). Like Monluc and Tavannes, D'Aubigné despised servile *robin* courtiers of

obscure origins (even though his grandfather had been a cobbler). But their “hatred” was principally a way of building their own warrior persona, and consequently a way of competing for court patronage.

We need not wait for the early seventeenth century to read the first treaties on nobility depicting court life outside of anti-courtier parameters. The development of memoirs in France envisaged a functional court, and even promoted it as a potentially stabilizing factor of political life. But court relationships were very fragile and could be easily broken. Disfavor became a very common topic in Renaissance memoirs and, as I aim to show next, its representations were highly codified as well.

#### **4 Writing Disgrace**

On January 17, 1582, King Henri III of France called upon Henri de Mesmes, seigneur of Roissy, his keeper of charters and chancellor to his wife the queen, and complained that he was dissatisfied with how the secretary was handling his “secret” and “private” affairs. Henri de Mesmes inquired as to who had accused him, but the king refused to disclose anything and ordered him to withdraw from the court. De Mesmes knew he had made some powerful enemies. Nevertheless, he knelt and begged for justice. The king acted with “modestie, retien et motz compez” (fol. 26ro) but nonetheless denied him explanations and said adieu. This is how Henri de Mesmes depicted the end of his career at the French court in his autobiography.

Pierre de l’Estoile, author of a diary started in 1574 and written in the form of a collection of contemporary tracts and pamphlets, described the same scene quite differently under the heading “Roissi ignominiously chased away”:

Roissi chassé ignominieusement. – Le mercredi 17<sup>e</sup> janvier, messire Henri de Mesmes, seigneur de Roissi, venu en la male grace du Roy, fut rudement baffoué par Sa Majesté . . . Et luy donna le Roy un coup de pied en le chassant (tant sa colere fust grande), l'appelant larron et le menassant de le faire pendre s'il lui advenoit jamais de se trouver devant lui (*Registre-Journal* 4: 11-12).

De l'Estoile commented on how the people did not pity Henri de Mesmes who, although a prudent man of great learning, was arrogant and insolent, an extortionist (“exacteur”), a plunderer (“pillard”) and a dissolute ribald (“paillard dissolu”) of very bad conscience (“d'une tres mauvaise conscience”). The same diarist recounted, in another entry, how Henri de Mesmes had been ousted seven years earlier from the office of chancellor to the king and queen of Navarre. The latter event appears in Pierre de l'Estoile's diary under the heading “disgrace de Roissi” (168); again De l'Estoile accused the chancellor of arrogance and larceny, and reproduced a popular poem poking fun of the greedy courtier. The poem starts “Il a derobbé la Vache” (“He robbed the Cow”), the cow being a reference to the arms of the King of Navarre. Assuming that this first disgrace had been real, why would King Henri III of France name Henri de Mesmes his private secretary, keeper of the royal charters and chancellor to his wife, after the king of Navarre had already disgraced the arrogant, greedy, and debauched chancellor?

Pierre de l'Estoile belonged to the Parisian bourgeoisie, worked as a clerk in the chancellery, and was no courtier himself, but a spectator who rejoiced at the idea of a great courtier's misfortune. He probably reproduced hearsay stories reflective of common popular hatred towards the court favorite. In his diary, we see clearly at work the influence of a rich anti-courtier literature. But this does not mean that Henri de Mesmes was telling the “truth.” There is a lot of rewriting in his autograph manuscript, precisely on this topic of disgrace.

This manuscript looks like a collection of notes. Folios 17 to 29 show a continuous narrative of his life and are full of erasures and additions. The story of his falling out of Henri III's good graces starts at folio 25 verso. It is preceded in the lower left margin by an addition in which the chancellor directly addressed the intended reader, his son, reminding him how much he actually despised the court for being a source of false happiness, how he only cared for his family, how holding a great office was also a great burden, and how unlike other courtiers in the king's good graces who feared no one, he feared everyone when Henri III favored him the most. Interestingly, two separate autograph leafes bound to the same volume contain almost identical statements. Folios 31 and 32 consist of a list of maxims about fortune and the need to defend oneself from its dark side through constancy and the cultivation of one's mind with the aid of liberal arts: "La fortune nous a ravalez cy tost elle qui nous avoit haulsez; ancore ne nous a elle pas jetez par terre, mais a soustenu nostre cheute. Les malins nous renversoient, elle nous a posés doucement en terre, afin que le coup de la cheute ne fust sy rude" (fol. 32 ro). The passage is reminiscent of Seneca's eighth letter to Lucilius praising retirement from public life in order to avoid the twists of Fortune; in Seneca's description, Fortune does not just capsize those she had previously favored but crushes them utterly: ". . . non evertit fortuna, sed cernulat et allidit" (1:37). Henri de Mesmes modified Seneca's observation, and underlined how fortune actually protected him in his downfall.

This and other maxims were reinserted afterwards inside the life story to amplify the depiction of his disgrace; they are not chronological and the only autobiographical element in them is the use of the first person grammatical subject both in the singular and more significantly in the plural:

Je voiois que la ruine de ce royaume aprochoit, je la sentoie desja sur noz testes. Je disois: 'ce qui m'est a present avenu il adviendra bien tost a chacun. Mon desastre

present devancera de peu de mois ou de peu d'annees le desastre publicq. De plus grands maux se preparent, de plus tristes accidens nous menassent, nous present, nous talonnent, nous quémangent ou de finir noz larmes, ou de les garder pour eulx' (fol. 31 vo).

The fragment makes use of parataxis, anaphora (“je,” “nous,” “desastre”), interior monologue (“je disois”), building progressively to the climax where Henri de Mesmes sees how the kingdom’s ruin will follow his individual downfall. Verbs of perception (“je vois”, “je sentois”) intensify the idea of an almost physical connection between the public servant and the body politic. This retrospective prophecy alludes to King Henri III’s assassination in August 1589.

Henri de Mesmes wrote a draft of his life story and then prepared the scene describing his ouster with special care. This complex rewriting process included minute changes in style. For instance, Henri de Mesmes wrote how he fell on his knee and begged the king to justify him: “Je le supplioy un genou en terre me traicter comme son subject par sa justice et me dire quelle estoit mon accusation . . .”; dissatisfied with this version, the memoirist crossed it out and turned it into direct speech: “Sire, je vous supplie en l’humilité que peut un tres humble subject rendés moy la justice que doit un bon Roi! Si je n’ai point faict de mal je ne dois pas estre condamné et si j’en ai faict c’est trop peu” (fol. 26vo).

The dramatization of the scene serves not so much to stage the clash between two personalities, but to undergird the functional differences between a subject expected to obey and a king whose main role in the body politic was to administer justice. Once Henri de Mesmes realized he had lost the king’s favor, he immediately assumed an obedient posture of complete vulnerability (kneeling) and he adopted the official language with which a subject recognized the qualitative

distance separating him from the monarch; terms like “Sire” and “votre tres humble sujet” were typical formulas of beginning and ending letters sent to the crown. In his own recollection and rewriting of the event, Henri de Mesmes was addressing the king’s public office as head of the kingdom’s body; this incorruptible head and its body politic were a fictional person comprising all past, present, and future monarchs and subjects, a medieval political theology familiar to us from Ernst Kantorowicz’s study on the *King’s Two Bodies*. Henri de Mesmes acted as a subject to the king and as a dignitary of the body politic. Public offices being distinct from the actual person of the office-holder had a quasi-sacred meaning. Therefore, De Mesmes reinterpreted his personal story as symptomatic of the history of France and saw necessary connections between his own misfortune and a national decline; the apparent hyperbole echoed a political ethos and deeply rooted beliefs that had been developed first in the legal scholarship of the Middle Ages and then reinvigorated by humanism. The figurative and stylistic modifications solicit the reader’s emotional adherence to the author’s cause. The representation of a desperate subject facing a disproportionate act of injustice implicitly accuses the monarch of being unable to rise to the dignity of supreme judge.

How are we to interpret De Mesmes’s rhetorical transformation of an event that his contemporaries remembered radically differently? It seems that Henri de Mesmes had in mind a wider and more distant readership than his son to whom he had dedicated his life-writing. The first impulse to write his own life story might have just been a therapeutical endeavor, but as time went by, he reread his drafts, he recollected things differently and he took pains to polish his style and address wider issues concerning the body politic. But we need not conclude that the former keeper of the royal charters sought to deceive his readers. In fact, he freely admitted himself that he had recreated and not reproduced exactly the conversation he had had with Henri III:

Ce colloque fut un peu plus long, mais c'est la substance, et tant modéré qu'en la mauvaise impression je cognoissois que son bon naturel et mon innocence combatoient contre ce qu'on luy avoit faict promectre,<sup>8</sup> et eust esté malaisé de discerner cy [sic] avec plus de regret je le laissois ou il me perdoit" (fol. 26 ro).

Henri de Mesmes retained the "substance" of the dialogue and omitted the exact words. This process of forgetting the traumatic aspects and of selective recollection was quite typical in Renaissance memoirs, as we will see in the last chapter. The "substance" of the conversation revealed the king's essentially good character, or ethos, which De Mesmes knew well from the long service rendered for the crown. Therefore, the essence of the conversation lay not in the exact words but in the interlocutor's character, Henri III's "bon naturel." The dialogue is both very formal and highly affective. The narrator ventures into nuanced psychological insights, and underlines the king's inner struggle between a promise he made to somebody else – De Mesmes claimed that this person was the jealous queen mother – and the affection he felt towards his faithful servant. Through this affective yet objective link, the narrator can act as a "psychologist," and read in the monarch's soul rather than his words. Henri de Mesmes became, over so many years of public service, a *familiaris*, both a public servant and a close friend to Henri III. Henri de Mesmes elaborated his life discourse on a number of commonplaces inherited from Antiquity but he must have also learned about them from his contemporaries. Highly similar techniques occur in quite a number of memoirs that deal with the same topic, and that De Mesmes must have read.

Let us consider one of his political enemies, Blaise de Monluc, who hated Henri de Mesmes for being an interloper and probably suspected him of being behind the letters ousting him from

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<sup>8</sup>Erased: "mon innocence cogne le retenoit et presque empeschoit en ce qu'il avoit promis."

the king's service. Monluc started his *Commentaires* or discourse on his life in the third person as the earliest surviving manuscripts (early 1570s) attest: "Le seigneur de Monluc se trouvant en l'eaige de soixante unze ans ayant pourté les armes pendant cinquante deulx et commandé quarante neuf ans . . . et estant retiré a sa maison . . . a voullu employer son temps a descrire les combatz ausquelz il c'est [sic] trouvé" (Monluc fol. 1; MS. fr. 5011). The first edition published after his death in 1592, and which Henri de Mesmes probably read, switched to the first person, and the resulting introduction sounds less like a factual deposition dictated to a scribe and more like a personal intervention:

M'estans retiré chez moy, en l'aage de soixante quinze ans, pour trouver quelque repos, après tant et tant de peines par moy souffertes pendant le temps de cinquante cinq ans, que j'ay porté les armes pour le service des Rois mes maistres . . . j'ay voulu employer le temps qu'il me reste à descrire les combats ausquels je me suis trouvé (1; ed. Millanges, 1592).

Monluc followed Caesar's model, as is clear from the title he chose to give to his memoirs. But the initial third person choice is also reminiscent of the original context of writing. King Charles IX, having made, with the aid of Henri de Mesmes, the peace of Saint-Germain with the Protestant faction, needed to sacrifice his zealous Catholic governor in order to satisfy his Protestant subjects. In October 1570 he sent prosecutors in Guyenne to inquire into the way Monluc had been spending public finances and treating Protestant subjects. Monluc wrote an initial *mémoire*, in the singular, a public statement of facts dictated to a scribe in the third person. Pardoned in 1572, with the help of the duke of Anjou, Monluc started adding commentaries to his actions, and engaged in a dialogue with his intended readers; he kept the motif of retirement at the beginning of his memoirs, even though he had been made Marshal of France and still had public missions. Monluc gradually

came to realize that his *Commentaires* could stand outside of their initial apologetic context and would immortalize his name for posterity. The old knight was becoming an author and an authority in military history, hence, the choice to adopt the grammatical “I.” The theme of retirement was no longer associated with disgrace but with a literary tradition; the opening phrases of Monluc’s *Commentaires* strangely resemble Montaigne’s story of withdrawal from public life: “Dernièrement que je me retiray chez moy, délibéré autant que je pourroy, ne me mesler d’autre chose, que de passer en repos, et à part, ce peu qui me reste de vie: il me sembloit ne pouvoir faire plus grande faveur à mon esprit, que de le laisser en pleine oysiveté” (Montaigne 54-55; bk I, ch. 8). Noticing the temporal proximity between the two writers from Gascony, and the vast “literary” treatment retirement from public life received in the sixteenth century, Claude-Gilbert Dubois sees in this commonplace the “propaedeutic of literary creation” (228). Henri de Mesmes too elaborated at length on the regenerative power of withdrawal, but he focused however not on writing about past glorious deeds but upon the cultivation of one’s mind: “A present, je me plonge profondement dans mes etudes. A present, je m’envoie dans ces munitions de l’ame, je barriquade des gabions de la raison et constance, afin que la douleur ne puisse entrer dens moy” (fol. 32 ro). De Mesmes internalized metaphorically the martial language that Monluc used to describe literally his past actions. Retirement served De Mesmes to shield the subject’s soul from passions and suffering caused by a tyrannical ruler, whereas Monluc employed the opportunity of withdrawal more prosaically in order to tell the story of how he defended the crown against enemies of the state.

Although the stories of retirement have very different means and ends in Monluc, Montaigne, and De Mesmes’s narratives, they are all indebted to a literary commonplace inherited from Antiquity. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the opposition between an idyllic, private retreat and a corrupt public life was associated with a rich anti-courtier literature. Alain Chartier

in the Middle Ages, then Joachim du Bellay, Pierre de Ronsard, Jean de la Taille, and virtually all major court writers of the French Renaissance would disparage the morally corrupting court and dream of withdrawing from public life to the countryside. Although Monluc, Montaigne, and De Mesmes's withdrawals were real, choosing to foreground retirement in their writings inscribed the authors into a distinguished cultural tradition and offered them an external, legitimate vantage point from where they could criticize the corruption of life at court.

Real or fictional, the rhetorical commonplaces suggest to what degree memoirs entailed a cultural condensation of personal experience. Far from insisting on the traumatic (at least in the case of Monluc and De Mesmes) character of their experience, memoirists objectified it into acceptable cultural forms. In these scenes of retirement, there is an entire "pedagogy of disgrace," to use Nicolas Le Roux's expression (*La faveur du roi* 417-457). But the "pedagogue" is not the king, as Le Roux suggests, but the king's servant.

In reality, disgrace seemed rarely effective and did not always express the king's independent will. The duke of Epernon's disgrace, one of the most well-known cases, had been imposed against Henri III's own inclination by popular discontent. The king did not entirely control the mechanism of disgrace, and it could pose a real threat to his authority, far from increasing it; courtiers usually retained influential networks at court, sometimes in both factions (Cheverny); some disabused gentlemen joined factions directly opposed to the king, wearing down his authority (Villeroy and Tavannes); in other cases, they would be reinstated by the same prince (D'Aubigné) or by his successor (Villeroy, Cheverny).

Nicolas Le Roux considers that King Henri IV successfully introduced absolutism in France. According to this interpretation, Henri IV employed royalist authors to resacralize the crown's prestige, significantly diminished after the civil wars, and his personal victories were used

as a sign of Providence reinforcing his legitimacy (*Le Roi, la Cour, l'Etat* 264-280). Le Roux follows Norbert Elias's sociological model closely; the major difference is that Elias ascribes to Louis XIV this taming of the nobility taking his inspiration from Saint-Simon's memoirs. Saint-Simon might have read a similar type of reasoning in Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's memoirs, who saw in Hugh Capet the first authoritarian monarch to employ officers to diminish great noble lineages. Discontent was clearly part of a noble culture long before Saint-Simon and even Jean de Saulx-Tavannes. It need not be interpreted literally. When represented in memoirs, it was a way of self-expression in which quite often the author construed his identity through objective, collective terms.

The term "disgrace" itself was borrowed from Italian towards the middle of the sixteenth century. It expressed the dangers and fears regarding patronage and court society. The synonymous "desfaveur," although attested earlier in fifteenth-century French, appeared less frequently. Chancellor Michel de l'Hospital employed it later to describe a defendant's emotional response to an act of injustice:

Ung judge concussionnaire, ung financier ou aultres officiers corrompeus vendront une pauvre partye qui se fiant sur son bon droict et la justice de sa cause, suyvoit le grand chemin, et par ung judgement qu'il sçayt en conscience estre fort injuste, se trouvant condamné, entre en desfaveur et desespoir (Hospital 1: 225).

The semantic proximity of disfavor and despair is frequently highlighted in contemporaneous memoirs. For instance, Monluc recalled his first emotional reaction to an unjust royal letter that had accused him of idleness; foreseeing his loss of favor, he noted: "ces lettres me mirent en . . . desespoir et colere," (767). He immediately regained composure, and realized that some jealous courtiers were behind the unjust accusation. Monluc's reaction, which denoted

fundamental violent passions, was informed by some theologically and politically loaded notions: despair was a mortal sin opposed to the theological virtue of hope, whereas injustice negated the most important cardinal virtue appropriate to a Christian prince. On the other hand, anger signified Monluc's own temperament and was not so much a vice as much as a martial quality laudable in a knight. Monluc's emotional response was highly codified and it was supposed to remind his king of his royal duty of imparting justice onto his subjects and of supporting his public servants.

Monluc and his peers believed that social orders – called “estats” in early modern French – had specific functions in the body politic – sometimes called “Estat” in the singular – that reflected the natural order; the king was supposed to deliver justice whereas his knights were supposed to protect him. The act of disgrace was referred to as a disruption in the natural social order that in turn threatened the king and his state. A natural link, both biological and divine, connected the king to his servants, who belonged to the same larger noble family or “race.” The family link explains why Blaise de Monluc, an impoverished knight from Gascony who rose to the title of governor of Guyenne by way of arms, could have premonitory dreams about the death and ill-fate of the kings his masters Henri II and Charles IX. A similar idea can be found in Queen Marguerite de Valois's *Memoirs* published posthumously in 1628, in a digression about how her mother Catherine of Medici had foreseen her husband King Henri II and her son King Charles IX's deaths: “Quelques-uns tiennent que Dieu a en particulière protection les grands, et qu'aux esprits où il reluit quelque excellence non commune, il leur donne par des bons génies, quelques secrets avertissements des accidents qui leur sont préparés” (107). Marguerite de Valois probably alluded to Plutarch's discussion of the “daemones” in his essay on the *Cessation of the Oracles*, and transferred it to the ideas regarding noble lineage that were fashionable in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Monluc boldly integrated this theory into his own memoirist persona and

imagined that his relationship to the royal family paralleled the intimacy between the queen mother and her sons. Henri de Mesmes, more subtly, did the same when he read into Henri III's soul and chose to reproduce the substance of his dialogue. They both described their emotional reactions to disgrace through wide moral-political categories that their noble and princely intended readers could understand.

If we look into the distant origins of the topic of disgrace, at least in memoir writing, Comynes's memoir immediately comes to mind. Yet, the Franco-Burgundian memoirist only alluded to his misfortunes after Louis XI's death. He undertook his memoirist project to comfort himself by recollecting the good fortune he had experienced during Louis XI's reign, but also to compensate for his sorrowful circumstances when writing. Still, Comynes defined his case as illustrating a larger natural-political law, because he firmly believed that the death of a great and powerful prince always engendered great "mutations" at court. He referred to his loss of favor using the astrological vocabulary from which the term "mutations" came: the movement of planets, God's secondary causes, effected political changes that determined the fate of subjects who had limited free agency in great political matters. Although disgrace occupies a minor part of Comynes's memoir and should not be overemphasized, the interpretation of a personal downfall as symptomatic to a national decline thrived in De Mesmes's life story.

At the end of the fifteenth century, Comynes first codified the topic of disfavor that would be subsequently refined throughout the memoir genre of late Renaissance France. Within this perspective, memoirists would always generalize their particular downfall to a collective and even natural degradation. By the late sixteenth century, the theme of royal disgrace would become a sign of fictional elaboration. Montaigne, otherwise a great admirer of Comynes' *Memoirs*, noticed an interesting maxim: "Qu'il se faut bien garder de faire tant de services à son maistre,

qu'on l'empesche d'en trouver la juste recompence" (985; bk 3, ch. 8). Montaigne was referring to a passage in which Commynes described how the Constable of Saint-Pol wanted King Louis XI to fear him because he felt that his services had not been well returned; this led to his falling out of the king's favor and eventually cost the constable his head. Montaigne retraced the maxim back to Tacitus, Seneca, and Cicero. The essayist did not condemn the use of a borrowed maxim, but insisted that it was important to read beyond the subject matter into an author's "soul" in order to really appreciate him, and that doing so required one to distinguish between the author's own appropriation of the subject matter and the authority of tradition. By Montaigne's time, writing about loss of favor had acquired such a vast cultural presence that it became difficult to distinguish what was lived experience and what was learned humanist commonplace.

One way of writing about disgrace and give the impression of authenticity was to choose to include dramatic dialogues and monologues, as we have seen with Monluc and Henri de Mesmes's life stories. In terms of content, one's particular downfall needed to be interpreted as a national tragedy because the king and his servants were part of the same body politic. At stake was the creation of a form of expressing noble discontent, in which the accused demanded justice and asked to be reintegrated into a more functional court society, as the following late example will show.

For François de La Rochefoucauld, the topic of disgrace became "ordinary." In fact, the first paragraph of La Rochefoucauld's memoirs packs together several leitmotifs like the tyranny of the court favorite, the author's own disfavor, and the creative retirement in which the author starts writing his life story; the theme of disgrace is invoked at the beginning of his memoirs, even though La Rochefoucauld had later regained royal favor:

J'ai passé les dernières années du ministère du cardinal Mazarin dans l'oisiveté que laisse d'ordinaire la disgrâce: pendant ce temps, j'ai écrit ce que j'ai vu des troubles de la Régence. Bien que ma fortune soit changée, je ne jouis pas d'un moindre loisir: j'ai voulu l'employer à écrire des événements plus éloignés où le hasard m'a souvent donné quelque part (La Rochefoucauld, *Mémoires* 55).

