

How to Be Good (but still get ahead) at the French Court:
virtuous advice for the courtier.

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This article examines the dilemmas facing the ambitious courtier and noble in the decades leading up to the court's permanent installation at Versailles. By exploring a number of previously neglected texts, including Charles de Bourdonné's Le Courtisan Désabusé (1658), Joachim Trotti de La Chétardie's Instructions pour un jeune seigneur, ou l'Idée d'un gallant homme (1682), Jean-Baptiste Saint-Jure's Conduites pour les principales actions de la vie chrétienne (1682), and Antoine Le Grand's Les caractères de l'Homme sans passions (1662), this paper affirms the significance of 'behaviour texts' in assessing the ideals of courtly virtue, civility and masculinity. In particular it investigates the impact of the move to Versailles in 1682, what the implications were for the ideal courtier, the 'honnête homme', and in turn the concept of the court itself.

During the 1660s and 1670s, between Colbert's 'recherche de noblesse', and the move to Versailles, the essence of nobility was under intense scrutiny from a number of quarters. Ideals of virtue, of civilité, and of honnêteté, constituted the backbone of discourse on what precisely could make one truly noble. As well as the professional writers who published courtesy works, theologians, courtiers, and philosophers weighed into the debate. In particular the arguments between Jansenist and Jesuit thinkers revealed fundamental differences in the view of what made one virtuous. While the golden age of the honnête homme came to an end in the 1660s, he remained a viable entity for many into the eighteenth century, but what precisely defined him became more and more vague as time went on. This ambiguity had protective qualities; the unwillingness to define nobility made it both less accessible and more attractive. The Jesuit Dominique Bouhour's Les Entretiens d'Aristes et d'Eugène (1671) captured this uncertainty, defining the undefinable as a certain 'je-ne-sais-quoi', satisfying and infuriating in equal parts. Within these works the traditional expectations of nobility, such as military service, Christian duty and familial responsibility, are discussed, but they are joined by wider considerations of what it is to be truly virtuous, to transcend the boundaries set even by the texts themselves, and to find one's true self in the face of outside influences and pressures.

Thus, this study investigates the ambiguities surrounding the ideals of the courtier and the noble, the uncertainties of defining virtue, and the multiple versions of courtly masculinity that appear

across a range of behaviour texts during these decades, while placing them in the context of religious and political debate during the 1670s. While there were texts that continued to present good manners alone, many more delved deeper into the questions of being and seeming good, of what the purposes of the courtier and noble were, and in turn revealing both the strengths and weaknesses of the court as it underwent a crucial phase of centralization.

The troubling dilemmas of how to be good and how to do well were the subject of much debate in the early modern period. The great conflicts of the Reformation(s) and the religious wars across Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were driven by, among other things, the central debates of whether one attained salvation through the performance of good works, the possession of faith alone, or a predetermined destiny. Questions of the true nature and demonstration of goodness, of integrity and of virtue occupied more and more writers and readers, fuelled not only by religious and spiritual concerns, but also by social and political needs.¹ How to reconcile one's secular role with one's spiritual duties lay at the heart of many works during the latter half of the seventeenth century in particular. It is during this time that we see the encroachment of many different intellectual, political and spiritual debates into the realm of the courtesy genre, a genre that was sometimes vulnerable to ridicule due to its perceived role of simply glossing the character, of providing the tricks of the trade to convince others of the rank one aspired to in life. Indeed this was true of some texts, but many more were motivated by prevailing philosophical debates, by pressing political needs, and by significant social demands, to uncover what made one *truly* good.

Works of etiquette and courtesy literature added greatly to the business and profits of the printing houses of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially in France, Italy and England. The works of the early sixteenth century built upon a tradition of chivalric works that taught the basics of princely society such as Daniel of Beccle's *Urbanus Magnus* and Bonvincino de Riva's *Courtesies* (both thirteenth century). As the

¹ Virtue as a component of early modern political theory has inspired debate in recent years starting with works by J. G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) and Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 1978). The most recent studies to grapple with virtue in the French context include Michael Moriarty, *Disguised Vices: Theories of Virtue in Early Modern French Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Jennifer A. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue. The Legacy of the Splendid Vices*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

population of educated, ambitious and socially and geographically mobile readers grew, so too did the demand for clear instruction on what constituted proper and, more importantly, successful behaviour. The first decades of the sixteenth century marked something of a boom in the courtesy genre. Influential works such as Machiavelli's *The Prince* (written 1513, published 1537), Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* (1528) and Erasmus's *De Civilitate Morum Puerilium* (1530) were published, edited, re-printed, and pirated throughout the following century. The genre proliferated: in Italy a host of titles were published including Nenna of Bari's *Il Nennion* (1542), Speroni's *Il dialogi* (1542), Giovanni Della Casa's hugely influential *Galateo* (1558), Muzio's *Il Gentilhuomo* (1571), and Torquato Tasso's *Il forno*, printed as *De la Noblesse in France* (1580). In England works such as Thomas Elyot's *The Boke Named the Gouernor* (1531), Henry Peacham's *The Compleat Gentleman* (1622) and Richard Braitwait's companion volumes *The English Gentleman* and *The English Gentlewoman* (both 1631), contributed to the discussion of what made the ideal man or woman.