The “first” paragraph in terms of the narrative’s internal chronology is the last one in the actual writing process because La Rochefoucauld wrote books four to six first, books dealing with the civil war known as the *Fronde*, in which he took part. He wrote these initial four books in the third person. Like Monluc, he might have been alluding to Caesar as well as writing a self-justification. La Rochefoucauld wrote books three to six in his fifties, during the last years of Cardinal Mazarin’s years; he felt defeated and disenchanted with his younger self.

Nevertheless, his personal traumatic experience also echoes a set of conventions, among which are hatred of the court favorite and forced retirement from public life. In fact, La Rochefoucauld only switched to the first person later, when working on books I and II, after he had regained royal favor and probably after having read some of his Renaissance predecessors. Was this hatred of the court favorite genuine? In the *Maximes*, on which he was probably working around the same time he wrote books one and two of his *Mémoires*, La Rochefoucauld keenly observed that:

La haine pour les favoris n'est autre chose que l'amour de la faveur. Le dépit de ne la pas posséder se console et s'adoucit par le mépris que l'on témoigne de ceux qui la possèdent; et nous leur refusons nos hommages, ne pouvant pas leur ôter ce qui leur attire ceux de tout le monde. (*Maximes* 18).

The question about La Rochefoucauld's genuine anti-courtier feelings might be a question *mal posée*: the *Maximes* and the *Mémoires* belong to different genres with distinct writing codes that pre-determine the author's choices, more so than personal authentic lived experiences.

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In order to accommodate their writings to the public taste, Renaissance memoirists recounted many commonplaces from a centuries-old anti-courtier literature (both fictional and non-fictional). Memoirs developed in France concomitantly with the socio-cultural type of the court favorite, whose role was never fully accepted nor comprehended. Therefore, the most typical answer was a drive to differentiate oneself from parasitical, ambitious flatterers. However, having been courtiers themselves, memoirists did not always caricature court society; *robin* memoirists, especially, embraced more directly their court persona. They promoted a public identity formed of a sublimation of subjectivity and of an objectification of social roles. Typically, they imagined their public dignity as part of a body politic and showed how they had sacrificed themselves for the public weal. This objective representation of the individual as part of a body politic was best codified in the topic of disgrace, in which the traumatic experience was always expressed in impersonal terms. The topic afforded a subtle criticism of tyranny and served as a form of royal and courtly pedagogy. The chapter argues in the end that the theme of disgrace in Renaissance memoirs was a way of comprehending and negotiating an unstable court society rather than a symptom of the feudal knights' resistance to the growth of the early modern court.

### Chapter III. Reason of State

If the previous chapter has explored the gradual memorialization of the court as a necessary meeting point between the crown and its subjects, this chapter explores the politics of memoirs, and shows that the actors of the Wars of Religion justified their engagement in their autobiographical narratives in terms associated with reason of state theories. I argue that memoirists tried to harmonize more traditional values regarding honor with more modern notions of political expediency. They contributed to what Olivier Christin calls “the autonomisation of political reason” during the Wars of Religion, in ways that have been ignored by the more traditional history of ideas, which typically restricts the examination of reason of state ideas to early modern political treatises. At stake is a reevaluation of the traditional historiography, which regards Wars of Religion as the expression of a feudal resistance to absolutism. While ideals of a mixed monarchy might have been adduced in order to justify civil wars, former rebels either distanced themselves, in their self-memorialization, from their past engagements or explained them as attempts to reinforce social order and communal values.

Recent literary scholars of the French Renaissance such as Timothy Hampton, Marcus Keller, and Nicolas Russell have amply studied the relationship between the “modern secular literary culture” of the Renaissance and the emerging national state (Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy* 1), using some of the most canonical works of French literature, with the assumption that this culture was informed by and shaped Renaissance political culture. Nothing similar has been proposed with regard to noble life-writing. Although they were written in the epoch of state-building, “the state is nowhere to be found” in Renaissance memoirs, as Harari notes, while arguing, instead, that memoirists focused on isolated military events that brought them honor, and that they were incapable of connecting these events in order to see the big picture of statecraft

(108). How are we to interpret then the occasional appearance of abstract notions such as “patrie,” “raison(s) d’Etat,” and “raison(s) politique(s)” in these same narratives largely concentrating on concrete and particular events? The presence of these terms invalidates the notion that the agents of the Wars of Religion were incapable of political reflection and out of touch with the political literature of their day.

Governors and military commanders like Monluc and Tavannes did not produce elaborate political theories resembling the works of humanist scholars like Bodin and Hotman. This is probably why, in traditional historiography, French early modern noble rebellions were neglected by modern historians as the unfortunate and politically irrelevant outcome of personal ambition. Recent scholarship has challenged these ideas, however. Arlette Jouanna, most notably in *Le Devoir de révolte* and more recently in *Le Pouvoir absolu*, has argued that the leading figures of the Wars of Religion promoted an ideal of mixed monarchy in which sovereignty was to be shared between the crown and nobility. This political ideal came from the Middle Ages, and was most prominently articulated by the feudal League of the Public Weal formed in 1465, under the leadership of the duke of Burgundy Charles the Bold, against King Louis XI’s centralizing policies. According to this revisionist history, noble demands for a mixed monarchy faded away during Henri IV’s reign, when the French monarchy’s march towards absolutism could no longer be impeded. The last great noble uprising that occurred in the middle of the seventeenth century, the *Fronde*, never really endangered the French state as the Wars of Religion had done before.

A memoirist that Jouanna often quotes in order to substantiate her claims is the Viscount of Turenne, known after 1591 and referred to as the duke of Bouillon throughout this chapter. Bouillon’s political career first started as one of the Catholic leaders of the Malcontent movement, formed around his court patron Francis of Anjou (1574-1576), in which capacity he commanded

an alliance of Catholic and Protestant nobles discontented with King Charles IX and his successor King Henri III's authoritarian government. The existence of such an inter-confessional alliance would seem to support Jouanna's interpretation of these conflicts as part of a noble political struggle for mixed monarchy. Yet the same Bouillon writing his memoirs in 1609, more than thirty years after the events, advised his son against joining such noble factions and reduced his early political engagement to youthful inexperience. Jouanna suggests that this and other Renaissance memoirs are insincere and apologetic reinterpretations of the past and that they do not reflect their authors' real political beliefs.

The injunction to read memoirs carefully and distrust them as valid sources is very typical of modern historians of French noble culture. The resulting mining of memoirs for factual historical material is a very partial reading that foregrounds whatever confirms the narrative of a monarchy domesticating the nobility. This reading ignores the frequent self-contradicting life stories of former rebels openly supporting an authoritarian monarchy, regretting past factional engagement or claiming, on the contrary, that their political career aimed at strengthening the state. The modern historiographical reading of memoirs, which either denies that they contain any political claims or interprets them quite unilaterally, might also be a consequence of our tendency to use categories such as constitutionalism and absolutism, which did not exist in the minds of Tavannes, Bouillon and others. The following sections show how authors reflected upon their political past by referring to traditional and modern values such as honor, freedom of speech, and reason of state, values which shaped the early modern French subject's dialogue with and inscription in a political community.

## 1 Honor and “Parrhesia”

Political theories outlining the best possible regime are largely absent from the Renaissance life stories of courtiers and government officials. This does not mean, however, that their authors were incapable of political reasoning. Henri de Mesmes, for instance, wrote a critique of La Boétie’s *Discours de la servitude volontaire*, in the form of a traditional scholarly dissertation on the best political regime, aiming to engage with the political uses of the *Discourse* by Monarchomachs (MS fr. 839; La Boétie ed. Gontarbert); allusions and even borrowings from the same anti-royal discourse can be found in both Protestant (D’Aubigné’s) and Catholic (Tavannes’s) life-writings. However, the most stringent issue in self-memorialization efforts was safeguarding one’s honor. All this seems to fit Yuval Harari’s conclusion that Renaissance memoirists imagined themselves as “independent historical-political agents” seeking only honor, a value that was “not dependent on service to the state” (Harari 162). This would indeed explain why state-building and political theories are largely absent from memoirist narratives. Nevertheless, I should like to show that ideas of honor were not incompatible with political claims. On the contrary, only by foregrounding a common code of honor between the author and his intended readers could a memoirist participate in a political dialogue.

The concept of honor had a variety of meanings. Inherited from medieval ideas concerning knightly values, honor was essential to the early modern general understanding of social orders and ideals of behavior appropriate to every socio-professional category, as Paul Bénichou (*Morales du Grand Siècle*) and Jouanna (“Recherches sur la notion d’honneur,” *Mythes et ordres sociaux*), among others have shown. Since the “natural” employment of nobility was warfare, martial qualities like courage played a central role in defining an author’s honor in memoirs. Blaise de Monluc claimed that he would give up freely his natural right to self-preservation in the crown’s

interest, but refused to endow monarchs with powers over his salvation and his honor: “. . . noz vies et noz biens sont à nos roys, l’âme est à Dieu et l’honneur à nous; car sur mon honneur mon roy ne peut rien” (Monluc 343). Honor is aligned with religion because it brings the subject glory on earth just as observing religious precepts fosters eternal life after death. Monluc’s declaration seems to substantiate the claim that honor was autonomous and independent of service to the state. However, Monluc set out to write his life story in response to the disrepute he was held in when investigated on charges of embezzlement and abuse of power. His memoirs discursively recreate an honorable image of himself offered to his peers. An essential part of creating this image involves narrating actions proving his courage, but equally important is highlighting self-denial in public duties. Therefore, honor pertains to subjects” (“à nous”), and not to sovereigns, only in the sense that one can convince a courtly readership of an irreproachable, honorable service to one’s king and church. Even in the most knightly life stories of the Renaissance, honor is negotiated inter-subjectively, and it is subordinated to ideas of social order based on distributive justice according on merit and good birth.

A typical life story unfolds itself around the official positions that the memoirist upheld in the body politic. These offices are called “honneurs,” and they have foremost a materialistic meaning coming from Old French where “honor” could designate a fief, and any type of material wealth. Writing at length about one’s *cursus honorum* is a way to prove the objective, visible nature of one’s honor. Commynes acknowledged his indebtedness to Louis XI for his “obligation d’honneur et grans privaultez et bienfaictz” (3). “Grans privaultez” might be translated as great intimacy that he acquired as a court favorite who could voice his opinions freely. “Bienfaicts” refer to the material emoluments – the most visible signs of honor – with which Louis XI gratified his mignon. Far from being an insulating apolitical value, for a Renaissance man, honor was the most

important inter-subjective value that reflected a person's position within the body politic. Renaissance memoirs narrate the history of how the author gradually acquired a great "privacy" with a prince, or how one's reputation reached one's prince.

Cheverny, for instance, writes of how he started his political career by joining his cousin the archbishop of Tours. The latter was following King Henri II in an expedition against Emperor Charles V. Cheverny then replaced Michel de l'Hospital in the Parliament of Paris as a counselor on Church matters, in 1533, after Henri II signed a decree in this respect. He received "more testimonies of friendship and honor than he deserved," and he successfully climbed ("montai") the social ladder to the Grand Chambre (10). The persecution of Huguenot members of the Parliament of Paris and Cheverny's own ability to either please everybody or oblige "men of quality" facilitated his success. He became then master of requests, at which point the cardinal of Lorraine, a person in great favor at the court, took notice of his skills; through the cardinal, Cheverny had the "honor" to "start approaching" Queen Catherine (11). The queen mother eventually attached him to her son Henri of Anjou. After Henri became king of Poland, Cheverny prepared his return to the throne of France when Charles IX died, and the new king "honored" the chancellor by listening to everything that he had to say on matters of state. But once the king came to the throne, he no longer listened to his chancellor as before. Henri III was assassinated shortly after. His body was transported to the burial place at Compiègne with less "honor and ceremony" than Cheverny considered appropriate to a monarch (104). Cheverny's own dishonor resulting from the loss of his office was followed by the king's dishonor, for Henri III was killed by one of his subjects and buried without proper respect. Cheverny's life story produces a subtle criticism of Henri III's political choices by exploiting the multiple and relative meanings of honor.

Rather than assuming that honor was a fixed knightly value incompatible with abstract political thought, the examples examined herein show that the concept of honor had both concrete and abstract meanings, and that memoirists used it to write about public duties and explain political action. These same examples point towards a political pedagogy. In Cheverny's story, Henri III's downfall was caused by the estrangement of faithful servants who spoke their mind freely in political matters. We do not know much about the degree to which Cheverny and Commynes really spoke freely to their princes or what "grans privaultez" meant exactly. But the highest honor bestowed on a subject was the permission to speak freely. This was also the most important quality foregrounded in a memoirist's self-representation, as I will show in the following pages.

Free speech was a rhetorical figure known in Latin as *oratio libera*, which customarily corresponded to the Greek word *parrhesia* ("saying everything"). This figure has received a lot of scholarly attention recently due to Michel Foucault's essays on the subject. Like testimonies, the figure had an ambiguous status in rhetoric, for it was supposed to express the speaker's belief directly and without "art." Quintilian defined it as pertaining to figures of speech (*figurae orationis*) like *exclamatio* and *licentia*; but, for Quintilian, free speech was often simulated and hid flattery: "Quid enim minus figuratum quam vera libertas? Sed frequenter sub hac facie latet adulatio" (2: 270, bk. IX, ch II). Cicero, for instance, in his *Pro Ligario*, addressed Caesar and admitted of having freely joined the enemy camp against the dictator; this apparent freedom of speech, in Quintilian's interpretation, was a hidden eulogy of Caesar's clemency. In a rhetorical setting, free speech is a figure that amplifies the listener and reader's emotion and creates an illusion of the speaker's courage in an atmosphere of danger. As Michel Foucault notes, a grammarian who tells the truth to his pupils cannot be called a *parrhesiast* because no danger is involved:

However, when a philosopher addresses himself to a sovereign, to a tyrant, and tells him that his tyranny is disturbing and unpleasant because tyranny is incompatible with justice, then the philosopher speaks the truth, believes he is speaking the truth, and, more than that, also takes a risk (since the tyrant may become angry, may punish him, may exile him, may kill him). And that was exactly Plato's situation with Dionysius in Syracuse (“Discourse and Truth” no page number).

For *parrhesia* to be effective it needed to happen in the face of life-threatening danger. The danger could be invented; Jean de Saux-Tavannes wrote, in his letter to his children, nephews, and friends, that he was not disclosing the whole truth but only what the times allowed him to reveal: “La malice, la menterie des uns, l’ignorance et flaterie des autres, me violentent à passer sur ces considerations, et à escrire, non toute la verité: mais ce que le temps me le peut permettre” (*Epistre* a ii vo). How are we to make sense of the writer’s confession of self-censorship, itself denouncing official censorship? Had official censorship been truly efficient, Tavannes would have ultimately claimed that he was telling only the truth and that there was nothing to fear from the authorities. Far from being effectively censored, Jean de Saulx-Tavannes was trying to convey the idea that he was writing in dangerous times and that, despite this, he was bold enough to tell most of the truth. The former Leaguer adapted *oratio libera* to create the impression that he was writing during dangerous and tyrannical times, and emphasized the social and political constraints on his writing. He shifted his readers’ attention from the importance of saying the whole truth in order to focus on his having the courage to speak and write, thus risking his own life in the process. The courage needed to write the truth paralleled, rhetorically, Tavannes’s courage on the battlefield, one of the most common definitions of noble honor. The passage conflates the ancient philosophical and rhetorical category of *parrhesia* with traditional noble preoccupations with honor. Hence,

memoirists foregrounded how life-writing as a life-threatening activity, and throughout the *Ancien Régime*, memoirs were met with a *parrhesiastic* rhetoric even when their contents were quite conventional.

The courage to speak the truth was probably the historiographical quality that early modern readers prized the most. The reader's response to Tavannes's memoirs looks like a succession of amplificatory remarks on the figure of the honest *parrhesiast*. As early as March 1657, Charles Spon wrote to his friend, the bibliophile Guy Patin, asking for his discretion regarding an attempt by the Lyonnais printers Fourmy and Champion to get a royal privilege for the publication of Tavannes's *Mémoires*; "livre dans lequel (à ce que m'a dit l'Advocat Huguetan), il y a des choses hardies, et des veritez que mesme Mr de Thou n'a pas sceües, ou n'a pas ozé escrire dans son histoire principalement sur le fait des massacres" (212). However, by July of the same year, Fourmy printed Tavannes's *Mémoires* without royal privilege, and he sent a copy of the memoirs to Guy Patin around the same time; still hoping that he would eventually get a royal privilege, Fourmy asked Patin via Spon to show the book only to trustworthy persons "de peur qu'on ne luy [to Fourmy] fasse piece" (237). The mid-seventeenth-century epistolary exchange about Tavannes's memoirs evokes fear, danger, and censorship. Eighteenth-century bibliographical catalogues unfailingly reproduced Spon's words about Fourmy's clandestine publication (Lelong 267; Papillon 240-241). From one generation of early modern readers to another, Tavannes's reputation as a courageous historian gained in magnitude. This was partly due to commercial strategies because typically banned books or books with a scandalous reputation sold well (Soman 439-463). But the interest in dangerous books also highlighted the political stakes of the "*parrhesiastic game*."

Jean de Saulx-Tavannes addressed a courtly and princely audience. His memoirs were an attempt to engage Henri IV and his successor Louis XIII in a truth-telling game by appealing to shared ideas of noble honor based on courage. By exposing his vulnerability, Jean de Saulx-Tavannes invited Henri IV and then Louis XIII to play his truth-telling game, a game that “flatterer” courtiers and historians were incapable of playing, the memoirists asserted. By refusing the game and persecuting Jean de Saulx-Tavannes and his family, the monarchs acted as unjust tyrants dishonoring their royal office. The gentlemanly freedom to speak one’s mind and the princely clemency displayed in accepting such a challenge constituted the literary framework for writing about politics in memoirs.

At the level of social representations, noble honor meant above all knightly courage and having held public offices. In memoirs, honor was conflated with the figure of free speech and became a powerful rhetorical tool for entering into a political dialogue. Conversely, failure to portray the idea of free, courageous speech invalidated the political usefulness of a historian, as the following example will make it clear.

Montaigne’s essay *Des livres* ends with a severe assessment of the Du Bellay brothers’ *Mémoires*:

Sur les memoires de monsieur du Bellay: C’est toujours plaisir de voir les choses escrites par ceux, qui ont essayé comme il les faut conduire: mais il ne se peut nier qu’il ne se découvre évidemment en ces deux seigneurs icy un grand dechet de la francise et liberté d’escrire qui reluit ès anciens de leur sorte: comme au Sire de Joinville domestique de S. Loys, Eginard Chancelier de Charlemaigne, et de plus fresche memoire en Philippe de Comines (441; bk. 2, ch. 10).

The essayist accused the Du Bellay brothers of having written a plea in Francis I's favor rather than a trustworthy history. Montaigne expected from memoir writing a certain freedom of speech ("la franchise et liberté d'écrire"), which had characterized earlier proponents of noble eyewitness histories like Joinville (author of a *Vie de Saint-Louis*), Eginhard (author of a *Vita Caroli Magni*), and Commynes. By contrast the Du Bellay brothers' narrative interpreted everything to the advantage of the French ("à nostre avantage"), and hid everything that was potentially sensitive ("chatouilleux"), like Francis I disgracing certain court favorites, and the king being under the spell of his mistress Madame d'Estampes. In other words, the memoirists, otherwise valorous knights, lacked the courage to write freely on sensitive topics of political consequence ("effects publiques"). Instead, they wrote an idealized history of things as they should have happened rather than as they did. Their memoirs' hagiographical portrait of Francis I was, in Montaigne's opinion, contrary to the realist conventions of the genre. History written by experienced statesmen should have prepared men for political life; idealizing and hiding political events diminished the pedagogical utility of history.

Montaigne traced back the origins of memoir writing to medieval hagiographic *vitae*. But, as we have seen in the first chapter, it was the publication of Commynes's *Memoires* in the mid-sixteenth century that marked the arrival of a new type of eyewitness history which would depict princes and historical agents as they really were, without flattery. Commynes's work had a great impact on Renaissance political literature, especially during the Wars of Religion in France (Baumann, *Der Geschichtsschreiber Phillippe de Commynes*) but also abroad (Maissen 313-349). This was due, of course, to Commynes's predilection for moral-political commentaries (Demers, *Commynes méMORiaLISTE*), but mostly to his creating a pragmatic dimension of politics:

. . . conçu comme une “science” ou un “art” pour reprendre les propres termes du mémorialiste, un “art” dont il convient de rationaliser les moyens, les procédés, en dehors de toute référence morale et édifiante. Sainte-Beuve parlait, à propos de Commynes, d’un “Machiavel en douceur.” La formule est excellente, à condition de ne pas oublier qu’il y a là un palier, dans une continuité qui mènera aux doctrinaires de la raison d’Etat (Blanchard, *Commynes l’Européen* 22).

Blanchard’s pithy observation deserves to be explored further because political pragmatism would continue to be a defining feature of the memoir genre of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and it was one of the innovations of Renaissance political thought.

## **2 The Honorable and the Useful**

Commynes’s innovation with regard to his medieval predecessors came through in his tendency to show that political actors were driven by immoral utilitarian drives and that ideas of what is honorable and honest were relative. The duke of Burgundy’s downfall was a direct consequence of his obstinacy in wanting to conquer the city of Neuss as a matter of honor, when he should have assisted the English with invading France and getting rid of his arch-enemy King Louis XI. The narrator explains Charles the Bold’s political downfall and eventual death through his obsession with honor and glory, which Charles developed by (mis)reading history books (357). The duke of Burgundy’s principal fault was that he neglected honor’s intrinsic relativity, summed up in a proverb repeated ad nauseam by future memoirists: “. . . qui en aura le prouffict [of the war] en aura l’honneur” (Commynes 208; 259). The maxim about honor being a function of the success of an action rather than a value in itself seems to be attacking the Ciceronian dichotomy *utile-honestum* (the useful and the honorable), advanced most notably in his *De Officiis*, arguably the single most influential book on public duties in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Commynes probably knew the work indirectly from the vernacular political literature of his day, which was largely a Christianized version of Ciceronian ideas about a just society.

In Cicero's view, both humans and animals are endowed with a natural instinct for self-preservation. This is why both are self-centered and seek what is beneficial, or useful (*utile*), to them. But humans, unlike animals, cannot live happily outside of a just society. Hence, they need to lead a moral life (*honestum*), and the highest moral value is thus social justice. Consequently, what is useful should also be honorable, and it is one's duty to put society and justice ahead of personal interests. Cicero rarely discussed the possibility that following moral precepts could sometimes threaten the republic (Tuck 1-30).

By the end of the fifteenth century, Commynes wrote at length about morally dubious and politically effective historical agents. The fortunes of the term *honneste*, translating the Latin *honestum* parallel these changes. Originally, a synonym of *honorable* in medieval French, *honneste* preserved this meaning throughout the early modern period (Demaiziere 11). But by the 1540s, *honneste* could describe ideal courtiers, and the epithet conveyed models of valor, fashion, and conversation; characters in Marguerite de Navarre's novellas and in Brantôme's *Mémoires* could be said to be *honnestes* either because of their moral qualities or because of their talent for ruse, dissimulation, and seduction (Cazauban 159).

In setting out the conventions of memoir writing and explicitly refusing to idealize his main historical character (Louis XI), Commynes was breaking away from medieval royal hagiographies (like Joinville's *Vie de Saint-Louis*). His realism was alien to the political literature of the late Middle Ages, the essence of which was encapsulated in the mirror-for-princes genre. Machiavelli was Commynes's younger contemporary, and their works enjoyed a similar popularity, although Commynes's temperate political realism did not prompt the negative publicity with which

Renaissance readers met Machiavelli's *Prince* (Stegmann, "Commynes et Machiavel" 265-284). Commynes's memoirs, first published in 1524 under the title *Chronique et histoire*, and Machiavelli's *Prince*, first published in 1532, shared a point of view that privileged practice over ideal theories when analyzing political action. This concrete, pragmatic discussion of politics remained a characteristic of French memoirs and grew in importance as the Wars of Religion unfolded.

Machiavelli went further than Commynes in denouncing the entire mirror-for-princes genre for depicting politics as it ought to be rather than as it really was:

But because I want to write what will be useful . . . it seems to me better to concentrate on what really happens rather than on theories and speculations. For many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist. However, how men live is so different from how they should live that a ruler who does not do what is generally done, but persists in doing what ought to be done, will undermine his power rather than maintain it. If a ruler who wants always to act honourably is surrounded by many unscrupulous men his downfall is inevitable. Therefore, a ruler who wishes to maintain his power must be prepared to act immorally when this becomes necessary (*Prince* 54-55; ch. XV, transl. Skinner).

This was an unprecedented attack on Cicero's *De Officiis*. The Florentine humanist pointed to a problem that would become topical in Renaissance memoirs, namely that adhering to strict moral principles might be politically ruinous. I will briefly sketch the development of this anti-Ciceronian literature before examining the ways in which memoirists of the Wars of Religion engaged with it.

The disjunction between the honorable and the useful became a common topic of reflection during the Wars of Religion. Michel de Montaigne, for instance, described his political career as a peace negotiator between the ultra-Catholic duke of Guise and the Protestant King of Navarre, in his essay *De l'utile et de l'honneste*. He argued for the preservation of an individual's moral principles, but he admitted that in times of necessity a prince might legitimately make use of dishonest means to preserve his state, and that this should be regarded as a punishment from God for the sins of the people. Montaigne denied any justification for dishonest actions on the part of subjects. In his own career, he avoided potential conflicts between moral beliefs and political contingency by refusing to engage in factions, and by controlling his own passions and opinions. The most felicitous solution to conflicts between conscience and political expediency, in Montaigne's opinion, was to leave public employment early in his life.

The question of an immoral political utility was officially baptized in 1589 as "reason of state" with the publication of Giovanni Botero's *Della Ragion di Stato*, although the term, which Botero popularized in Europe, had been used before by Guicciardini in his *Dialogue on the Government of Florence*, written in the 1520s (Catteeuw 36-67). Medieval legal studies inherited from Roman law the concept of *ratio status reipublicae* and *ratio publicae utilitatis*, but few scholars would agree with Gaines Post, who, in his *Studies in Medieval Legal Thought*, starts from the assumption that medieval legal theorists had an abstract idea of a state. The distant origins of reason of state must surely be explored in medieval legal thought, but it was the end of the sixteenth century that saw the appearance of the concept in vernacular languages, as well as the publication of systematic theories on reason of state.

What prompted Botero to write a treatise on the subject was that all over Europe courtiers talked about reason of state and quoted Machiavelli, who had dictated its precepts, and Tacitus,

who had described vividly (“esprime vivamente”) Tiberius’s art of maintaining his empire (1). Botero proposed to correct the immoral ends to which reason of state were attached and attempted to re-Christianize it. He defined the state as the stable rule over a people and reason of state as the knowledge of the means by which such a rule may be established, preserved, and augmented (3).

Botero was correct in naming Tacitus as a major influence, as Montaigne amply quoted the Roman historian both in his essay on political necessity and throughout his writings. Tacitus had first been rediscovered as a historian in the fifteenth century, and was eventually embraced as a political thinker late in the sixteenth century, when Justus Lipsius edited Tacitus’s *Annals* (1574) and then used him as a main source for his own *Politica* (1589). Modern scholars of Tacitus’s early modern reception (Burke, Dorey, Tofannin, Schellhase, etc.) call this culture of political realism “Tacitism.” It was not a clear-cut political ideology, as humanists could quote Tacitus to support absolute monarchies (Lipsius), republics (La Boétie), or constitutional monarchies (Gentillet), but more of a style of reading and writing history in order to uncover real political laws and provide efficient exempla instead of moral ideals. In this sense, Tacitism is a continuation of Machiavellian and Commynian views on history and politics. Unsurprisingly, memoirists of the Wars of Religion read and quoted Tacitus quite often (D’Aubigné, *Sa vie* 48; Tavannes, *Epistre* a ii), and “reason of state” as a concept emerged in a number of memoirs around the same time as Botero’s treatise.

It is likely that the sudden appearance of a pan-European reason of state literature in the last decade of the sixteenth century was due in part to the events of the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre on August 24, 1572. Protestants assembled in great numbers in Paris to celebrate the marriage between their leader Henri of Navarre and the Catholic Princess Marguerite of Valois, King Charles IX’s sister. After an attempt on the admiral of Coligny’s life on August 22, 1572, the monarch agreed, under unclear circumstances, to the execution of the admiral and the main

Protestant figures who were attending the wedding festivities. The ultra-Catholic Parisian population ran amok and, in a religious frenzy, started killing Protestants en masse. Charles IX unsuccessfully tried to avoid a new religious war and the spread of the massacre by issuing several statements. In the first letter to his governors sent on August 24, he blamed the execution of the admiral and the ensuing genocide on the duke of Guise (Goulart 1:401). Four days later, he assumed full responsibility for the assassination of Protestant leaders with the justification that the admiral had plotted against him and his state; he also forbade, unsuccessfully, any continuation of the massacre. The king admitted to having employed extraordinary means to defend himself and his kingdom against rebellious subjects:

Sadite Majesté declare que ce qui est ainsi advenu a esté par son expres commandement, et non pour cause aucune de religion ne contrevenir à ses edits de pacification qu'il a toujours entendu . . . observer, garder et entretenir, ains pour obvier et prevenir l'execution d'une malheurese et detestable conspiration faite par ledit Amiral, chef et auteur d'icelle . . . en la personne dudit roy et de son estat, la Royne mere, Messieurs ses freres, le Roy de Navarre, princes et seigneurs estans pres d'eux (Goulart 1: 427).

He tried to reassure his Protestant subjects that he had not intended to annul the peace treaty signed in 1570, which gave Protestants extensive religious and political liberties. In other words, the king acknowledged the use of extraordinary justice to execute, without legal justification or any religious motif, subjects who had not previously been convicted of treason.

Extraordinary measures against subjects and large scale executions were not new historical phenomena. The radical novelty of Charles IX's statements lay in the Very Christian King of France openly admitting (and therefore legitimizing) that he was governing through exception, in

the name of what was politically useful for himself and his state. Sixteen years later, King Henri III ordered the assassination of two Catholic leaders, the duke Henri of Guise and his brother the cardinal Louis of Guise, and it seemed that the state of exception became normal. The repetitive use of extraordinary measures, unbound by laws, against rebellious subjects in the 1570s and 1580s, was instrumental in creating a reason of state literature that is still part of our modern political vocabulary, although our own views about political reason are more in tune with how Montaigne wrote about it than how most of his contemporaries referred to it.

Of all his essays, Montaigne's *De l'utile et de l'honneste* adhered most closely to the conventions of the memoir genre. Writing about his political career, Montaigne struggled to prove that he had preserved his reputation intact and that he had freely chosen to retire from public life in order to avoid any conflict between political necessity and moral conscience. All of this is, of course, quite topical for Renaissance noble life-writings. Atypical, however, is his choice of refusing dishonest political means and presenting an irreducibly private, morally coherent, albeit "aristocratic" self (Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy* 63). We can better understand Montaigne's originality by examining the way other political agents understood, used, and responded to this new reason of state political vocabulary.

### **3 Uses of Reason of State**

The most striking aspect of the uses of reason of state vocabulary in memoirs is the way in which authors refused to present any active opposition between their irreducible selves and the state. I will show in the following pages that the political pedagogy of memoirs fully espoused reason of state theories to the extent that a distinction was eventually made between the state as such, and princely personal rule. Paradoxically, however, this in turn could justify disobedience and self-affirmation.

Historians of ideas have not noticed thus far the fact that the term “raison d’Estat” appeared in written French for the first time in Villeroy’s *Advis . . . a Monsieur le duc de Mayenne*, which the author claims to have published in Paris, “apres la mort du Roy [Henri III], sur la fin de l’an 1589.” This speech was included in the first edition of Villeroy’s *Memoires d’Estat* in 1622. This is of the utmost importance because the speech is contemporaneous with Giovanni Botero’s *Della ragion di Stato*, also published in 1589. Villeroy sent his advice to the duke of Mayenne, leader of the Catholic League, as a form of protest against the influence the Spanish and Papal ambassadors had over the French Catholic League in 1589. Henri III’s former secretary of state had joined the Catholic League and was trying to dissuade its leader, the duke of Mayenne, from trusting Spanish offers to protect the kingdom of France:

. . . par raison d’Estat ledict Roy d’Espagne devoit plustot nous ayder à nourrir la guerre en ce Royaume qu’à l’achever et la finir, et a demembrer la Couronne qu’à la conserver en son entier s’il perdoit l’esperance de se la mettre sur la teste : ses ministres disent que le duché de Bourgogne lui appartient; celui de Bretagne aux infantes ses filles, et pareillement le Comté de Blois, de Couchy, et d’Auvergne (414).

According to Villeroy, reason of state governs international relations, and states compete against each other like living organisms. It is unclear whether Villeroy knew about Botero’s treatise, and his views on international relations might have been a development of Commynes’s theory of a balance of powers willed by God in which every European superpower eventually met its formidable foe. In the text, the concept of reason of state is nowhere explicated as if it were self-explanatory.

The discourse was added posthumously to a compendium of autobiographic apologies and discourses entitled *Mémoires d'Etat*. It has the form and the title of an *advis*, a deliberative speech on the right course of action to be taken. The advice form is constitutive of the “*parrhesiatic game*,” and this accounts for the fact that many memoirs contain long lists of deliberative speeches with little concern for “literary” devices such as narrative structure, the art of the portrait, and peripeteia. In both *De inventione* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, the commonplaces of deliberative rhetoric fall into two classes: the honorable and the expedient (*honestum* and *utile*), with a further division of the *honestum* into the four main cardinal virtues (Moss 7). None of the deliberative discourses attached or included in memoirs of the Wars of Religion elaborate upon these commonplace cardinal virtues, so characteristic of medieval political literature, but rather focus on a rhetoric of political expediency and contribute to a new view on politics distinct from the Ciceronian civic humanism.

Significantly, Villeroy used the term reason of state for the first time upon the death of Henri III, who had continued Charles IX’s expedient treatment of rebellious subjects. Henri III was assassinated, and on his deathbed he recognized the Protestant king of Navarre as his successor. Composed under these circumstances, Villeroy’s speech addresses the issue of the survival of the French kingdom, by which he meant the preservation of an unwritten constitution that would come to be referred to as the fundamental laws of the kingdom; besides the Salic law of succession to the French throne and the inalienability of the realm, the Catholic Leaguer Villeroy included the king’s Catholic faith among these fundamental laws.

The advice shows how failure to negotiate with the king of Navarre would reduce the populace to further poverty, alarmingly noting that commerce in basic products, such as grains, was blocked. Soon the cities would open their doors to the king of Navarre because the Catholic

League was unable to represent popular interests. Not only was the populace impoverished, but factitious gentlemen jealous of one another only further destabilized the kingdom. Villeroy advised the Duke of Mayenne towards a settlement with the king of Navarre, the legitimate heir to the throne of France.

If Villeroy did not sacrifice religion in the interest of the state, Cheverny pursued these alternative. He recounted how Henri of Navarre had been recognized as king of France by Henri III's army. Henri IV began a policy of reforming the state and reinstated former officers of the crown. Noblemen from his army recommended Cheverny, who had been living away from the political scene after his disgrace, because, in the memoirists own words, he was "le plus ancien et premier Officier de cette Couronne comme n'y ayans lors point de Connestable," the only officer who could reestablish the king's council and put the court in order as the institutions were in a state of chaos (Cheverny 119). Henri IV sent spies to inquire into Cheverny's intentions before sending an official letter asking him to reestablish the king's state ("estat"); the king allegedly called Cheverny in his letter "bon François" and "premier Officier de la Couronne," and Cheverny felt growing inside him an "affection et obligation naturelle envers cet Estat et . . . l'obeïssance . . . à [s]on Roy" (120). Even though the enterprise was risky, Cheverny accepted to become chancellor again: ". . . ma conscience, mon honneur, et mon serment au vray interest et conservation de ceste Monarchie, me porterent et obligerent à la meilleure resolution qui estoit de servir le Roy, que Dieu m'a donné pour maistre par vraye et legitime succession" (120). Unlike Villeroy, Cheverny joined Henri IV before his conversion because he considered the law of succession to the throne more fundamental to the preservation of the kingdom than any religious faith. The three basic values of conscience, honor, and oath towards the interests of the kingdom share a certain degree of synonymy; they suggest a process of internalization of honor and a strong

attachment to an abstract fatherland (“patrie”), rather than to an individual king and his subjects. This trope thrived in other memoirs:

La conscience et bon naturel doit faire agir pour le public, non la recompense ou la reputation qui s’en espere: rien n’est plus ingrat qu’un peuple . . . la recompense s’en doit esperer au ciel, et la satisfaction à nous mesmes d’estre bons patriotes, sans l’esperer du Prince ny du peuple” (Jean de Saulx-Tavannes 203)

The Governor of Burgundy Tavannes and Chancellor Cheverny must have both adapted these patriotic ideas about self-sacrifice from Cicero:

Parents are dear; dear are children, relatives, friends; but one’s native land embraces all our loves [sed omnes omnium caritates patria una complexa est]; and who that is true would hesitate to give his life for her, if by his death he would render her a service? (Cicero, *De Officiis* 58-60; bk. I, 57)

Patriotic love effectively subordinates all other allegiance. A prudent king who knew how to listen to experienced officers like Cheverny, Henri IV hoped that other public servants would follow Cheverny’s example, not out of love for his own person but out of a genuine desire to be good Frenchmen:

. . . je suis content et me tient maintenant assez fort, puisque je vous sçay pres de moy, estimant qu’a vostre exemple tous les Officiers de ma Couronne et tous les bons François me reconnoistront pour leur Roy, et me viendront bien-tost servir, m’assurant cependant tellement de vostre fidelité et affection en vostre experience et conduite, que j’estime desja toutes mes affaires restablies, comme je le desire (126-7).

If Cheverny silenced his religious scruples before joining Henri IV, the king himself needed to sacrifice his own religious beliefs:

. . . par raison d'Etat l'on commença aussi fort alors à parler de la conversion du Roy, et qu'il estoit necessaire qu'il fust instruit en la Religion Catholique, surquoy l'on fist infinis discours concluans tous à ceste juste necessité, hormis que les francs Huguenots et desesperez Ligueurs craignans de là leurs ruines, ne peurent empescher de descrier ceste conversion (151).

Reason of state demanded the Henri IV's religious conversion, following a conciliatory policy put in place by Henri IV and his chancellor. Cheverny considered that Catholic Leaguers and Protestant zealots opposed the conversion not so much out of genuine religious scruples, but because they feared their own ruin. Crucial in Cheverny's story is the emergence of the idea of a fatherland that was a value in itself, and that personal religious beliefs could be put aside in order to strengthen the political community.

Around the time when reason of state came to the fore of political theories, memoirists used its language to explain political actions in the context of religious wars which threatened the survival of the French kingdom. Secretary of state Villeroy considered the sovereign's Catholic faith part of the unwritten constitution of France, whereas Chancellor Cheverny deemed religion secondary to the Salic law of succession to the French crown. In both cases, the presence of reason of state language signaled a new awareness regarding politics as an autonomous field, an internalization of honor, and the birth of a patriotic sensibility among government officials.

Equally notable for my general argument is the importance of collaboration in the conception of reason of state. There is no opposition involving an authoritarian crown

domesticating the nobility with the aid of weak bureaucrats. Both Cheverny and Villeroy depicted themselves as conscious political agents, and their relationship with their princes was one based on free speech and patriotism. But what about the “bad Frenchmen” who never regained royal favor? Strikingly both ultra-Catholics and former malcontent rebels reflected on the Wars of Religion in terms of reason of state. Jean de Saulx-Tavannes and Henri de la Tour d’Auvergne-Bouillon will serve as cases in point.

The Catholic Leaguer Jean de Saulx-Tavannes invoked reason of state in a variety of meanings, from the Machiavellian one, in which a prince maintains his personal rule by sacrificing moral principles, to the more patriotic meaning present in Cheverny’s narrative. The first meaning occurs in the description of the events following the battle of Moncontour in October 1569, during the Third War of Religion (1568-1570). According to this version of the events, the young Duke Henri of Anjou, under the influence of Marshal Gaspard de Saulx-Tavannes, advised his brother King Charles IX to destroy the fleeing Protestant army. However, the Count of Retz, “favyroy du Roy et de la Royne,” convinced King Charles IX that it was unwise to let his brother Henri of Anjou acquire too much glory: “Le sieur de Tavanès debat le contraire pensant vaincre par raisons de guerre, ne prenant garde que les raisons d’Estat du Roy les emporteroient, Sa Majesté eust mieux aymé les Huguenots à naistre, que la victoire entiere à son frere” (358). Gaspard de Saulx-Tavannes, in his son’s interpretation, ignored the king’s reasons of state because he was too immersed in a knightly culture that ignored courtly intrigue. Aside from the implicit attack on Retz, “reasons of state” are negatively charged here because they represent courtly manipulations of prestige; they justify a prince’s jealousy maintaining his own dominion, against internal competitors. Courtly reasons of state, paradoxically, go against the interests of the state; Charles

IX adopted a Machiavellian prudence that consolidated his own position on the throne of France rather than the kingdom itself.

Charles IX paid the price later in August 1572, on Saint Bartholomew's Day, when, according to Jean de Saulx-Tavannes and his father's story, the religious factions threatened both his rule and his state. This time Gaspard de Saulx-Tavannes advised Charles IX to assassinate Coligny, and part of the Protestant leadership, with the justification: "Il est plus permis d'entreprendre contre les sujets par voyes extraordinaires, qu'à eux d'entreprendre contre leur Roy" (421). But Gaspard de Saulx-Tavannes, unlike the court favorite Retz, argued against sacrificing princes of the blood like the king of Navarre and the prince of Condé. Gaspard de Saulx-Tavannes, whose speech Jean de Saulx-Tavannes supposedly reproduced, employed therefore a reason of state language ("voies extraordinaires") that was not entirely negative; it referred both to Charles IX maintaining his own rule and to the state's survival. Moreover, the king decided to take extraordinary measures against his subjects after having consulted the *parrhesiastic* adviser Gaspard de Saulx-Tavannes; the latter counter-balanced the pernicious influence of flatterer courtiers like Retz who only managed to fuel base passions of jealousy instead of guiding the king according to state interest.

A further step in this promotion of reason of state can be seen in Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's sincere admiration of the uses of reason of state in Spain, where the king "se sçait servir des papes et de l'Inquisition" and "se maintient par l'appuy et conservation de la Religion" (115); this ideal of reason of state is more in line with Giovanni Botero's Catholic imperialism. Nevertheless, the Catholic Leaguer Jean de Saulx-Tavannes sometimes conceived religion as subordinate to reason(s) of state.

In his own “advice” to the queen regent Marie of Medici, composed after Henri IV’s death and discussing the subject of whether France should ally itself with Spain, Jean de Saulx-Tavannes quoted an argument “by those” (“par ceux”) who wanted the infant king Louis XIII to marry the Spanish heiress; according to these anonymous advisers, the union served the Catholic religion and reasons of state best:

Ceux qui disent qu’il falloit unir les deux Coronnes de France et d’Espagne, monstrent que c’est le party de la religion Catholique qui est le plus juste et par raisons d’Estat et que s’alliant avec le Roy d’Espagne par mariage, l’on pouvoit chacun de son costé ruiner les rebelles, et restablir la religion Catholique; et que tant qu’il y auroit deux religions, il seroit impossible d’y avoir une paix de durée (410).

But against this opinion one might argue (“contre ceste opinion s’allegue”) that the marriage alliance was not beneficial (“utile”) as long as the king was a minor (411); the move might give Spain a free hand over France’s sovereignty. Jean de Saulx-Tavannes concluded with another “impersonal” counter-argument:

Que les pechez sont moindres d’endurer deux religions forcez par la necessité des affaires. Et par raisons d’Estat quand il y a deux puissances contraires, ou en façon de l’estre qu’il faut secourir les plus foibles: d’autant qu’aydant les plus forts, il est dangereux que d’amis ils ne deviennent ennemis (411).

The speech’s impersonal construction (“s’allegue”) suggests Jean de Saulx-Tavannes’s own inner conflicts, since in other fragments of his memoirs he openly condemned human prudence and advocated for sacrificing everything in the interest of religion: “Il faut que les raisons d’Estat, et

les raisons humaines cedent à la Religion, d'autant que l'ame est plus que le corps" (425). But the rubric *Autre advis donné à la royne regente par ledict sieur Vicomte de Tavannes* (411) attributes the speech and the opinions expressed on the subject of an alliance with Spain after Henri IV's death to Jean de Saulx-Tavannes himself. Even if we admit that the editor chose headings and internal titles, Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's impersonal speech ends with an argument for maintaining two religions out of necessity; it makes up the conclusive peroration of the speech and must be the opinion that Jean de Saulx-Tavannes held himself.

Of special interest to my purpose, in both the argument and the counterargument, is the notion that reason of state is a prudential commonplace, favoring both tolerance and intolerance according to circumstances; there is no systematic theory behind its use, and reasons of state seem to refer to a technique of ruling according to circumstances. Amazingly, considering the long disgrace Jean de Saulx-Tavannes had been living in ever since Henri IV became king of France, nothing suggests, in his life-writing, a right to actively oppose royal "absolutism"; on the other hand, Jean de Saulx-Tavannes, borrowing his father's voice, did not condemn noble rebellion completely. Gaspard de Saulx-Tavannes's advice, which triggered the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre, argued that it was more legitimate for a king to persecute his subjects than for subjects to rebel against their sovereign. But this implied that subjects could take up arms against their monarch under extraordinary circumstances. This suggests a paradoxically shared absolutism where the king has the upper hand. The notion of a former noble rebel espousing absolutist ideas seems counterintuitive; but its reoccurrence in other memoirs, from the opposing Protestant faction, points to a collective disenchantment with past civil wars.

For instance, Henri de la Tour d'Auvergne, viscount of Turenne, duke of Bouillon, described in his memoir the creation of the Malcontent movement against Charles IX and Henri

of Anjou in the wake of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre. Although he had co-founded the movement, the former Malcontent warned his child against taking part in political factions:

Icy ai-je à vous noter . . . que vous vous serviez de mes préceptes, qui sont que vous ayez à dépendre du Roy, de vous entretenir bien avec tous, mais faisant partie à part, tenez vous tousjours avec vostre Roy, et que rien ne vous en puisse jamais séparer, que le maintien de la liberté de vostre conscience, pour laquelle je vous convie et vous conjure de présenter à Dieu vos biens, vostre vie et vostre personne; et qu'il vous souvienne que les rois nous sont donnés de Dieu, et quoyque mauvais quelquefois, néantmoins, nous les devons servir (45; ed. Puchesse).

The duke of Bouillon regretted having been instrumental, as Francis of Anjou's favorite courtier, in the formation of the Malcontent movement in 1573-4. He conceded that it was possible to defend one's freedom of conscience, meaning religious beliefs, but he immediately argued against any active resistance, for tyrannical princes were also God-sent. Neither divine laws nor political laws ("la loy de Dieu, ny politique") granted Francis of Anjou legitimacy to take arms against his brother even if the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre seemed to justify vengeance: ". . . et quand Dieu eust bény ses desseins, c'eust esté pour punir ce qui avoit esté entrepris à la Saint-Barthélemy, mais gardant à Monsieur [Francis] ce qu'il méritoit en se rendant autheur de tant de maux qu'une guerre illégitime apporte" (45).

The "political law" stands for reason of state and is not opposed to religion. Just as Comynes and Tavannes, Bouillon thought that God alone had the power to punish sinful princes by creating powerful enemies from within or from neighboring lands; it was not up to subjects to punish their princes. His tense relationship with his former ally Henri IV around the time he was

writing his memoirs notwithstanding, Bouillon's self-justification is coherent and reflects a process of political maturation.

In his self-portrait as a rebel, the young Bouillon was under the false impression that factional struggles made his noble courage more visible ("le courage y paroist mieux") and that it facilitated a quick acquisition of public offices ("charges"); but the mature writer knows that factions displease God ("Dieu ne veut pas tels desseins"), that the state always survives them ("l'estat se maintient, et les partis s'en vont toujours en déperissant"), and that those who gain the most from rebellions are, not people from great families ("ceux de maison qui ont du bien et de la qualité naturelle") but adventurers who have nothing to lose (46). In Bouillon's mature political thought, the "state" represents Providence, it aims at preserving itself, and anything that goes against it eventually perishes.

When Henri of Anjou became king of Poland, the French crown unsuccessfully tried to force the future duke of Bouillon to marry Mademoiselle of Vaudémont from the House of Lorraine. The memoirist surmised that this was part of the royal family's marital policy of neutralizing opposing factions through alliances: "J'estimay que l'ouverture de ce mariage se faisoit pour raison d'estat pour me séparer et d'avec mes oncles et d'avec Monsieur, en m'alliant avec la maison de Lorraine, à ce que je n'aidasse à ce qui pourrait brasser contre le roi de Pologne, estant hors du royaume" (49). The duke of Bouillon calls these marital strategies reason of state, because they aimed at peacefully uniting factions that threatened the body politic. The quotation nicely reveals one of the meanings the term "estat" had for noble families; Bouillon and his peers imagined the state as the sum of marital alliances between the most reputed families in the kingdom. Thus, the "state" could be an abstraction like Cheverny's "patrie" but also something very concrete reflecting family ties. In the latter meaning, there is no difference in "natural quality"

between the king and the kingdom's great nobility; after all, the same Louise of Lorraine-Vaudémont eventually married King Henri III shortly after he returned from Poland.

Bouillon used reason of state as an explanatory principle just as his predecessors did. But he emphasized a more familial conception that surfaces in another rare occurrence of the term when describing Francis of Anjou's preparing his voyage to Flanders in 1581. Francis's allies raised armies to deliver Cambrai from the duke of Parma. Henri III kept his neutrality, but he ordered a trusted captain to shadow his brother's army with four thousand men; this trusted captain also received instructions from the wiser queen mother, however:

. . . il avoit charge que si ces deux armées s'affrontoient, de paroistre et faire le holà en nostre faveur: conseil prudent de la Reine mère, qui ne se laissoit emporter par la jalousie du Roy, pour le flatter sur les moyens de s'en délivrer; mais satisfaisoit à cette raison d'Estat, que la perte de Monsieur, accompagné de plus de trois mille gentilshommes françois, par un lieutenant du Roy d'Espagne, importoit trop au Roy et à son Estat (165).

The passage is similar to Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's condemnation of Charles IX's jealousy and courtly reason of state, but also implies that the queen mother acted as an arbiter of family and state matters.

This survey of reason of state language in Renaissance memoirs challenges common notions about noble servants opposing the crown's absolutism. On the contrary, they seemed to support it. But the acceptance of the monarch's legitimacy to use reason of state went hand in hand with free speech. Jean de Saulx-Tavannes, for example, criticized Henri IV's policy of keeping at

a distance the children of former political enemies. Only God could punish a sinner's family, he wrote, but not earthly sovereigns:

Quand ainsi seroit que mondit sieur de Tavanés fust cause de la S. Barthelemy, ce n'est à un Roy de France de venger les injures d'un Roy de Navarre: et par raison d'Estat devoit faire pour nous, afin que sans exception ni crainte de l'advenir ses serviteurs le servissent, et le conseillassent ainsy que le sieur de Tavanés avait fait ses predecesseurs, à la manutention desquels il posteposoit toutes choses (467).

Implicitly, the passage argues that Henri IV's incapacity to accept the "*parrhesiastic game*" was detrimental to his state, and that servants fearing for their own life had the right to preserve themselves.

The memoirs of the Wars of Religion construed "reason of state" as a self-explanatory principle of a science aimed to preserve the state. At times the "state" still designated one's personal dominion, but this type of reason of state was usually condemned. Another sense that was fully adopted by all of the authors of memoirs examined distinguished between the prince's personal rule and the best interests of the state. This latter idea offered opportunities justifying disobedience.

#### **4 The Right to Disobey**

Former political agents used the same reason of state vocabulary to justify their past disobedience. Individuals with a dishonorable reputation protected themselves not by turning to literature and writing for posterity, as one of the most persistent scholarly commonplaces about Renaissance memoirs goes, but by actively creating a political identity based on prudential knowledge and service to the state.

Monluc, for example, explicitly encouraged governors to follow his example and disregard direct orders when they had sufficient grounds to believe that blindly observing them might do the king and his state more harm than good:

. . . c'est à faire à un lieutenant de roy de prendre son party: car il n'est pas besoing toujours de faire ce que le roy commande; il est loing et se repose sur vous; c'est donc à vous, si vous avez tant soit peu de prudence, de juger le bien d'avec le mal. Il n'y a nul qui ose nier que, si j'eusse combattu, que je ne misse la Guyenne en proye, car c'estoit donner un assaut à dix contre un; si j'eusse faict ce que le Roy me mandoit par l'importunité du sieur de Monsallès, je laissois tout le pays à la devotion de l'ennemy. J'en fais juge tout homme sans passion (650).

He justified himself for not obeying the command to engage in battle by claiming that his soldiers were poorly equipped and outnumbered. The battle would have ended in a crushing defeat and Monluc would have lost Guyenne. His obedience to one of the fundamental laws of the kingdom counterbalanced the apparent dishonorableness of disobeying his king: Monluc saved his honor by suggesting that he had merely protected the realm from dismemberment by not engaging in a potentially disastrous battle.

Like in Comynes's memoirs, Monluc *Commentaries* propound that honor and dishonor are relative to the outcome of a decision rather than to abstract principles. A prudent man dispassionately assesses costs and benefits for himself, the crown, and the body politic. Although the *Commentaries* make no explicit use of the term reason of state, the type of reasoning behind many of Monluc's actions agrees with the imperatives of a state overpowering all other personal interests.

Monluc's initial apologetic project aimed to show that his minor derogations from strict obedience served the crown well in the end. But rebuilding one's honor through memoir writing proved a formidable task for authors who had freely and repeatedly changed allegiances. After Henri III had disgraced him, Villeroy joined the anti-royal Catholic League; when the ultra-Catholic faction lost ground and it became clear that Henri IV was about to win, Villeroy changed camps again and joined the royalist party. Unlike Monluc or Cheverny, Villeroy did not just choose to wait for times to change, but took the decision to support a party (the Catholic League) directly opposed to his sovereign (Henri III). When he left the Leaguer faction and came back to the crown he was suspected of being a Spanish agent. The first edition of the *Satire Ménippée* (Tours, 1593), a royal pamphlet directed against the Catholic League, suggested Villeroy had been plotting to hand over France's sovereignty to Spain. Unlike Commynes, who did not care to justify himself for leaving his suzerain Charles the Bold, Villeroy lived in a new age of print culture that saw the rapid multiplication of pamphlets specializing in character assassination. The question of disobedience and betrayal is central to his apologetic memoirs.

Villeroy defended himself by insisting that he had to pick the enemy's side after Henri III asked him to leave the court because his life was in danger; his role as Mayenne's chief-negotiator with Henri IV showed his sincere struggle to preserve the kingdom and the Catholic Religion. For the Catholic Leaguers that Villeroy joined, Catholicism was constitutive of the French monarchy, a provision that was not unanimously supported in a time when there was no written constitution of the French state. Preserving the kingdom, therefore, meant maintaining a Catholic crown, and endeavoring to do so was more important than self-preservation because political usefulness brought honor:

Monsieur je vous envoie le Mémoire que vous m'avez demandé; il contient les causes qui me contraignirent du temps du feu Roy [Henri III], que Dieu absolve, de me sauver à Paris, et me joindre à Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne, lequel je fis deslors, plus pour moy-mesme que pour le communiquer à personne, ny servir à ma justification: car encore que la nature nous excuse, voire que la loy nous permette de deffendre nostre vie, avec impunité: toutesfois comme tout homme de bien doit estre moins soigneux d'icelle que de son honneur, et que je sçay que le commun, lequel s'arreste plus à ce qui apparoist, qu'à ce qui est, faict souvent tel jugement de nostre devoir et merite, qui est le contentement que nos superieurs monstrent avoir de nous, j'ay depuis ceste action tousjours désiré l'amender plustost en bien faisant en public que la justifier ou l'excuser par la publication dudit Memoire (111-2).

The secretary of state saved his own life because natural law permitted it, but he did not dishonor himself, at least in the eyes of prudent men, because Villeroy had been serving the public weal (“en bien faisant en public”) even against public opinion, an opinion usually founded on the masters’ satisfaction. If in Cheverny’s memoirs there was a process of internalizing honor, Villeroy made honor dependent on a small circle of men of the law and government officials who understood reason of state. What common people hastily judged as betrayal was essentially done in the best interest of the state (and of the Catholic religion). Implicitly, Villeroy’s *mémoire* (in the singular) tried to harmonize the natural right of individual self-preservation with the political law mandating the state’s preservation. However, he distinguished clearly between the state and the particular interests of the monarch or of the Catholic League. Villeroy went a step further than Monluc in that he suggested through his actions that kings had no absolute rights over their

subjects' lives and that subjects had the right to resist if the public weal was under threat. In Villeroy's view, the new monarch and his officers' main task was to protect the lives of subjects and the public weal. These two ideas would later be formalized by Thomas Hobbes (Skinner, "A Genealogy of the Modern State" 46-61), but they were part and parcel of the French Renaissance political habitus.

Villeroy did not elaborate any coherent political theory advocating the right to resist; nothing in his actions indicated that he upheld an ideal of a monarchy tempered by representative bodies. The secretary of state still thought in terms of honor and a form of absolute monarchy that was mutually beneficial for both the sovereign and his public servants. Otherwise, it was perfectly legitimate for subjects to cease their voluntary servitude. But how far could one go in one's disobedience? Monluc remained in his king's service, Villeroy chose to join the opposing faction, and Jean de Saulx-Tavannes raised armies to protect himself and the League's interests against Henri III and Henri IV. Active prudent disobedience was practiced particularly frequently in Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's family. His father Gaspard de Saulx-Tavannes, one of the early founders of the Catholic League and governor of Burgundy, actively delayed, reinterpreted, and refused to enforce the edict of Amboise (March 19, 1563), a peace treaty granting significant liberties to Protestants. Olivier Christin has used this example to argue that the provincial elite played a significant role in the practice of government, and that both the crown and the provincial elite established a common legal framework that needed to be interpreted and contested in the first place (61-69). This process, by which fragile and relative coexistence was achieved, in turn gave rise to a modern autonomous political category. Surprisingly, Christin's work never quotes Gaspard de Saulx-Tavannes's biographer Jean de Saulx-Tavannes, who expanded on the ways to interpret and

disobey royal orders. One can read, for instance, in Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's memoirs, under the rubric *De N'Obeyr aux Roys contre leur service*:

Lever des soldats, et des impostes sans le commandement des Roys, est crime, se laisser tuer ou descharger de sa charge c'est deshonneur, les loix qui n'apportent ni utilité ni seurte ne se doivent observer en la necessité; il vaut mieux respondre de sa faute au conseil du Roy avec sa charge entiere que desnue d'icelle. La faute de n'obeir aux Roys quand ils commandent de se desarmer, pour eviter d'estre en danger d'estre assassiné ou ruiné avec leurs services, est necessaire. Souvent les Roys ne sçavent ni cognoissent leurs affaires, il s'appelle d'eux devant eux mieux conseillez, mieux advertis, ou hors de passion ou du conseil des mignons (259).

Tavannes articulated what could be called a noble reason of state ideology that was already burgeoning in previous memoirs. Within this set of political beliefs, the officer of the crown could bypass laws that threatened his life and the kingdom's preservation. Laws that bring no utility and security could be suspended in practice because there is always a possibility of regaining royal favor, once the court changes, passions fade away, and the king is able to engage again in a "*parrhesiatic game*."

Jean de Saulx-Tavannes was not an isolated case. The political culture of the memoirs of the War of Religion largely supported a noble reason of state theory in the name of which officers of the crown could suspend their obligations in order to correct the physical and intellectual limitations of a monarchy that was ignoring particular circumstances and was ill-advised by courtiers. These derogations to laws were temporary, reformative but non revolutionary, and needed to be accounted for in front of the king and his Council. Accordingly, subjection to a sovereign was "natural," meaning that it came with birth and going against it would have been

unnatural: “Veritablement l’obeissance au roy se doibt par subjection et utilité, naiz sous la Monarchie nous sommes obligez à la conserver, y faillans c’est se procurer infinis malheurs, meurtres et exactions, brulemens, forcemens accidens peculiers aux changemens d’estat” (Jean de Saulx-Tavannes 124). Like his Protestant enemies turned memoirists, Tavannes believed God actively intervened in history and punished those who tried to change the order of things. It was therefore more “useful” to endure an unjust regime than challenge it and risk divine vengeance. With regard to his own rebellious past, Tavannes seems to repent here, or at least to imply that he engaged in disobedient acts of disorder to restore a political regime that was undergoing revolutionary changes.

Disobedience motivated by revolutionary ideals was not excusable in French Renaissance self-memorialization. Entrusted with keeping order in Guyenne and silencing hostilities between Protestants and Catholics after the Colloquy of Poissy, Monluc was approached by a Huguenot minister who offered to raise an army of four thousand men under the pretext of reinforcing the peace agreement and demanding reparations from Catholics. This aggravated Monluc greatly because nobody in the kingdom of France should have been allowed to raise an army without explicit authorization from the crown. Monluc suspected Protestants of using the pretense of religion (“sous couleur de l’Evangile”) to divide the kingdom and make a king of their own choice (477). This meant that they wanted to transform France into an elective monarchy and make the people the sovereign power. Protestants attacked their Catholic noble masters and they proliferated slanderous words against the king’s authority. Monluc quoted rebels mocking the infant king Charles IX: “Quel roy? Nous sommes les roys. Celuy-là que vous dites est un petit reyot de merde; nous luy donrons des verges, et luy donrons mestier pour luy faire apprendre de gagner sa vie comme les autres” (484). This is no longer *parrhesia* nor prudent disobedience, but an attack on

the “natural” social order. Protestants refused to obey nobles: “et desjà commençoient la guerre découverte contre la noblesse” (483).

Monluc captured the four rebels who had slighted the infant king of France. When one of them begged for mercy, Monluc could no longer control his rage and pushed the wretched Huguenot’s head against the remains of a cross that Huguenot iconoclasts had previously broken. Monluc turned to one of his headsmen and shouted: “Frappe, villain’. Ma parole et son coup fust aussi tost l’un que l’autre, et encore emporta plus de demi-pied de la pierre de la croix” (485). The impossible simultaneity between Monluc’s verbal order and its physical execution is a symbolic, violent reinforcement of authority and a return to the natural order of society: the blow cut deep into the broken cross as if the act was a divine vengeance.

This violent and highly symbolical account of Monluc’s first execution of a Protestant revolutionary rebel has been carefully elaborated. The scene presents a form of disobedience that is depicted as opposite of Monluc’s own prudential disobedience, founded on mature and expert reflection. The story continues with Monluc executing rebels without trial:

Et voila la première execution que je fis au sortir de ma maison, sans sentence ny escriture, car en ces choses j’ay ouy dire qu’il faut commancer par l’execution. Si tous eussent fait de mesme, ayant charge ès provinces, on eust assoupi le feu qui a depuis bruslé tout. Cela ferma la bouche à plusieurs seditieux, qui n’osoient parler du Roy qu’avec respect; mais en secret ils faisoient leurs menées (485).

Ten years before the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre, Monluc was already using extraordinary measures to eliminate enemies of the state; the passage might have been written around the time Charles IX published his famous letter admitting to have employed preemptive and extraordinary

justice against his subject Coligny. Monluc's parallel and opposing stories of disobedience point to the commonality of interests between the crown and provincial governors; they also highlight a shared reason of state authority that can bypass laws so as to serve the best interest of the state. Monluc was enraged that the Protestant movement threatened the fabric of the French kingdom; Protestant preachers were luring the people to convert by promising them that they would not have to pay taxes, that kings had no power outside of that given to them by the people, and that there was no difference in quality between commoners and gentlemen (486-7). The governor attached no real religious significance to common rebels beyond the fact that they used Protestantism to advance dangerous democratic ideals. In the case of his noble peers, he could not identify any religious or political motivations behind their conversion and rebellion. According to Monluc, gentlemen shared a natural knightly penchant for violence that needed to be satisfied in military enterprises abroad. In his interpretation, for instance, Antoine de Crussol, Charles IX's lieutenant in Languedoc, converted to Protestantism because of personal dissatisfaction with how he was treated; Monluc's ironic comment is revealing: ". . . et croy qu'il s'en fit plustost pour quelque malcontentement que par devotion, car il n'estoit pas grand theologien, non plus que moy; mais j'en ay veu plusieurs par despit se faire de ceste religion" (475). This explanation is of course an over-simplification, but its repetition in many memoirs of the Wars of Religion has shaped the traditional historiography of the Wars of Religion that commonly depicts the nobility as politically and theologically incompetent.

The political lesson that systematically emerges when reading Renaissance memoirs is that the crown and kingdom's elite had an equal duty to collaborate in order to preserve a state on the verge of disappearance. It was not just the king who could suspend the laws and impose

extraordinary justice in times of necessity, but also governors like Monluc and Tavannes, an idea that has not been sufficiently emphasized in reason of state literature.

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This chapter has examined the political ideology of some of the agents of the Wars of Religion as expressed retrospectively in their life-writings. I have argued that the language of honor, which some scholars consider incompatible with political thought, was highly political and inseparable from ideas of social order and public duties. In fact, *honneur* was often synonymous with *honneste*, and the latter echoed the Ciceronian *honestum*, an ideal of moral behavior for the greater good of the body politic. This ideal played an important role in Renaissance memoirs, because their authors sought to amend through writing accusations of dishonest behavior. They entered a political dialogue by highlighting their courage to speak the truth. Free speech was both a mark of honor and a discursive creation.

The political thought of Renaissance memoirs responded to a particularly turbulent period when political expediency could no longer be subsumed into stable moral categories such as the *honestum*. Hence, memoirists adopted the new political vocabulary of their day to explain both the crown making use of extraordinary justice against subjects, and their own occasional disobedience or outright rebellion. Although never systematically explained, “reason of state” appeared in memoirs as a principle of political action that could be used to promote both religious tolerance and intolerance as long as it served social order. In all political lessons that memoirs offer the body politic is more important than the individuals composing it.

I hope to have revealed an unknown page in the history of reason of state, and to have avoided the old caricature that leaders of the Wars of Religion were knights dreaming of feudalism.

Admittedly, this might be occasionally present in the same memoirs where we read some of the best examples of political pragmatism:

L'honneur est malaisé à obtenir aux particuliers et hommes privez: s'ils entreprennent contre les Tyrans pour le bien du pays, ils ne peuvent aisement sans avoir charge d'eux, ce qu'ayant, c'est perfidie de les tromper, n'estant ceste regle generale receüe que le serment de la patrie esteint celui des maistres et bien-facteurs: il n'est permis à un particulier d'entreprendre de regler un Estat (Jean de Saulx-Tavannes 189).

This sounds like a gloss on the old Comynian proverb that equated honor with success. Although being a former rebel who, in other parts of his father's memoirs, defended the right to protect the Catholic Church against the crown, Tavannes seems to invoke a medieval ideal of feudal society by placing a vassal's oath to his suzerain higher than one's duty towards his country ("patrie"). Even if one rebels against tyrants for the public weal ("bien du pays") one cannot avoid the charge of perfidy. Jean de Saulx-Tavannes seems to contradict himself; after all, he has written his and his father's life story over decades, and his political ideas might have changed; a ghost editor might have further complicated things.

## Chapter IV. Memory, Lineage, and Nation

In his well-known essay *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* Ernest Renan wrote: "Or l'essence d'une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses. . . . tout citoyen doit avoir oublié la Saint-Barthélemy, les massacres du Midi au XIIIe siècle" (Renan 9). After quoting this passage in the revised edition of his classic study *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson notes the paradox inherent in the idea of a duty to forget, and adds the following commentary:

How are we to make sense of this paradox? We may start by observing that the singular *French* noun 'la Saint-Barthélemy' occludes killers and killed . . . The effect of this tropology is to figure episodes in the colossal religious conflicts of mediaeval and early modern Europe as reassuringly fratricidal wars between – who else? – *fellow Frenchmen* (200; the author's italics).

But Anderson forgets to ask a basic question: how did eyewitnesses of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre write about it? He would have found that they remembered the massacre pretty much in the same manner as Ernest Renan did, simply because Renan read those same eyewitness testimonies. To this day, most of what we know is summed up in a few texts published in the seventeenth century decades after the event: a *Discours du roy Henry III à un personnage d'honneur et de qualité* (published with Villeroy's memoirs), the *Mémoires de Gaspard de Tavannes* written by his son, and the *Mémoires* by Marguerite of Valois. Most early modern memoirs forgot Saint Bartholomew's Day and imagined that the Wars of Religion had been fought between "bons" and "mauvais" "François," as if they were part of the same national family. One of the ways to unify the belligerent factions nationally was to forget the religious divide or, more precisely, to deny the actors of the Wars of Religion any religious motivation.

Anderson neglects the Renaissance autopsies of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre because he assumes that the elements conducive to something like a national consciousness – i.e. the rise of capitalism and of the use of vernacular language in administration, along with mechanical reproduction through print – still interacted, in the sixteenth century, in an “interplay” devoid of self-consciousness (43). Moreover, Anderson predicates the birth of modern nationalisms on the destruction of religious imagined communities. André Tallon argues that religious allegiance was considered constitutive of nationhood in Renaissance France as the following quotation from Michel de L'Hospital makes clear: “La division des langues ne fait la separation des royaumes, mais celle de la religion et des loix, qui d'un royaume fait deux” (L'Hospital, *Discours pour la majorité de Charles IX* 84; Tallon 5).

Admittedly, the term “nation” itself was most often used in the sixteenth century to denote one's birthplace, especially in the context of university “nations,” rather than an imagined community. But while these objective processes may have escaped conscious manipulation, and although the words “pays,” “nation,” and “patrie” had a plurality of meanings (Contamine, “Mourir pour la patrie” 11-43), national feelings and ideas about a common shared past nonetheless existed well before the eighteenth-century date typically asserted by historians of nationalism (Descimon, “Un Etat des temps modernes?” 361-381). In her *Naissance de la nation France*, Colette Beaune examines the birth of an imagined community of France from the twelfth to the fifteenth century that she identifies in royal historiography, cults devoted to national saints, and cultural symbols. Renaissance writers certainly reflected quite consciously on the use of a national vernacular and fully exploited the possibilities of print-capitalism. Rabelais's linguistic creativity in his mock royal chronicles, and Joachim Du Bellay's *Defense et illustration de la langue françoise*, for instance, contain ample reflections on French nationhood and are in

themselves self-conscious quests for a national idiom. In *Figurations of France*, Markus Keller discusses some of the most-well known literary works of the French Renaissance through the lenses of national representations. His work builds on Timothy Hampton's study on *Literature and Nation in the Sixteenth Century* examining "the meaning and limits of community in Renaissance France" in the writings of the most canonical French Renaissance authors of fiction, a study that presents an "emerging secular literary culture that reflects and responds to those struggles" (IX). All recent studies are indebted to Myriam Yardeni's *La Conscience nationale en France pendant les Guerres de Religion (1559-1598)*, which focuses on the polemical pamphlets of the Wars of Religion. Almost nothing has been said about representations of nationhood in the memoirs of the Wars of Religion. This chapter aims to fill the scholarly gap. The hypothesis that I will discuss here is that the silence surrounding events such as the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre was part of a conscious effort to forget past divides. Actors of religious wars reinterpreted past conflicts as fratricidal wars between overly ambitious friends, neighbors, and relatives. The absence of religious explanation for civil conflict, in these narratives, was the result of a conscious process of forgetting religious particularisms in order to preserve ideas of community.

In the following pages, I shall examine first the relations between memoirs and early modern ideas about memory, track the growing importance of one's lineage in memoirs, and show how ideas of nation were related to notions of race and family. Finally, I look at the logic behind the selection and suppression of specific memories, before analyzing eyewitness narratives of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre.

## **1 Conceptualizing Memory**

In the first chapter on the invention of the memoir genre, we looked at a few meanings of the term *mémoire(s)* in the context of writing practices. I should like to turn now to the wider

cultural practices associated with memory in the Renaissance. While its psychological mechanisms might be universal, Renaissance views on memory differ from ours. In fact, I would argue that early modern ideas about memory were closer in spirit to medieval culture because both medieval and Renaissance ideas about memory had sprung from a similar education centered on rhetoric. *Memoria* was one of the five parts of rhetoric; it was the place where ideas were stored before they were articulated into arguments (*inventio*), arranged in good order (*dispositio*), put into appropriate style (*elocutio*), and delivered (*pronuntiatio*), as the textbook of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* teaches us (6).

We have seen in the first chapter that memoirs were defined both by their authors and first readers as a historiographical subgenre supposed to record eyewitness testimony. Their testimonial character placed them outside of the art of rhetoric. Memoirs were not the work of professional orators, and their authors and editors habitually excused themselves for their texts' lack of chronological order and style, while oral delivery did not matter to them since these were written documents. Paradoxically, however, memoirs, in that they served as testimonies, were understood as belonging to the first part of the art of rhetoric: invention. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* considered "inventio" together with "memoria" because in order to find things to say one needed to have a well-trained memory. Having a good memory was crucial in order to be creative as a speaker and as a writer. A good memory also ensured prudence, for the memory of the past enabled a person to make sound judgments about the present.

These values thrived in the Renaissance as they spread to previously uneducated social categories like knights and gentry. Late in the sixteenth century, the term "mémoire" could still be employed to mean prudence and foresight:

Et ne pouvois faillir, car Dieu me conseilloit tousjours, me mettant en memoire tout ce qu'il m'estoit besoing de faire. Et voilà pourquoy j'ay eu tout jamais bonne fortune, comme il vous aidera aussi bien qu'il a faict à moy, si n'employez vostre esprit en autre chose qu'à servir vostre maistre (Monluc 236).

Blaise de Monluc lauded his foresight and attributed its origin to God; it was as “natural” as his voluntary servitude towards his prince. The trope serves again to distinguish the author from professional writers and to reinforce his noble character. Monluc was born with the divine gift of memory-prudence and did not need to train it through practice like professional historians versed in the art of rhetoric and, implicitly, the arts of memory. A natural God-given memory meant that the author was prudent and destined for political and military life, and that he could command over people because prudence was an attribute of sovereignty in the Renaissance, as Francis Goyet observes in *Les Audaces de la prudence* (109-146).

Prudent men remembered memorable things extensively and exactly. In one of the rare moments in which Monluc described his actions at court, he reproduced direct speeches in the form of successful deliberative discourses, and certified the faithfulness of the lengthy rendition by lauding his own prodigious memory:

. . . il m'en souvient comme s'il n'y avoit que trois jours. Dieu m'a donné une grande memoire en ces choses dont je le remercie; car encore ce m'est grand contentement, à present qu'il ne me reste rien plus, de me resouvenir de mes fortunes pour les descrire au vray, sans rien adjouster; car, soit le bien, soit le mal, je le veux dire (143).

Again, Monluc excluded any reference to an artificially refined memory because this would have suggested that he had studied the arts of memory and rhetoric. He explicitly refused, in this passage, the celebratory historiography associated with rhetoric.

Monluc inherited this regard for prodigious memory from a long medieval tradition. Memory was the most esteemed and cultivated mental faculty in the Middle Ages just as imagination and intuition are overemphasized in our modern culture; a commonplace of the biographical proofs adduced during the process of a person's sanctification included testimonies asserting the candidate's extraordinary memory (Carruthers 1-17). In a way, Monluc wrote his own hagiography, with the help of his learned brother and a few friendly cowriters.

The collective writing practices that we have seen at work in Renaissance memoirs, arguably, also have to do with the principles of reading and composing derived from the training of memory. In order to memorize a text one needed to divide it into small units and assimilate or "digest" each unit through meditation (Carruthers 202-212). After the initial division, meditation meant writing these units down into florilegia and commenting upon them. This might explain why some Renaissance memoirs look like scrapbooks, as if they were specifically conceived as florilegia and commonplace books, a genre that, according to Ann Moss, exploded in the Renaissance with the printing press, and eventually died out due to market saturation and cultural changes. Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's biography of his father is often interrupted by commentaries and parallels from the biographer's life with the justification: "Et ce sujet remarquable m'a porté à des considerations et conceptions que j'ay trouvé à propos d'escire et y ay entremeslé aucunefois quelque chose de moy-mesme" (a3vo; *Epistre*). Jean de Saulx-Tavannes (and other possible editors) incorporated his father's deeds and sayings into his own memory, divided them into units under different headings, commented on them, and produced a composite book of memory for his

family and friends. The resulting patchwork creates difficulties for modern philologists preoccupied with finding the original text, the real author, and authentic personal memories; these concerns are largely absent from the way memoirs fashioned collective memory. Even the most personal writings about the self, such as Montaigne's *Essays*, were meant for a courtly readership because, as George Hoffmann argues, "writing served Montaigne as complement to and perhaps even as integral part of his public success" (5). Sixteenth-century autobiographical literature does not distinguish between personal and collective memory; rather the term *mémoire* denoted both types, as Nicolas Russell contends in *Transformations of Memory and Forgetting in Sixteenth-Century France* (116). Therefore, I use terms like "personal" and "collective" memory only in order to attribute specific recollections.

A characteristic aspect of memoirs is the militant character of memorialization. Undeniably, all memory is a fight against oblivion, and at the most basic level it is a way to immortalize one's name. The desire to acquire fame has been considered one of the most characteristic traits of humanist literature (Burckhardt 139-153). Moreover, memory is what distinguishes humans from animals and writing down what one remembers is a duty performed to one's humanity: "C'est mourir en beste de ne laisser nulle mémoire après soy" (Monluc 832). More specifically, however, memoirists wrote their memories as a conscious endeavor to fight against a perceived, systematic, public oblivion. Often, the memoirist felt he had fallen victim to the shortcomings of public memory. I use the concept of militant memory both literally and figuratively, both because it is part of typical military self-representations and because self-memorialization was used by writers to counter public oblivion or, worse, disrepute. By public, I mean mostly courtly culture: court historians and courtiers in general are repeatedly attacked in memoir writing. The most typical memoirist prologues denounced courtiers for their pernicious

influence on public memory because they “steal” the “honor” from worthy gentlemen and deprive princes of accurate examples of military and political action.

In his *Preambul à Monsieur*, the dedicatory epistle to the duke of Anjou (and future Henri III) that accompanies one of the earliest versions of his *Commentaires*, Blaise de Monluc boldly foregrounded his desire to amend a public image tarnished by evil courtiers. Honor and reputation were the most important values in life and failure to secure them affected not only the individual but also his descendants: “il diffamera et deshonorera toute sa posterité” (8). Monluc solved the delicate problem of how to talk about himself by invoking his family and peers. Contrary to some Burckhardtian ideas regarding Renaissance conceptions of fame, memoirists still thought of their self-memorialization in corporatist terms. At the most basic level, glory honored a gentleman’s entire lineage: “car il [the prince entrusting somebody with a public office] honore non-seulement vostre personne, mais toute vostre race, vous baillant en charge une clef de son royaume” (341). Glory also inducted its author into a family of great men who served their country well:

. . . mon escripture sera cause que ma memoire ne mourra pas si tost, qui est tout ce que les hommes qui ont vescu en ce monde, portant les armes en gens de bien et sans reproche, doivent desirer, car tout le reste n’est rien. Tant que le monde durera, je croy qu’on trouvera nouvelles de ces braves et vaillans capitaines, de Lautrec, Bayard de Foix, de Brissac, de Strossi, de Guise et de tant d’autres . . . pamy lesquels peut-estre le nom de Monluc pourra estre en credit. (Monluc 479-470).

Monluc conceived of his posthumous glory as earning him a place within a gallery of great men, with whom he felt deeply connected. Proper memorialization was reserved for a very limited and select number of great men, on whose remembrance hinged the very preservation of the French state. A small number of good Frenchmen worked towards preserving national interests, and the

French nation was therefore an exclusivist concept. It entailed a “politics of exclusion,” as for instance when a memoirist drew long lists of names of gentlemen both from the French and from the enemy camps, but almost never the names of common soldiers (Harari 175-181). This corporatist and exclusivist ideology of self-memorialization is best expressed as Monluc’s text plays with the literal and figurative meanings of memory made flesh:

Et quand je seray mort, à grand peyne dira on que j’en apporte le jour de la resurrection en paradis tout le sang, oz, nerf et voynes que j’ay pourté au monde du ventre de ma mère; et auserois assureur que je suis aujourd’huy le plus content homme de France, de Dieu et du Roy(14).

The number of scars on Monluc’s body testifies to his worthy service, and the *Commentaires* enumerate all the injuries Monluc suffered in battle. In a way, the *Commentaires* are a written memory of the author’s crippled, battle-scarred body, opposed to the “belles personnes” of courtiers who shed no blood for their country and need to be excluded from the book of public memory (12). The individual sacrifices his own body for France, God, and his king. This triad of ideas, in turn, is elemental to one’s sense of belonging to something like a French nation.

Monluc inscribed himself into the body politic, and his personal memory passed into a national memory by means of his written memoirs: “Or, ay-je voulu mettre cecy par escrit, non pour me louer d’une grande hardiesse, mais seulement pour monstrier à tout le monde comme Dieu a conduit ma fortune” (138). By contrast, the courtier and the court historian sought only their own profit and fed their princes’ ignorance:

. . . c’est grand dommage qu’ils ne veulent dire la verité, et qu’ils [many historians] ne mettent en arriere toute la crainte qu’ils ont: car les rois et les princes y pourroient

prendre exemple, qui les feroit plus sages, pour ne se laisser pas piper et decevoir, comme ils font bien souvant; mais personne ne veut que noz roys soyent si sçavans: car il ne feroient pas si bien leur proffit, comme ils font, auprès d'eux (50).

Incapable of free speech, historians have to adapt to their masters' whims and ingratiate themselves to their benefactors; this means obliterating or altering the memory of worthy gentlemen and denying them glory or even dishonoring them. Professional historians are doubly detrimental, for they both destroy the memory of great captains and deprive princes of real exempla that could make them more prudent.

A generation later, Tavannes justified his own and his father's memorialization with a reference to a well-established memoir genre written by the best representatives of the French nation: "J'excuse du Bellay, Montluc, et la Nouë d'avoir escrit d'eux-mesmes" (*Epistre* a 3). It is, of course, a very conventional prologue highlighting how much memoirs had come to be regarded as a distinguished genre in the early seventeenth century. It is also very intriguing because it mentions François de la Noue (1531-1591), author of some autobiographical *Discours militaires et politiques* (1587), and a leading Huguenot general during the Wars of Religion. Jean de Saulx-Tavannes had fought in the opposing ultra-Catholic camp, and one wonders how La Noue, a former religious enemy, became a literary model. Having seemingly forgotten their former enmity, Tavannes remembered La Noue for his military expertise, which, used correctly, could have served France. In fact, Tavannes considered the memory of great captains to be a matter of state:

Puis que le temps et les armes esteignent les Capitaines, le Roy devoit employer ceux qui luy restent, pour escrire exactement ce qu'il sçavent de la guerre, pour servir de precepte à ses heritiers: enclorre ces memoires dans ses cabinets, à ce que

par la longue paix l'aguerriment ne se perdit, et que par iceluy les estrangers n'obtinsent l'avantage par exercice, que les François ont maintenu sur eux (354).

The fragment bears witness to the public – or, more precisely, courtly – circulation of memoirs and also to their generic variety because authors like Monluc and Tavannes conceived of their life-writings akin to the arts of war. Significantly, the term “aguerriment” is a neologism invented towards the middle of the sixteenth century and it signals the growing preoccupation with creating a national disciplined army that will mark the birth of the modern state. Memoirists such as Monluc and Tavannes believed that their life-stories contained valuable knowledge that deserved to be preserved in order for the nation (“les François”) to preserve itself by relying on a strong modern army. Tavannes frequently interrupts his narrative in order to describe his own military inventions or to give his opinion on the military technology of his day. The belief that the knowledge one has accumulated in matters of state should be carefully stored is consonant with earlier ideas theories such as Louis Le Roy's *De la Vicissitude ou variété des choses en l'univers, et concurrence des armes et des lettres par les premières et plus illustres nations du monde* (1576). According to Le Roy, nations are born, grow, and die, just as living organisms. Therefore, memory is essential to the perpetuation of nations.

The term “nation” was limited, for Le Roy, only to the cultural and political elite (Russell, “How Memory Constitutes Nations” 149-160). Tavannes and Monluc did not differ in this respect; in fact, Tavannes might have been directly influenced by Louis Le Roy.

Historians of French Renaissance nationalism insist mostly on the struggles to define a French community based on the exclusion of other national groups such as Italians who were typically blamed for their influence on the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre (Heller, *Anti-Italianism* 80-92). Stereotypical thought based on national and regional characteristics was still

very much present in the early memoir genre, starting with Commynes who commented about the influence of climate on national characteristics, at length. Since the Wars of Religion took place within the French kingdom – whose imagined boundaries were unstable and constantly negotiated (Usher, *Errance et cohérence* 11-20) –, they were memorialized as civil wars between fellow “good” and “bad” Frenchmen. As far as the memoirs of the Wars of Religion are concerned, proving that one belonged to the national elite that preserved the French state was much more important than xenophobia and national stereotypes. Ideas of belonging to a nation were at this point inseparable from one’s birthplace and ancestors. The growing importance of genealogy in staging a memoirist persona proves this.

## **2 Lineage**

The most topical way of proving that one belonged to the exclusivist French nation was the establishment of family genealogies. The genealogy genre emerged in France during the Merovingian dynasty, and documented the lineage of royal and great feudal families. The genre developed considerably from the eleventh century onwards, when it became part of noble culture, paralleling other developments in family history such as the transmission of last names and the invention of family armories (Butaud and Piétri 11-66). The appearance of the printing press offered new possibilities for the genealogical genre, which exploded during the sixteenth century. But genealogies, both in manuscript and print cultures, rarely stood by themselves; they were usually bound to history books, as if they were a subgenre of historiography. They could also inform national-geographical descriptions, another source of scientific historiography, or frame national epic poems (Usher, “L’Unité du genre humain à l’échelle régionale” 301-316). Court historiographers, geographers, and poets drew royal genealogies and genealogies of the most

important families in the French kingdom. Soon even petty nobles and bourgeois would invent genealogies in their self-memorialization.

That progressive additions were not immediate is evidenced by the fact that Commynes still ended his memoirs with a brief genealogy of the kings of France since Pharamond, the first monarch who “fut esleu roy de France, car les aultres avoient esté appelléz ducz ou roys de Gaulle” (735). He detailed the four dynastic changes in the history of France: two of them being the usurpers Charles Martel, or rather his son Pepin the Short and Hugh Capet (“tous deux . . . usurperent ledict royaume”), whereas Phillip of Valois and Louis XII had been crowned “justement et loyaulment” (735).

Commynes probably used the *Grandes Chroniques de France* as his main source, but he did not follow their spirit. The advent of King Pepin the Short, for instance, was never called, in court historiography, an usurpation; on the contrary, the royal chroniclers underlined that it had been sanctioned by the pope and by the French people: “En cette année mesmes fu roy clamé par la sentence le pape Zacarie et par l’élection des François” (2:42). Admittedly, Hugh Capet’s accession to the throne posed some problems, but chroniclers avoided naming it unlawful. The *Grandes Chroniques* were started during Saint Louis’s reign, but they were really continuing a long tradition going back to the eleventh century, when the Capetians began sponsoring historiographies aimed at harmonizing the type of dynastic irregularity towards which Commynes’s seemingly innocent comment points. Capetian court historiographers sought to provide a legitimate genealogy for the Merovingian, Carolingian, and Capetian “generations” or “lineages” of French kings (Schneidmüller 167-192). For instance, when recounting how King Philippe Augustus married Isabelle of Hainaut, a descendant of Charlemagne, the chronicle insists that the Carolingian lineage was “recouvrée” (*Grandes Chroniques* 3: 149). It was essential to

show that, even if some individual kings did not live up to their royal prerogatives and needed the assistance of more competent leaders such as Charles Martel, there was nonetheless a monarchical continuity spanning several centuries because Providence protected the French kingdom. Ultimately, the genealogical spirit of royal historiography was inspired by biblical genealogies of patriarchs. Ideally, one could establish continuity between the latter and the father of the French people (“père du peuple”), a title applied to King Louis XII. In fact, a court historiographer to Louis XII and to his successor Francis I, Jean Thenaud, went well beyond the fantastic Trojan origins of the French monarchy, in his *Margarite de France* (1508), and linked the Trojans to Noah’s descendants, in order to prove that the Gallic and French “nations” (“nacions galiques et françoyses”) were indeed ancient, and to make the noble and beautiful history of the French nation and people known to the entire world (fol. 6vo). Court historiography was highly celebratory and could be used to various political ends. Desbois-Ientile shows, by examining a number of printed historiographical and literary works of the early Renaissance, how court historians and poets constructed an image of King Louis XII, in which the French king inherited eminent qualities from his Trojan ancestor Hector, qualities which were then transmitted to the French people in a less perfect form; conversely, Louis XII’s Venetian enemies were described as inheriting their treacherous character from Antenor, the Trojan ancestor they claimed to be descended from (291-2). But in order for these qualities to be transmitted to the royal family, there needed to be an uninterrupted and legitimate continuity from the ancestor.

When Commynes underlined instances of usurpation, he was not contesting the legitimacy of the French monarchy, but was rather reminding his courtly readership that monarchy was unstable, subject to mutations like everything else, and that it needed competent courtiers like himself if it wanted to preserve itself. In order to elevate his own political importance, the author

diminished his kings' pedigree. Although he did not obsess about his own lineage, Commynes was also the first French author to introduce into the vernacular the word "race," in the sense referring to qualities inherited through lineage. And race as lineage was a major topic of French Renaissance culture. Many of its theoretical texts have been amply studied in Arlette Jouanna's *Ordre social: mythes et hiérarchies dans la France du seizième siècle*, and more recently in the collective volume *L'Unité du genre humain: Race et histoire à la Renaissance*. From the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth century, race denoted, at least in France, lineage and social orders and not so much ethnicity and skin color. The latter more familiar and modern notions of race gained preeminence in Europe towards the middle of the seventeenth century after two centuries of colonialism (Spiller 1-40).

"Race" meant the totality of male and female ascendants and descendants of an individual, all of whom shared qualities and predispositions transmitted through reproduction, in much the same manner as animal breeds. Renaissance historians and especially noble memoirists considered that moral character and behavioral patterns were transmitted within a lineage. Cheverny noted, for instance, how Henri III had yielded to popular discontent, towards the end of his reign, and had started distancing himself from his mignons:

Et par là fut facilement reconneu que ledit Roy estoit du naturel fatal de la race des Valois, lesquels ont tous à la fin mal voulu à ceux qu'ils avoient du commencement le plus aimé; ainsi que nous le voyons en Philipès de Valois premier de cette race, qui avoit le plus aimé, et qui estoit le plus obligé au comte d'Artois (Cheverny 102).

Cheverny continued this list by mentioning Louis XI, who ruined the duke of Burgundy to whom he had been obliged, then moving on to Louis XII's disgracing the Marshal of Gié, Francis I's fall out with Monsieur de Bourbon, Henri II disgracing Dampierre, Charles IX's disfavoring

Montmorency and Cossé, and, finally, Henri III's distancing himself from pretty much everyone he had favored. The chancellor believed that innate defects were fatalistically transmitted within one's race, a "biological" atavism that was at odds with Christian anthropology. And yet, this type of racial thought was so widespread and obvious that Cheverny did not even attempt to explain himself. This story of the innate moral defects of the Valois race reappears in the *Intructions à son fils* bound to the same volume of memoirs, and they served to exculpate the author who had experienced disfavor at Henri III's court.

French Renaissance ideas of lineage were important in justifying the social privileges that were supposed to reproduce natural hierarchies. For Commynes, qualities transmitted to lineage were an anthropological evidence, but they did not constitute an explicit theme or motivation when explaining historical phenomena. Late Renaissance memoirs, however, make the idea a central topic. The growing awareness regarding the importance of one's family in defining an individual in the Renaissance substantiates my general argument that Renaissance men writing their life stories did not break away from medieval corporatist ideas, but became more self-conscious about them.

Foregrounding one's illustrious family became a "passage obligé" of memoirs, although not all memoirists chose to elaborate complex genealogies (Butaud and Piétri 78). It would be easy, therefore, to follow Ellery Schalk, whose thesis, in *From Valor to Pedigree*, is that in the 1570s and 1580s the ideal of nobility as a military profession was changing to that of nobility as a privilege given by birth, and that the obsession with lineage proved just that. We know for sure that "pedigree" had always been part of the noble "mentalité," and was not suddenly discovered during the Religious Wars. Early in the sixteenth century we find printed genealogical biographies of great knights such as Symphorien Champier's *Les Gestes, ensemble la vie du preulx chevalier*

*Bayard, avec sa généalogie* (1524), which have themselves many medieval precedents. The printing press brought with it the possibility of multiplying genealogical lists resulting in a considerable growth especially towards the end of the Wars of Religion, when the office of royal genealogist appeared, and in 1615, as a response to the demands made by the Estates General of 1614, an official position of “Juge d’armes de France” was created. The latter was supposed to judge who was a noble or not, and what armories were fit for new nobles (Grell 255-274). During Louis XIV’s reign the so-called “enquêtes de noblesse” took place on an unprecedented scale, although their results were always incomplete (Descimon, “Élites parisiennes” 607-644). In the late seventeenth century, Furetière defined the term *généalogie* and gave as examples: “Ce provincial se pique de *généalogie*. Il parle toujours de sa *généalogie*; on se moque de lui et de toute sa *généalogie*”; the ironic examples suggest a general saturation with regard to fictional genealogies (but not that they lost any credit with the public). Memoirs participated in this growing genealogical culture in an era when social racism justified privileges and there were no legal criteria defining nobility. The examples of Cheverny and Tavannes’s memoirs exemplify perfectly this evolution.

Cheverny’s autobiographical narrative starts with a very conventional history of his immediate ancestors and the various branches of his family: “Dieu m’a fait naistre en ce monde d’une bonne, noble et ancienne famille des Hurault, yssus de Bretagne, de laquelle il y a eu beaucoup de chevaliers de marque et d’honneur” (6). A mostly patrilineal lineage follows, giving the names of his relatives and of the suzerains or sovereigns they served. But Cheverny did not insist too much on the nature of his relatives’ employment; we only get the idea that they had been mostly honorable knights who had served the king and his state: “. . . tous ont possédé des grands biens selon leur temps, et exercé force belles et honorables charges dans l’Estat, le discours

desquelles seroit icy trop long” (6). Consequently, Cheverny reserved only two pages for his lineage. Thirty-seven years after his death, when his memoirs were published posthumously for the first time, the printer Pierre Billaine added fifty pages of a *Genealogie de la Maison des Huraults, de laquelle sont sortis les Seigneurs de Saint Denis, de Vibraye, d’Huriel, de Cheverny*, etc. The royal privilege is dated July 7, 1635 but the genealogy had to have been written and added after the acquisition of the privilege, since it mentions the year 1636 (18). It was probably at the request of the deceased memoirist’s family that the printer added this very detailed genealogy containing family trees and extensive numbered entries with the names of the different branches of the House of Hurault. It was added to the volume making up Cheverny’s *Memoires d’Estat*, before the first person memoirs, which were also assembled posthumously, as I have shown in the first chapter.

The posthumous genealogy refers to both Chancellor Cheverny’s ancestors and descendants, giving exact dates of births, marriages, and sometimes deaths (especially in the line of military duty). In the margins, various allied coats of arms are described. For important members of the family, like the chancellor himself, short narrative biographies are given. Besides length, the fundamental difference between this posthumous, paratextual, and unofficial genealogy and Cheverny’s own autobiography is a new antiquarian preoccupation: official acts like testaments, receipts, and even epigraphic evidence are quoted to prove the historical accuracy of the information given. This evidence is supposed to show the natural qualities transmitted and perfected within the extended family for two centuries.

Judging by the way Cheverny, the “author” of his own memoirs, wrote about his origins during his lifetime, it seems that he was trying to build a credible ethos, crucial for memoir writing. But Cheverny was not overly preoccupied with proving his noble lineage by antiquarian means as

his descendants were. The period between the death of the author in 1599 and the publication of his memoirs in 1636 saw rapid changes in how noble identities were defined, probably because of the relative peace following the Edict of Nantes (1598).

During the first three decades of the seventeenth century, Jean de Saulx-Tavannes started the memoirs of his father with a genealogy of the Saulx-Tavannes family, detailing its historical ties to Gallic and French royal families. The entire genealogy starts with the descent from Noah's Ark: "Dieu ayant appaisé sa colere Noë sorti de l'Arche, la posterité de Sem peupla les Gaules" (*Mémoires* 1). Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's major innovation consisted in his undergirding the ties between his own family and the ancient Semitic Celts that populated Gaul. According to this genealogy, the French kings' ancestors arrived in Gaul later than his own. Jean de Saulx-Tavannes claimed boldly that the first "known" Saulx, a certain Faustus, Seigneur of Autun and Saulieu, living in the year 214, had also been responsible for the spread of Christianity in Burgundy. The French ("les François") arrived later in "France" at the invitation of the bishop of Rheims, who needed a strong nation to replace the decadent Romans and protect Christians from Barbarians. Through different machinations, the Merovingians conquered Burgundy, and another Faustus of Saulx, related to the first recorded one, died in battle against the "French" invaders; the descendants of the house of Saulx negotiated with the kings of France and Austrasia ("traictent avec les Roys de France et d'Austrasie"), and agreed to submit to their monarchy in exchange for the elevation of the Castle of Saulx into a Duchy (3). This "race" of Merovingian kings having started with Pharamond was terminated ("enlevée") by Charles Martel and Pepin; the immorality and uselessness of the last Merovingian kings allowed for this change, but so did a corrupt nobility ("la Noblesse se laisse corrompre") who liked the idea of having their duchies and fiefs preserved and augmented by the new race of kings (3). Among this corrupt nobility was also the Saulx family,

who had collaborated quite well with the original Merovingian usurpers of the Burgundian crown. As behavioral patterns were transmitted through lineage, the descendants of the same collaborative Saulx struck another mutually beneficial deal with the last usurpers of the French crown, accepting gifts from Hugh Capet in the form of ducal and comital titles. In Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's opinion, Hugh Capet was a prudent ruler who knew how to form a personal bond with the grandees of his kingdom, a prudential science of which Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's contemporaneous leaders of the Catholic and Huguenot parties were ignorant:

Si les chefs de party [Catholic and Protestant factions during the Wars of Religion] eussent donné semblable recompense que Huë Capet, partageant l'Etat avec les principaux de leurs associez, et erigeant les possessions des grands en Duchez et Comtez, ainsi que Huë Capet fit à plusieurs, au nombre desquels furent les Seigneurs de Saulx le Duc: les interessant à leur usurpation, par dons de Duchez et Comtez, franchises, et immunité aux villes, ils ne se fussent perdus (4).

All ancient and Renaissance history was supposed to inform present political and military action, and Jean de Saulx-Tavannes certainly drew historical parallels, but these were far from neutral. The leitmotif of the Saulx' willingness to collaborate with the usurping races of kings – and all royal races of French kings were started by usurpers, according to this genealogical history – appears in a new light. In the above quoted passage, Jean de Saulx-Tavannes seems to be reproaching the inability of the duke of Mayenne, the leader of the Catholic League, to crown himself king of France by giving titles and benefits to people like the Saulx-Tavannes, whom Hugh Capet had won over six centuries before! More generally, and well beyond anything that Comynes had imagined, Jean de Saulx-Tavannes presented the image of a long-running collaboration between a corruptible nobility and a corrupting monarchy lasting through the passage

from one “race” of kings to another. Tavannes insisted on the “racial” differences between the various nations that composed his contemporaneous France: “aucuns Physionomistes disoient connoistre au visage qui estoient sortis des anciens Gaulois, des Scythes, ou des Vandales [sic]” (2). Nevertheless, he admitted that the ruling races have been mixing for centuries and that the French monarchy thrived to the extent that it cooperated with older pre-existing social elite. By pointing out successive usurpations of the French crown, Commynes had been merely suggesting the transient nature of all earthly power and the need for a prudent ruler to rely on wise counselors. Tavannes wrote a cynical history of royal usurpation and noble collaboration, from which he drew practical lessons about the birth of political factions.

Jean de Saulx-Tavannes’s historiographical method is valuable for what it reveals about the development of the memoir genre in the first three decades of the seventeenth-century. His genealogy displays ample historical documentation, consisting mostly of the (selective and uncritical) quotation of narrative, etymological, epigraphic, and archival sources, much as Cheverny’s descendants did. Tavannes quoted historians and genealogists like Bernard de Girard du Haillan with exact page numbers; he gave as proofs Latin letters including transactions; similarities between the Saulx’s coat of arms and the Bohemian coat of arms were supposed to demonstrate that some Saulx had been kings of Bohemia, *iure uxori*, etc. Renaissance historical scholarship and antiquarianism joined forces in the biography of a noble family whose lineage antedated and was more continuous than any generation of French kings.

In mid sixteenth century, Jean de Laboureur edited the memoirs of Michel de Castelnau (d. 1592), and added “commentaries,” “manuscripts,” and “original documents” (“pièces originales”) clarifying the historical context. He preceded everything by a detailed genealogy of the House of Castelanu noting in his preface that:

. . . la science des genealogies n'est pas moins necessaires à l'Histoire que la Mathématique l'est à la Philosophie. C'est le seul moyen de parler avec assurances des personnes principales et les plus recommandables de chaque Regne; et c'est encore celui de découvrir les interests des Maisons particulieres, qui causent bien souvent de grands Partys dans l'Estat (c iii).

Laboureur's ideas about genealogy as a science of discovering factitious families echo Jean de Saulx-Tavannes memorialization of his family. The resulting story at the end of the Wars of Religion is a dialectic of opposition and collaboration between the monarchy and the nobility that made the history of the French nation. Wars and genocides could be then comprehended as internal conflicts between the leading families of the same nation.

### **3 Forgetting**

Not all memoirists (nor their editors) invented genealogies going back to the Flood. In recounting his peace negotiations with Henri IV in his role as ambassador of the Catholic League, Villeroy, for instance, chose to represent himself within a "private" group of "public" servants, who happened to be on one or the other side of the civil conflict, but who were in reality good neighbors and friends. He called Philippe Duplessis-Mornay, one of Henri IV's chief negotiators and one of the main Protestant leaders, his "neighbor and friend" with whom he could talk about both "private" and "public matters" (148). "Voisin et amy" pertain to the semantic field of the *familiares*; the ancient latin *familia* comprised all domestic slaves, the close family in the modern sense, but also friends and clients that "hold all things in common," to paraphrase the first maxim of Erasmus's *Adages* (Eden 4). The concept of family and of the good neighbor extends beyond the biological confinement the term "race" implies. It is intimately related to the idea of belonging to a nation made up of the leading families of public servants, who all share a common past and

aspirations, although they sometimes experience fratricidal differences. In order to create this imagined community, one needed to learn to forget past quarrels.

The best-known historians of the Wars of Religion, like Natalie Zemon Davis and Denis Crouzet, insist on the radical hostility between French Catholics and Protestants, and certainly those wars' large-scale dehumanizing violence supports these claims. Other recent scholarship, by Philip Benedict, Olivier Christin, and Keith P. Luria, to name only a few, highlights also, on the contrary, moments and places of peaceful coexistence and common shared values in the same period. My own approach does not consider so much the historical reality of conflict and cooperation as such, but how actors of the Wars of Religion reimagined and interpreted the same conflicts and coexistence. What was the Catholic Villeroy's motivation in underlining the quality of neighbor and friend of one of the leading Protestant diplomats and theologians?

His immediate purpose is clear. The motif of cross-confessional cooperation between leading Frenchmen exculpated him of the accusation that he had been providing intelligence to the Spanish crown and that he had betrayed his *patrie*. The secretary of state wrote his second Apology in response to a caricature published in the first edition of the *Satire Ménippée*:

. . . un petit home, meslé de blanc et de rouge, habillé à l'Espagnole, et neantmoins portant la chere Françoise, qui avoit deux noms . . . Sa contenance estoit double, et son chapeau doublé, et sa gibeciere quadruplée, et dessus sa teste, du costé d'entre le soleil de midy et le couchant, pleuvoit une petite pluie d'or qui luy faisoit trahir son maistre (*Satire Ménippée* 292-3).

What hurt him the most, Villeroy wrote, was that another “neighbor” had actively contributed to the creation of the pamphlet:

. . . soit que mon entreprise [participating in the peace talks between the duke of Mayenne and Henri IV] aye desplu à quelques-uns ou qu'elle n'aye eu bonne yssuë, j'en ay souvent et longtems esté hay, et blasmé de part et d'autre, jusqu'à m'avoir taxé d'ingratitude envers ma patrie, par un escrit composé et publié par un personnage qui me cognoissoit fort mal, encore qu'il fust mon voisin, et m'eust quelque obligation (113).

Villeroy alluded here to (but did not name) Guillaume du Vair. We know this because multiple copies of a previous letter addressed to Du Vair circulated in manuscript form before and after Villeroy's death, and it was only published in the nineteenth century by Charles Sapey; in this letter, Villeroy reprimanded Du Vair for letting his friends publish such an injurious and false portrait of him. Guillaume du Vair replied in August 1594 promising to contact those responsible; subsequent editions of the *Satire Ménippée* did away with the portrait (Sapey, "Appendice" 429-470). Both Villeroy and Du Vair's letters are highly artificial and aimed at a wider public; both letter writers had served the Catholic League only to join later King Henri IV, and both had to account for their reversals: "Les deux homes jouèrent mutuellement dans cet échange épistolaire le role du regardant et du regardé, chacun s'extasiant sur la vertu de l'autre" (Boucher 81).

Over time, Villeroy decided that Du Vair's name should be omitted in his more ample apology-memoir; he only kept the quality of the accuser – an obliged neighbor and a friend – and the accusation – betraying his fatherland. Villeroy does not even mention the *Satire Ménippée*. In many respects, the apology that Villeroy wrote after this initial letter was an amplification, but eliminated the precise references of his accusers and of the exact content of the accusation, in both cases for practical reasons: Guillaume du Vair effectively censured afterwards new issues of the *Satire Ménippée*, and Villeroy was also writing within a new genre of life-writing, which was more

public and more oriented towards contributing to a national history than a letter could have aspired to be. He himself called it *apologie*, *discours*, and *mémoire*, while his editors entitled it, maybe at the author's suggestions, *Memoires servans à l'histoire de nostre temps*. In any case, Villeroy judged that it was better to insist on his role as unifier of the French kingdom and willfully “forget” or blur past personal quarrels.

In describing the authors of the *Satire Ménippée*, Cheverny called them “bons François” and “bons et gentils esprits” mindful of their duty (“leur devoir”), but he disclosed neither the names nor the identity of the people that the satire mocked; he called the latter “leaders” (“chefs”) of the League and of the Spanish, and he added:

. . . et d'autant qu'aux premieres impressions d'icelle [*Satire Ménippée*] il y avoit certaines choses un peu libres, mais tres veritables, qui touchoient quelques particuliers et principaux entremetteurs dudit party [the Catholic League], lesquels estoient depuis revenus en l'obeïssance du Roy, ils firent tant qu'aux secondes impressions, ils en retrancherent ce qui les offençoit, et ne peurent neantmoins empescher que le tout ne fust demeuré dans la memoire, et dans les Bibliothèques des plus curieux du temps, pour leur servir de honte et d'exemple à leur semblables, de ne se laisser emporter à telles furies pour leurs interests et passions, à chacun en particulier (190-191).

Every “good Frenchman” who read this passage at the turn of the seventeenth century knew well that Cheverny was referring, among others, to Villeroy. The latter's joining the League is attributed to irrational drives (fury and passion) and self-centeredness, exactly the image of himself that Villeroy struggled to eliminate from public memory in his apologetic memoirs. The quotation reveals something about the fears associated with the power to inform public opinion that printed

books (“impressions”) had, and about how public memory was directly associated with the printing press and the library by the late sixteenth century; public memory and libraries are quasi-synonymous in the passage (“dans la memoire, et dans les Bibliothèques”). The fear of destroying the reputation of “friends” in public offices explains why the vast majority of Renaissance memoirs circulated in manuscript and systematically avoided naming and accusing friends and neighbors. At the same time, even if the exact words were not there, contemporaneous readers with some knowledge of the recent past did not have to investigate much in order to find out whom Cheverny was writing about.

Undoubtedly, Chancellor Cheverny had two separate readerships in mind: contemporaries who could easily identify those who had threatened national unity and future generations of readers who would have to check into the special collections of the “plus curieux du temps.” Villeroy’s name and personal history is remembered, quite strategically, only when discussing his major role in reuniting the kingdom in 1594:

Villeroy commença lors à revenir à lui mesme, et à vouloir retirer ledit sieur du Mayne [the Duke of Mayenne, leader of the Catholic League] des grandes pretentions où il l’avoit trop ambitieusement fait entrer, tant dedans que dehors le royaume, lors qu’il s’estoit jetté dans son party, par depit et mescontentement particulier, qu’il prit plus sensiblement que tous nous autres du conseil, lors que le Roy Henri troisieme nous congedia tous à Blois (201).

The secretary’s betrayal of the crown was due to a temporary lack of reason and inability to control emotions. On a political level, he was guilty of ambition; Villeroy was too blinded by his “particular” resentment, unable to see that he was part of a public family. Quite ably, Cheverny compared Villeroy’s erring to other disgraced officers (“tous nous autres du conseil”). The

chancellor was not incriminating the secretary of state. Cheverny's comment was more of an admonishment to a friend who came back to his senses.

Selective memory and conscious oblivion served the purpose of creating the representation of a family of public servants, who at times were too passionate and too attached to particular interests, but who nevertheless came back to reason. The corollary to this creative memory of a national family with its occasional family problems was a tendency to forget one's immediate family. Although lineage was of the utmost importance in noble ideas of merit and rank, memoirists did not write anything too "particular" and intimate about their children, for instance.

Montaigne's essay *De l'affection des peres aux enfants* quotes Marshal Blaise de Monluc confessing his sadness at never having fully expressed his love to his second son who died on the island of Madera:

Et ce pauvre garçon, disoit-il, n'a rien veu de moy qu'une contenance refroignée et pleine de mepris, et a emporté cette creance, que je n'ay sceu ny l'aimer, ny l'estimer selon son merite. A qui gardoy-je à descouvrir cette singuliere affection que je luy portoy dans mon ame? estoit-ce pas luy qui en devoit avoir tout le plaisir et toute l'obligation? je me suis contraint et gehenné pour maintenir ce vain masque: et y ay perdu le plaisir de sa conversation, et sa volonté quant et quant, qu'il ne me peut avoir portée autre que bien froide, n'ayant jamais receu de moy que rudesse, ny senti qu'une façon tyrannique (415-6 ; bk. 2, ch. 8).

This artful complaint in the form of a direct speech is not in the style of Monluc's *Commentaires* or letters. The theme of a conversation between souls is specifically "Montaignian" and is reminiscent of his own ethic of reading. More than factual truth, Montaigne was interested in

discovering an author's true character; the art of reading was also a form of conversation between gentlemen (Force 523-544). By the same token, ideas taken from an interlocutor or from an author needed to be incorporated into the listener or reader's own mind, and filtered through one's own style when rewritten. If one merely reproduced somebody else's words without mentally ingesting the ideas, one still acted as a schoolboy. Therefore, Montaigne recomposed Monluc's complaint into his own words and expressed something from his own "soul" through his friend's direct speech. The "art and ethics of reading" (Carruthers 195-233) needed to be filtered, in Montaigne's opinion, by artfully forgetting the exact words of the author when they passed into writing.

It is hard to imagine that Montaigne was unaware of Monluc's *Commentaires*, which were circulating in manuscript form around the same time he was writing his essay. He must have known Monluc's "own" style, and he could have learned about the subject matter both from his own recollections of the conversations he had had with Blaise de Monluc and from the latter's *Commentaires*. In Montaigne's words, Blaise de Monluc's son had been a "brave gentilhomme et de grande esperance" (Montaigne 415), precisely the two qualities that Blaise de Monluc himself had praised in his son. Blaise de Monluc wrote that his son's only "defect" had been his knightly upbringing, which made him unsuited for becoming a courtier and obtaining undeserved benefits. The resulting poverty led him and other noblemen to journey towards Africa in an attempt to conquer "something," although the enterprise ended badly on the Island of Madera where he was killed:

J'avois perdu le courageux Marc-Antoine, mon fils aîné, au port d'Ostie ; mais celui [his second son Pierre-Bertrand de Monluc] qui mourut à Madère pesoit tant qu'il n'y avoit gentil-homme en Guyenne qui ne jugeast qu'il surpasseroit son père. Je laisse à discourir à ceux-là qui l'ont cogneu quelle estoit sa valeur et sa prudence.

Il ne pouvoit faillir d'estre un bon capitaine, si Dieu l'eust preservé . . . Je croy que ce petit Monluc, qu'il m'a laissé [his grandchild], tâchera à l'imiter soit en vaillance ou en loyauté envers son prince, comme tousjours les Monlucs ont fait. S'il n'est tel, je le desavoüe (*Commentaires* 582-3).

What strikes the reader in this funeral eulogy of the *Commentaires* is the author's "rude" and "tyrannical" persona that corresponds exactly to the "vain mask" that the same author allegedly lamented having worn in his private conversations with Montaigne. In the *Commentaires*, the death of Monluc's son is more of a loss for the nobility of Guyenne than for the father, because Pierre-Bertrand de Monluc had been a great knight, showing promise of becoming a better captain than his father. The affection Blaise felt for his son grew out of Pierre-Bertrand's conformation to and confirmation of a knightly ideal of martial bravery and fidelity to princes that had been passed from generation to generation in Monluc's family. If Pierre-Bertrand's son proved to be unworthy of this noble ideal, the inflexible Blaise de Monluc would have no scruples in disowning his grandson. Nothing could be further from the speech that Montaigne attributed to Monluc; and yet, there is no reason to suspect that just because Montaigne adapted the conversation into his own words and revealed therein something of his own character, he also changed Monluc's ideas. In other words, one should not hastily conclude that Montaigne was deceiving his readers, and that Monluc was incapable of expressing genuine affection in writing.

In fact, in his constant attacks against rote memorization – "savoir par coeur n'est pas savoir" – and his preference for a "teste bien faicte" to a "teste bien pleine," Montaigne drew on a classical distinction between the memory of words and the memory of things (Weinrich 44). Rabelais was ridiculing the same type of memory of words in his portraits of monks singing prayers back and forth although ignorant of their meaning. *Memoria rerum* meant memorizing and storing

images or ideas (*sententiae*) rather than exact words. It entailed a specific technique of assimilation, and it explains why the “modern” Montaigne consciously altered some of his quotations; numerous medieval writers chose to paraphrase other authors and did not quote exactly even when manuscripts with the original text were immediately available (Carruthers 110-6). Although he altered the words, Montaigne had probably reproduced the substance of Monluc’s private conversation.

More than likely the *Commentaires* omitted the free and genuine expression of sorrow at the loss of the author’s beloved son because it did not have direct implications for public life. Monluc worked within a genre that had implicit rules for what was appropriate to pass into writing and become public memory. The capacious memory with which Monluc flatters himself in his *Commentaires* was just as selective and transformative as Montaigne’s who, on the contrary, constantly complained about his “weak” and “bad” memory (*Dictionnaire de Michel de Montaigne* 748-50). Both Montaigne and Monluc worked within the same classical tradition of *memoria*, and adapted it to two new but different genres. The *Essais* were conceived as philosophical exercises aimed to transform one’s private self through the exercise of moral judgment, whereas the *Commentaires* prepared men for warfare and public life.

Monluc silenced the movements of his soul that did not directly foreground martial values, for which he and his family hoped to be remembered. In another passage referring to the same death, Blaise de Monluc interrupted abruptly the expression of his sorrow: “Laisant ces propos, qui me tirent les larmes des yeux, je retourneroy à nostre faict” (225). His memoir contains only traces of this suppression; the generic constraints of memoirs require that the author concentrate on the “faict,” the “facta et dicta memorabilia” as in traditional historiography, except that the collective protagonist was no longer a royal dynasty but Blaise de Monluc as representative of a

family of faithful knights. Memoirs contain little in the way of explicit memories about the intimate and private lives of their authors because, contrary to what these authors wrote in their prologues, they were rarely really meant for “private” circulation within one’s close family, where expressions of affections might have made sense. If Monluc wrote little about his sons’ deaths, he made a moving funeral portrait of the prince of Condé, his Protestant enemy, excusing his heresy by describing it as an expression of jealousy, ambition, and more importantly, of a warrior instinct appropriate to his lineage. Monluc traced back the origin of the French Civil Wars to Henri II’s peace with Emperor Charles V. Not having enemies from the outside, great princes started fighting each other within France. Monluc greatly regretted the death of a French prince: “car je suis François, et regrette la mort de ces braves princes tuez de nos propres mains, qui nous pourroient servir ailleurs” (669-670). In this view, Wars of Religions were fratricidal struggles between French nobles.

The resulting paradox is that the Wars of Religion had nothing to do with religion, and masked only private interests and dissatisfaction. The question of whether religion was a historical drive in itself or a mark of something else still produces heated debate (Holt 524-551; Heller, “Putting History Back into the Religious Wars” 853-861). The Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre of August 24, 1572, the most horrific act of the Wars of Religion, was in itself an act of collective violence driven by deep religious beliefs. Yet, in the period that followed this act, eyewitnesses carefully omitted the topic from their life stories. Official censorship cannot explain this state of affairs since exceptions do exist (Jean de Saulx-Tavannes and Marguerite de Valois’s memoirs, most notably). More likely, this has to do with a conscious effort to forget past conflicts and work towards a public memory acceptable to everyone closely involved.

#### 4 The Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre

In the absence of testimonies, the modern historiography of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre is complex and still widely debated. The purpose of this closing subchapter is to examine the way Renaissance eyewitnesses reimagined this event in their life-writing. The few verifiable facts available have been summarized in the previous chapter, where we have seen how Charles IX assumed responsibility for (part of) the massacre by invoking the rights of monarchs to use extraordinary preemptive justice. Historians generally agree that the massacre was not planned. What interests me here is the insertion of this event into the memory of the French nation.

Early on, a black legend circulated involving a Machiavellian French monarchy unscrupulously using both deceit and brute force to eliminate troublesome subjects (Bourgeon, "Pour une histoire, enfin" 83-142). We all remember Voltaire's portrait of Charles IX: "Charles IX qui n'était point du tout guerrier, était d'un temperament sanguinaire; et, quoiqu'il eût des maîtresses, son cœur était atroce. C'est le premier roi qui ait conspiré contre ses sujets" (Voltaire 2: 494). Republican historians like Michelet transformed this interpretation into a commonplace of French national memory, and even a relatively recent movie like *La Reine Margot* (1994) fully embraces similar received ideas about how the Machiavellian queen mother, in her jealousy of Admiral of Coligny's influence over her son, orchestrated the murder attempt and finally convinced Charles IX to endorse the killings.

While disagreeing sometimes radically with regard to their interpretation, most prominent historians of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre – Bourgeon, Crouzet, Jouanna, and Sutherland, to name only a few – reject this dark legend and blame its preponderance on memoirs. According to the modern historiography, these personal recollections recounted in memoirs, written sometimes decades after the events, are counterfactual. Worse still, the memoirs

themselves are sometimes “purely invented,” as Jean-Louis Bourgeon suggested (“Pour une histoire, enfin” 104-5). My first chapter argues that Bourgeon’s hypothesis is not far from the truth. However, the “invention” of memoirs does not mean, as the historian believes, creation *ex nihilo* and false accounts. Tavannes’s memoirs were a collection of papers written and dictated by Gaspard and Jean themselves over decades, a typical process for “inventing” memoirs. There is no reason to believe that Marguerite of Valois did not write her *Mémoires* (Viennot “A propos de la Saint-Barthélemy,” 894-917), or that she did not closely oversee their composition.

Although biased and used to self-serving ends by various groups, the memoirs recounting the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre are relevant precisely because they are collective reinterpretations of their recent past meant to promote social reconciliation and national unity. Rather than approaching memoirs by trying to discern what is historical reality and what is political agenda, like historians do, I propose to read memoirist narratives of the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre on their own terms. Although memoirs are always apologetic, they also express the maturation of a political reflection that we need not readily suspect to be insincere and interested.

The modern reader is initially struck by the absence or brevity of the eyewitness life-narratives of the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre. Agrippa d’Aubigné dedicated a significant portion of his *Histoire Universelle* to Saint Bartholomew’s Day and lent credence to his Protestant party’s version of events that alleged the tyrannical Charles IX and his Florentine mother had carefully premeditated the attack. The epic poem *Les Tragiques* reads the event through the eyes of a prophetic poetic persona and consciously reinterprets and deforms both history and geography, tailoring the events to fit a Calvinist eschatology (Usher, *Epic Arts* 160-201). Surprisingly, D’Aubigné’s *Life* quickly skims over the events of the massacre, which happened two days after he had left Paris in order to avoid prosecution for having participated in an unlawful duel. After

hearing the news of the massacre, D'Aubigné and a small number of Protestant companions were so scared that they ran away like sheep ("comme une troupe de moutons"), but then resolved to put their trust in God, and were able to face a Catholic mob the following day (*Sa vie* 76-77). In his life-writing, Agrippa d'Aubigné considered the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre briefly, as a moment when he learned to overcome fear and trust God. There is no trace of the tone adopted in the political pamphlets accusing Charles IX of tyranny that made up such a large part of his other writings, accusation that can also be found in the Protestant tracts published in the years following the event. The brevity characterizes most moderate or ultra-Catholic memoirists as well.

Typically, the massacre is narrated as part of an inflexible chain of events that forced the monarchy to take preventive measures. Words like necessity and resolution abound in these narratives. Cheverny explained Saint Batholomew's Day massacre contextually by tense international relations and by a particular incident that functioned as a trigger and could not have been foreseen. The anti-Spanish rebels from the Lower Countries sought the help of the French, in accordance with the peace that reigned there between Protestants and Catholics after the edict of August, 1570. The Protestant leader Coligny pressed King Charles IX to declare war against Spain. The particular occasion for the massacre came after somebody shot the admiral in the arm during the celebrations of the wedding between the king of Navarre and King Charles IX's sister. Consequently, the Protestant leaders, the king of Navarre and the prince of Condé, demanded justice. Cheverny's narrative synthetizes in a complex sentence the king's judgment and execution:

Ce qui donna sujet et occasion au roy d'entreprendre contr'eux plus avant, et de juger par les choses passees qu'il s'en pouvait prendre de plus grandes et plus perilleuses à l'advenir; ce qu'il fut cause, avec les insolences et les menaces qu'ils faisoient, que le roy se resolut à l'effect de la S. Barthélemy vingt quatriesme aoust

mil cinq cens soixante et douze, qui fut executee par tout le royaume, ainsi que chacun le peut mieux voir dans les histoires du temps, veritables et non falsifiees, et augmentees par ceux de la religion (24).

“Entreprendre plus avant contr’eux” immediately brings to mind Tavannes’s maxim that we discussed in the previous chapter: “Il est plus permis d’entreprendre contre les sujets par voyes extraordinaires, qu’à eux d’entreprendre contre leur Roy” (421). The logical jargon of cause and effect, judgment and resolution also closely echoes Jean de Saulx-Tavannes’s description of the same occurrence:

Du peril present de leurs Majestez, et des Conseillers tenus en crainte naist la resolution de necessité, telle qu’elle fut de tuer l’Admiral, et tous les Chefs de part. Conseil nay de l’occasion par faute et imprudence des huguenots, et qui ne se fust peu executer sans estre descouverte, si elle eust esté premeditée (417).

One wonders whether Tavannes read Cheverny’s memoirs. Both explanations use a similar reason of state language that eliminates any alternative course of events and denies any moral-religious motivation on the part of the aggressors. Cheverny refused to describe further the atrocities themselves, and referred readers to truthful histories written not by the victims but by the perpetrators.

Cheverny endorsed the view that the Protestant leaders had imprudently threatened King Charles IX who decided to put into motion the events that happened on Saint Bartholomew’s Day after he had carefully weighed past exempla. These precedents made up a lenient policy of appeasement that in the end brought only civil wars; in light of these inefficient past measures, the crown adopted an intolerant policy and decided to besiege the Protestant stronghold of La

Rochelle: “Et sur l’occasion des choses passees, le Roy ayant pris la volonté de ne laisser plus de retraite acoustumée pour ceux qui prennent les armes contre luy en la ville de la Rochelle, resolut que l’on l’alla assieger . . .” (Cheverny 25).

In Cheverny’s telling, where the author’s personal views, insight, and implication in the events described are completely left out, King Charles IX acted as a prudent, rational ruler who knew how to read history, whereas the Protestant leaders were hotheaded and disobedient subjects. For Cheverny, history had its own logic independent of the historical agents’ will. The chain of causes and effects that brought about the “effect” of the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre is described as having been started back in August of 1570, when the peace treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye was signed.

Charles IX’s main peace negotiator in this treaty, Henri de Mesmes, recalled in his manuscript life story the calumny he had suffered because of that peace. He had done his best, but no peace ever lasted for long: “Ainsy advient-il ez guerres civiles, mesme pour religion, et nous y sommes encore!” (fol. 24ro). Wars of Religion were no different than other civil wars. The peace lasted only two years when the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre happened and the edict was broken: “Il est vray que la Saint-Barthélemy la rompit au bout de deux ans, et est bien vray aussy ce qu’on dict que les grands empires ne sont jamais en repos” (fol. 24vo). If in Cheverny’s narrative, “La Saint-Barthélemy” is an outcome borne out of inexorable historical processes, in De Mesmes’s it is a grammatical subject and it seems to personify historical agency. In any case, there is no trace of human responsibility. Henry de Mesmes’s narrative does not even attempt to explain the causes of the massacre as if the event needed to be consciously repressed from public memory altogether; only the name and its personification, empty traces of the event, needed to be remembered.

After this brief mention of Saint Bartholomew's Day, De Mesmes's shifted his narrative to the next step in the author's political career:

Après la Saint-Barthélemy, qui fust le 24e aoust 1572, le Roy me forsa [sic] de prendre la charge du Roy de Navarre, et de ses affaires, et de la Reyne de Navarre, ainsi que le contient le brevet du forcé commandement qu'il m'en feit,<sup>9</sup> pour mettre poine de les retenir toujours en son obéissance (fol. 24 vo).

Rereading this passage, the author added in the left margin: "et desclara qu'il le vouloit et me le commanda absolument" The marginal note served Henri de Mesmes's own apologetic purposes because some rumors and pamphlets claimed that the king of Navarre had ousted him from the office of chancellor. But Henri de Mesmes strategically inserted the adverb "absolument" immediately after mentioning the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre, thereby alluding to the necessity to sacrifice individual interests for the preservation of the crown's interests.

When choosing to forget in his "private" life story the atrocities of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre, Henri de Mesmes was actually faithful to the exact terms of the peace treaty of Saint-Germain that he had prepared two years before:

Que la mémoire de toutes choses passées d'une part et d'autre, et dès et depuis les troubles advenus en notre dit Royaume, et à l'occasion d'iceux, demeure éteinte et assoupie comme chose non advenue. Et ne sera loisible ni permis à nos procureurs généraux ni autre personne publique ou privée quelconque, en quelque temps ni pour quelque occasion que ce soit, en faire mention, procès ou poursuite en aucune cour ou juridiction (*Edits des Guerres de Religion* 69).

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<sup>9</sup> Added above: "qui contient mes longs refus et contestations."

In her “Waging Peace: Memory, Identity, and the Edict of Nantes,” Barbara B. Diefendorf underscores how all peace edicts between the Peace of Amboise (1563) to the Edict of Nantes contained injunctions to forget past atrocities. The paradoxical (and impossible) order to forget found in these peace treaties came from previous medieval models of peace settlement between belligerent factions, although the formalizing of religious tolerance central to Renaissance edicts of War was unprecedented. These pacifying policies successfully penetrated the memoirs of the Wars of Religion. With a few exceptions, Renaissance memoirs with different religious and political agendas are similar in their rushed treatment of the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre. This also has to do with the testimonial nature of the genre, because some memoirists like D’Aubigné did describe the event amply in different genres (history and epic poetry), freely attacking the tyrant Charles IX and the Machiavellian Catherine of Medici. When it came to producing a memory of their public self for their “children,” most memoirists chose to imagine themselves within a family of public servants with a “French heart,” who sacrificed their individual lives and traumatic memories for the life and memory of their *patrie*. There are a few exceptions; the most significant and lengthiest representation of Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre comes from Jean de Saulx-Tavannes’s memoirs of his father. He had a strong apologetic reason, since his family was out of favor at the court, and he believed this was Henri IV’s way of punishing him for his father’s having advised the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre.

Jean de Saulx-Tavannes admitted at first that his father had been among the small council that advised Charles IX to order the Admiral of Coligny’s assassination but reminded Henri IV that it was Gaspard who convinced Charles IX not to order the spare Henri of Navarre and Condé’s lives. Although he expanded upon the representation of the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre more than any other eyewitness, Jean de Saulx-Tavannes recounted the history of the massacre

pretty much in the same way as Cheverny and De Mesmes did, that is to say as a series of objective historical processes, in which the ultimate human responsibility lay not with the monarch and his council, but with the victims themselves who tried to force Charles IX to declare war against Spain and help the rebels in Flanders. Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's account is mostly a series of lengthy deliberative discourses ("advis") signed by his father Marshal Gaspard, who argued against such a course of action, showing how this would have only further weakened the monarchy. The prudence of the advice was evidenced by the fact that all statesmen lauded the marshal's impeccable reasoning: "Tous les gens d'Etat qui vivoient de ce temps-là et qui du depuis ont veu cét advis l'ont exalté et loué sur tous autres qu'ils eussent jamais veu" ; Jean de Saulx-Tavannes also decided to insert two of his own discourses to King Henri IV and the queen regent : "et pour luy donner encore plus de lustre [to Gaspard's advice] j'en ay mis encore deux donnez du vivant du Roy Henry III, et de la regence de la Royne" (404). The two speeches treat the same topic, an alliance with Protestants against Spain, although under different historical circumstances, and are entitled: *Advis contre la Guerre d'Espagne donné par le Sieur de Tavanés. Au Roy Henri III* (406) and *Autre advis donné à la Royne Regente par ledict sieur Vicomte de Tavanés* (410). Like his father before him, Jean de Saulx-Tavannes argued against such an alliance. There was no will on Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's part to distinguish his ideas from his father's. On the contrary, what mattered to him was to show that he had inherited not only his father's habits and qualities but even the structure of his judgments, as if prudence was both informed by history and inherited through lineage.

The importance of family relationships also sometimes affects the logic of the narrative. Tavannes repeatedly dismissed any premeditation in the ordering of the massacre, and blamed it on Protestant pressuring and menacing the crown. Nevertheless, Jean de Saulx-Tavannes accused

the queen mother Catherine of Medici of having orchestrated with the duke of Anjou and two other counselors the assassination of the Admiral of Coligny, by rekindling the ancient hatred between Guise and Coligny. Thus, at least part of this massacre had been planned by the queen mother because she was jealous of Coligny's influence on her son Charles IX, just as much as she feared an open war with Spain. Tavannes even reproduced a poignant direct speech, delivered behind closed doors by Catherine to her son ("enfermée en un cabinet avec luy"), and even noted the king's reaction of disbelief and fear: "Ceste harangue artificielle esmeut, estonne, espouvante le Roy, non tant des huguenots que de sa mere et de son frere, dont il sçait la finesse, ambition et puissance en son Estat, s'esmerveille de ses conseils revellez, les advoüe, demande pardon, promet obeissance" (416).

The speech is indeed "artificial," both in the sense that it exemplifies Catherine's ruse and in the sense that it is completely invented. The harangue synthesizes all the major fears of our memoirists: the court as a major cause of instability, the pernicious role of women in government, a weak king, and the danger one put oneself in when one tried to disunite the royal family. Coligny's major mistake had been that he had foolishly thought that he could divide the royal family, antagonize Charles IX against Catherine and against his brother the future King Henri III.

The story of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre, as it is told and untold in personal eyewitness accounts, is explained both through abstract historical processes and through concrete family quarrels, well before Ernest Renan gave his definition of nationhood.

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This chapter examined the conception of memory in the memoir genre. We saw first that Renaissance authors of memoirs were fully enmeshed in a rhetorical culture of memory inherited

from the Antiquity and the Middle Ages. They adapted this culture to the specific purposes of the historiographical genre they invented. A memoirist would praise his prodigious memory with the double aim of reinforcing the veracity of his account and of creating the ethos of a prudent person giving valuable exempla to his peers. But if rhetorical memory was a trained one, the specific ethos of the memoirist as an unprofessional writer required that his prodigious memory be a natural gift. Memoirists further distanced themselves from more traditional views on memory in that they conceived of their writings as a battle against court oblivion.

The rest of the chapter focused on the specific content of the memories included in life-writing. Although sometimes writing for apologetic reasons, memoirists also aimed to immortalize their names. This desire for earthly glory did not mark the advent of the individual breaking away with medieval corporatism, as is argued in the more traditional historiography of the Renaissance, however. On the contrary, one's family name, ancestors, and descendants mattered the most for Renaissance individuals who sought to assert their identity. Some memoirists, or their descendants (Cheverny, Tavannes) created well-documented genealogies of their families, which included narrative, heraldic, and archival sources to prove the worth of their "races." In Jean de Saulx-Tavannes's case, we examined the fascinating history of a struggle between his indigenous Burgundian ancestors and the Frankish invaders, who erected a monarchy on the ruins of Romanized Gaul, a struggle that spanned several centuries, and that justified Jean de Saulx-Tavannes own rebellion against Henri III and Henri IV. In other cases (Villeroy, for instance), authors had recourse to wider categories of friends and neighbors as if they were all part of a great family of magistrates and state servants working towards the preservation and the French, even though they had joined opposing religious and political faction. Therefore, individual memorialization always served the purpose of creating a public, national memory. However, this

collective and unifying character of self-memorialization also entailed the suppression of certain memories: highly personal and traumatic events make up a very limited part of memoir writing.

The second type of willful suppression of personal memories is political and traumatic not just for the individual but for the body politic as such; the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre falls within this category. The final part of this chapter demonstrates that memoirists were already imagining, at the end of the seventeenth century, a national memory made up of suppressions of and vague allusions to traumatic events, creating a memorial model that would have a lasting influence on the conception of the French nation well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

## Conclusion

In his essay *Des boyteux*, Montaigne lamented about social conventions requiring him to assent to nonsensical stories (“contes frivoles”) about miracles that he did not believe in at all; negating them would have been unkind (“rude”) and offensive (“quereleux”), especially when storytellers often claimed that they witnessed the miracle themselves (“d’affirmer qu’ils l’ont veu”) or when they invoked authoritative eyewitnesses (“alleguer des tesmoins, desquels l’authorité arreste nostre contradiction”):

La vérité et le mensonge ont leurs visages conformes, le port, le goust, et les alleures pareilles: nous les regardons de mesme œil . . . J’ay veu la naissance de plusieurs miracles de mon temps. Encore qu’ils s’estouffent en naissant, nous ne laissons pas de prevoir le train qu’ils eussent pris, s’ils eussent vescu leur aage. Car il n’est que de trouver le bout du fil, on en desvide tant qu’on veut: Et il y a plus loing, de rien, à la plus petite chose du monde, qu’il n’y a de celle là, jusques à la plus grande. Or les premiers qui sont abreuvez de ce commencement d’estrangeté, venans à semer leur histoire, sentent par les oppositions qu’on leur fait, où loge la difficulté de la persuasion, et vont calfeutrants cet endroit de quelque piece fauce . . . L’erreur particuliere, fait premierement l’erreur publique: et à son tour après, l’erreur publique fait l’erreur particuliere. Ainsi va tout ce bastiment, s’estoffant et formant, de main en main: de maniere que le plus esloigné tesmoin, en est mieux instruit que le plus voisin: et le dernier informé, mieux persuadé que le premier (1073; bk. 3, ch. 11).

This is one of Montaigne’s best known essays, and it is often quoted to show how much the essayist prefigured the Enlightenment in rejecting authority, tradition, capital punishment, the persecution

of sorcerers, etc. The question of authority is central to Montaigne because people tend to add details to a story in order to gain credence, and the final account becomes so clear and well-thought that the last storyteller sounds more credible and inspires more authority than the eyewitness closest to the event. As a remedy, we should assess a testimony by comparing it with other testimonies, in function of the proximity to the event narrated, and look for forged documents (“*pièce fauce*”) that might have been inserted in the body of evidence. Next, one should examine closely the style of the verbal testimony and eliminate the all too human tendency to embellish and rationalize an account. Admittedly, Montaigne himself used too many words and hyperboles in order to convince his interlocutor, even though he disliked lying: “*je fais conscience de mentir*” (1074). All this is quite topical to Renaissance historiography. Montaigne assessed the persuasive force of a testimony from the perspectives of its authority and style. His preferred authors, Caesar and Comynes, founded their authority on professional competence and firsthand experience of political and military affairs; their sound judgments and their plain style reinforced the truth of their narratives. However, Montaigne, just like his humanist predecessors, did not fetishize eyewitness testimony; he admitted that Caesar could be wrong and that his beloved Comynes might have plagiarized some ideas. Eyewitness testimonies remained an important source of historical knowledge in the Renaissance but they needed careful evaluation. The only unquestioned authority was God; all human authorities, including the testimonies of miracles, could be contested.

*La logique ou l'art de penser*, commonly referred to as *Port-Royal Logic*, published anonymously in 1662, quotes Montaigne's view on miracles, and refutes it in a manner that is of import to my main subject. While discussing miracles and testimonies, Arnauld and Nicole argued against both the credulity of simpletons and Montaigne's skepticism because both gullible people

and skeptical savants made use of commonplaces in their reasoning: “Ils se jettent sur des lieux communs” (322). The former grounded their belief in miracles on God’s might and goodness, on previous certified miracles, and on the blindness of libertines who disbelieved anything not founded on reason. Skeptics, on the other hand, ignored that one can always find commonplaces opposite to theirs (“un lieu commun opposé à celui-là, qui sera pour le moins aussi bien fondé”), commonplaces such as the possibility that many miracles may have been forgotten by people or that some miraculous events had never been examined (323). In both cases, the *Port-Royal Logic* attacks the reliance on commonplaces when examining testimonies:

On voit donc assez qu’il n’y a rien de moins raisonnable que de se conduire par des lieux communs en ces rencontres, soit pour embrasser tous les miracles, soit pour les rejeter tous, mais qu’il faut examiner par leurs circonstances particulières et par la fidélité et la lumière des témoins qui les rapportent (324).

Commonplaces could mean categories of reasoning (definition, etymology, contrariety, analogy, etc.), as well as proverbs and sayings of general application. Many early modern histories and memoirs were accompanied by tables of useful maxims and they participated in a commonplace culture. Traditionally, commonplaces of general applicability and specific testimonies were complementary parts of “invention,” the process by which one found arguments. Testimonies were taken from the “outside” and drew their persuasive force from the authority of witnesses, whereas commonplaces were “internal” to the art of speaking and thinking. A well-wrought persuasive discourse on human matters contained both credible testimonies and commonplaces; there was no opposition between them. The authors of *The Port-Royal Logic* denied any epistemological value to commonplaces and promoted the examination of testimonies according to their “particular circumstances,” instead. The devaluation of commonplaces meant that testimonies became, by the

same token, the sole valid base of deciding upon events that depended on human faith. Significantly, the chapter following this discussion regarding the credibility of testimonies recounting miracles is followed, in the *Logic*, by a discussion of the rules of establishing the authenticity and authorship of letters and documents attributed to church fathers and saints (327-330). Montaigne's ultimate argument against testimonies describing miracles was that they were human fallible testimonies that required ratiocination (through commonplaces); Arnauld and Nicole called for a rejection of commonplaces and for a strict reliance on the authenticity of documents along with the examination of the witness's faithfulness and intelligence.

The distant origins of our modern preoccupation with authenticity must be sought in the late seventeenth-century devaluation of and saturation with commonplaces. Changes in the way one conceived memoirs and eye-witness history must be linked to developments in the history of rhetoric, logic, and science in the second half of the seventeenth century, although these fields of research greatly exceed my capabilities. In this dissertation I aimed to re-place the origins of memoirs in their own context, where the traditional culture of commonplaces successfully permeated new forms of Renaissance life-writing and historiography. I explained the apparent disorder and lack of esthetic value, traditionally associated with pre-classical memoirs, by uncovering their compositional principles, readership, and holistic ideals. The issue at stake was a fresh reading of early modern memoirs without the retroactive imposition of a literary esthetic inherited from the Age of Louis XIV.

My ambition was to bring back to light uncharted forms of history and life-writing of potentially great interest for scholars of literature and history. Many of these texts do not correspond to the ideas of a good memoir that we have derived from reading Saint-Simon and Chateaubriand. Yet, for various reasons, authors such as Commynes, D'Aubigné, and, more

recently, Marguerite de Valois still interest literary historians. I hope to have shown that, with all their esthetic difference with regard to latter models of memoir writing, forgotten authors such as De Mesmes, Monluc, Tavannes, and Villeroy can be equally stimulating as objects of literary and rhetorical analysis when we read them in their context. My dissertation also engaged with a number of historians of the sixteenth century, and it sought to give a better generic view on the rhetorical conventions of Renaissance memoirs that ought to be taken into account when mining these texts for information. Even though part of this dissertation was to show the collective nature of most of these memoirs, this study has at its core the belief that memoirs are still valuable historical sources for facts and for charting Renaissance noble culture.

A subject of further inquiry would be the study of memoirs alongside other Renaissance testimonial practices such as travel narratives. Memoirs and travel narratives were the primary sources for the Renaissance ideal of a perfect history. Grégoire Holtz has studied the ghostwriting practices of a late Renaissance publisher of travel narratives, and this type of research seems promising. In a recent article, Holtz analyzes three memoirs collectively written in the seventeenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries claiming that the principles of their composition relied on a subtle dialectic of the author's *apprivoisement* and *ensauvagement* by his editors ("Des textes ensauvagés? L'écriture collective des Mémoires" 37-51). My own approach differs in that it proposes a more historicized explanation of the collective writing of memoirs. The idea of polishing or "domesticating," in Holtz's terminology, a "savage" author is an editorial creation of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, and it reflects the specific noble ethos of the "illiterate" knight. Literary refinement was associated with flattery and dissimulation at court. Anti-courtier motifs abound in the memoir genre of the Renaissance and reflect a common cultural typology of noble self-representation. I argue against a literal interpretation of these conventions. Even the most

virulent denouncers of flatterer courtiers, like D'Aubigné and Monluc, sometimes depicted themselves as worthy courtiers.

Another object of inquiry, upon which I very briefly touched in chapters two and three, is the relation of this (anti)courtier literature to the political thought of noble rebels. Paradoxically for a genre reputed to reflect the awakening of the individual confronted with the growth of absolute monarchy, the corruption of political life was always ascribed to individualistic aspirations. The inability to transcend personal interest was often described as having caused the civil wars. As usual, Comynes started this memoirist tradition, when he characterized the war of feudal nobles under the leadership of Charles the Bold against King Louis XI (1465), in the following terms: “Et fut ceste guerre depuys appellée le *Bien Publicque* pour ce qu'elle s'entreprenoit soubz couleur de dire que c'estoit pour le bien publicque du royaume” (10). Comynes was in dialogue with an entire medieval literature on this subject. A generation earlier, Alain Chartier, secretary to King Charles VII, wrote in his anti-courtier letter *De vita curiali*, around the 1430s: “Vis modernam curiam descriptiva diffinitione designare: est viroꝝ conventus, qui ad se invicem decipiendum, *boni communis simulacione*, communicant.” (Chartier 368; my italics). But whereas Alain Chartier's anti-courtier tract was strictly moralizing, apolitical, and ahistorical, Comynes adapted the anti-courtier motif to a firsthand history and made it an explanatory principle of political action. A few generations later, the memoirists of the Wars of Religion would routinely suspect that the Protestant and Catholic factions were driven by personal interest, and that they had no genuine concern for religion or the public weal. I believe there is a lot to be said about the way imaginative literature informed the self-memorializing narratives of gentlemen after the Wars of Religion.

Besides being the larger center of culture and patronage, the court was also the center of politics. Sustained reflection on moral and political matters was strangely absent from early modern memoirs, with the prominent exception of Commynes's narrative. The perceived absence of political thought is also a consequence of the type of questions we are asking of these texts. Memoirists rarely explored theories of the best political regime because they were writing to justify and to inscribe themselves in a national elite. One of the most important political concept was reason of state because it could harmonize what was apparently immoral and dishonorable in their past with traditional ideas of the common good. Unlike previous secondary literature that pits "constitutionalist" noble rebels against an "absolutist" crown, I hope to have shown that, within the life-writings of former actors of the Wars of Religion, reason of state was advanced as acceptable justification for both state servants and the crown. I have left aside the fruitful line of future investigation concerning the Italian "fuoriusciti" around Henri III, and the development of reason of state culture at the French court. For instance, Jacobo Corbinelli, an acute scholar of Guicciardini, Machiavelli, and Tacitus, lectured King Henri III in the novel school of political realism (Fumaroli, "Aulae arcana" 137-139; Gorris Camos 161-182). The biographies of these Italian humanists might intersect with the (auto)biographies of some French government officials.

The sacrifice of the individual for the preservation of the community conjures ideas and beliefs concerning the nation. My last chapter has investigated how the memoirs of the Wars of Religion contributed to the development of a national memory by simultaneously forgetting and remembering a distorted past, in which conflicts between different factions were reimagined as conflicts between good and bad Frenchmen, as if they were all part of the same national family. This national family consisted of a very exclusivist group. From the beginning of the genre, memoirs were aimed at a courtly audience, even when they circulated only in manuscript form

during their authors' lifetime. But they entertained complex relations with many forms of life-writing, such as diaries, scrapbooks, account books, books of reason, writings which were mostly private in nature, in the sense that they were not necessarily meant for a public or courtly circulation. Henri de Mesmes, for instance, kept private florilegia that he used in his life-writing, Cheverny's descendants blended a more private book of reason with a memoir that started itself as a testament. Since these parallel life-writing forms remained mostly unpublished and did not solicit the interest of early modern historians as much, they display an even greater generic instability than memoirs; there was no model for writing a diary in the Renaissance as Commynes's narrative had been for memoir writing. A study of the relations between the memoir genre and other life-writing forms, written around the same period, would certainly deserve another dissertation.

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## Appendix

**Henri de la Tour d’Auvergne, duke of Bouillon (1555-1623)**, grandson of the constable of France Anne of Monmorency, was a court favorite of Francis of Anjou, with whom he formed the Malcontent movement two years after the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre. Dissatisfied with how Francis rewarded him and his allies, Henri de la Tour d’Auvergne joined Henri of Navarre in 1576 and subsequently converted to Protestantism. He started writing his memoirs in 1609, and dedicated them to his son. The narrative stops in 1580, in some manuscripts, while other manuscripts and editions continue it until 1586. The earliest and best manuscript (Dupuy 82) dates from 1627. All the quotations I have given are taken from the 1901 edition prepared by Puchesse, which is based on the first edition published in 1666.

**Philippe de Hurault, seigneur de Cheverny (1528-1599)** served as chancellor of France until 1588, when Henri III relieved him of his duties. He regained this position from Henri IV in August 1590. He had previously served as counsellor to the Parliament of Paris, master of requests, and keeper of the seals. He married Anne de Thou, Jacques-Auguste de Thou’s sister. Cheverny started writing his life discourse in 1586, and continued it until his death, when his son, the abbot of Pontlevoy, arranged his “papers” into a memoir. The first known edition of his life-writing only appeared in 1636. See Durand, “Philippe Hurault de Cheverny, Chancelier de France (1528-1599).”

**Henri de Mesmes, seigneur de Roissy et de Malassise (1532-1596)** served as counselor to the Court of Aids, before becoming master of requests, and superintendent at Montalcino (1557) during Blaise de Monluc’s tenure as governor of Sienna. He joined Charles IX’s Privy Council in 1568, and was also appointed chancellor to the king and queen of Navarre from 1572 to 1575. He

became Henri III's keeper of charters and the queen's chancellor before Henri III dismissed him in 1582.

Although he possessed many manuscript volumes consisting of his writings, notes, and excerpts from classical authors, political and moral commentaries, Henri de Mesmes never published anything. The story of his life survived in an autograph manuscript written anywhere between Henri III's assassination and De Mesmes's own death in 1596. There were multiple copies of this manuscript in the seventeenth century, and significant excerpts of his life story were published in Jean de Laboureur's edition of Castelnau's memoirs in 1659. Edouard Frey first published De Mesmes's autobiography fully in 1886. Henri de Mesmes's other important unfinished project was a refutation of La Boétie's *Discours de la servitude volontaire*, preserved in the MS français 839, and written after 1577, as Marc Schachter has shown. J. G. Espiner Scott's article "Note sur H. de Mesmes et sur son influence" and Simonin's "Montaigne et ses frères: un poème inédit de George Buchanan conservé par Henri de Mesmes" are particularly revealing analyses of De Mesmes's literary network. Unfortunately, Jean Humbert's dissertation *Henri de Mesmes et ses amis: recherches sur un milieu littéraire de la Renaissance* (Ecole nationale des chartes, 1931), often quoted in more recent secondary literature, has in fact long been lost.

**Jean de Saulx-Tavannes** (1555-1629?) was the third son of Marshal Gaspard de Tavannes. A court favorite of Henri of Anjou, Jean de Saulx-Tavannes followed his benefactor to his new kingdom in 1573, when Henri was elected king of Poland. Shortly after Henri became king of France, Tavannes grew increasingly dissatisfied with his lenient policy towards Protestants, and joined the Catholic League. He served as the Duke of Mayenne's lieutenant in Burgundy, fought against Henri IV and his own brother the royalist Guillaume de Saulx-Tavannes. Jean de Saulx-

Tavannes wrote his testament in 1629, and died shortly after. The viscount probably started writing his father's biography during Henri IV's reign and he seems to have worked on it until his death. Pingaud published a number of interesting letters written by Jean de Saulx-Tavannes, his father and brother in 1877.

**Nicolas de Neufville, seigneur de Villeroy (1543-1617)** was secretary of state from 1567, and served kings Charles IX, Henri III, Henri IV, and Louis XIII. After Henri III ousted him in 1588, Villeroy joined the League, became the Duke of Mayenne's secretary, and negotiated on his behalf with the royalist camp. He left Mayenne and joined Henri IV in 1594.

Besides Villeroy's official correspondence, there are a number of apologetic letters that circulated in manuscript form, during his lifetime, which were printed posthumously under various titles: *Lettres, Discours, Apologies, Mémoires d'Etat*. The first such long letter recounts Villeroy's political activity from 1567 to 1589, and is sometimes dated April 1589. A second letter, usually dedicated to his colleague Pomponne de Bellièvre, enumerates his efforts to end peacefully the war between the Duke of Mayenne and Henri IV. Other supporting documents were sometimes collected with these previous apologies: *Harangue faite au roi en l'assemblée des prétendus Etats de Paris*, dated 1593; *Advis* to the duke of Mayenne supposedly published in Paris immediately after Henri III's death in 1589; a letter from Villeroy to Mayenne dated January 2, 1593; a letter to Bellièvre dated May 17, 1594; a *Manifest* defending Villeroy against the association with his former commissioner who had been outed as a spy in the service of Spain; a *Discourse* supposedly written by King Henry III for the Polish nobility on the causes and motives behind the events of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre. This last document did not appear in the first edition of Villeroy's memoirs published in 1622 in Paris, but only in a later four-volume edition, published in 1665, and containing many other writings that had nothing to do with Villeroy's career.

Nouaillac wrote Villeroy's biography in 1908, but Dickerman and, especially, Sutherland have authored more reliable works on the secretary of state.