For many of these works the primary concern was to educate their readers in the polite ways of civil society, the emergence of which has been much debated since the publication of Norbert Elias' work *The Civilizing Process*.² The moral integrity of these texts was questionable, not helped by the fact that so much of their content was traditionally devoted to the smallest social niceties (how to blow one's nose and how to spit (or not) being two recurrent themes) rather than to greater questions of goodness. However the works themselves made reference to the demands placed upon them both by their readers and the societies they served. Giovanni Della Casa in 1558 wrote 'The habit then . . . beautiful and becoming on the outside, is inside totally empty, and consists in appearances without substance and in words without meaning. This does not allow us, however, to change it. On the contrary, we are obliged to abide by it because it is a fault of our times, not of ourselves'.³ The views of others reflected the practical requirements of the courtier's life; Henry Peacham in 1622 was that his mission was to save the reader

² Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), Jorge Ardit, *A Genealogy of Manners: Transformation of social relations in France and England from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998), William Roosen, 'Early Modern Diplomatic Ceremonial: A Systems Approach', in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (Sept., 1980), pp. 452-476, Orest Ranum, 'Courtesy, Absolutism, and the Rise of the French State, 1630-1660', in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (Sept., 1980), pp. 426-451, Michael Curtin, 'A Question of Manners: Status and Gender in Etiquette and Courtesy', in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (Sept., 1985), pp. 395-423.

³ Giovanni Della Casa, *Galateo: Or, The Rules of Polite Behaviour*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 31.

from 'the tyrannie of these ignorant times, and from the common Education; which is, to weare the best cloathes, eate, sleep, drinke much, and to know nothing'.⁴

The importance of the integrity of one's interior life and its manifestation in one's exterior behaviour was certainly important in the religious context, but it became increasingly so in the political. The proliferation of courtesy texts and their growing emphasis on the integrity of the individual reflected the need for a precise definition of what it was to be truly noble. Through the purchase of offices the noble class became more and more permeable, making the definition of this social grouping increasingly subject to revision. As such, the content of courtesy literature reflects the changing dynamics of social structure at any given time. Clarifying what it meant to be noble, or what was expected of one if one aspired to nobility, was therefore a key component of courtesy literature. The audience for such literature was primarily those who were not of the dominant class, but who sought to be. Ideally noble-born men were sent to the court at a young age to learn the ropes and those with closer ties to the court were native speakers in the evolving language of behaviour. However for the upper bourgeois, lower-born or new nobility of the robe, one did not want to sound like a social tourist.

The traditional role model of noble behaviour in the seventeenth century was the *honnête homme*, variously translated as 'the honest man', the decent man, or simply the gentleman.⁵ Seventeenth-century interpretations of the *honnête homme* distinguished the ideal man as morally irreproachable and without malice. He was adept at being sociable, likable and knowing how to please. In many ways he was a re-incarnation of Aristotle's Magnanimous Man, enhanced with Christian virtues. Entire guides were devoted to the *honnête homme* including Pasquier's *Le Gentilhomme* (1611), and Nicolas Faret's *L'honnête homme, ou l'art de plaire à la cour* (1630). Pasquier's work, written at a time of courtly transition, addressed the aforementioned problem of attaining nobility, and even more importantly, of transmitting it to the next generation. He cautioned young nobles that they needed to work at their own behaviour to insure that nobility could be truly passed on.⁶ Precise definitions of nobility and *honnêteté* were offered by several writers, most notably La Rochefoucauld, the Chevalier de Méré, Pascal, Furetière, and Madame de

⁴ Henry Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman* (London, 1622), frontispiece.

⁵ Maurice Magendie, *La Politesse Mondaine et les théories de l'honnêteté, en France au XVIIe siècle de 1600 à 1660*, (First published Paris, 1925, Geneva, 1993)

⁶ Jay Smith, *The Culture of Merit: Nobility, Royal Service, and the Making of Absolute Monarchy in France, 1600-1789*, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, p. 64.

Lafayette. La Rochefoucauld's Maxims viewed this ideal with a great deal of skepticism: 'If one acts rightly and honestly, it is difficult to decide whether it is the effect of integrity or skill', and 'Falsely honest men are those who disguise their faults both to themselves and others; truly honest men are those who know them perfectly and confess them'.⁷ Furetière outlined that an *honnête homme's* identity was derived from his actions, rather than any internal virtues 'L'honnêteté des femmes, c'est la chasteté, la modestie, la pudeur, la retenue. 'L'honnêteté des hommes est une manière d'agir juste, sincère, courtoise, obligeante, civile'.⁸ Sounding too good to be true, the Chevalier de Méré described him as the embodiment of all virtues 'L'honnêteté n'est rien de moins que la quintessence de toutes les vertus. . . peu s'en faut que nous ne comprenons sous ce mot les plus belles qualités du coeur et de l'esprit'.⁹ If he had faults, he did not hide them, instead he acknowledged them. 'Les faux honnêtes gens sont ceux qui déguisent leurs défauts aux autres et à eux-mêmes. Les vrais honnêtes gens sont ceux qui les connaissent parfaitement et les confessent'.¹⁰ Pascal described the *honnête homme* as straightforward, a man of the people in many ways: 'Il faut qu'on n'en puisse [dire] ni: il est mathématicien, ni prédicateur, ni éloquent, mais il est honnête homme. . . Cette qualité universelle me plaît seule.'¹¹ Le Chétardie explained that 'Il ne suffit pas d'avoir de la valeur pour estre honneste Homme; il faut avoir de la probité, estre bon Amy, Homme de parole, chercher à obliger tout le monde, plaindre les Malheureux, sur tout ceux qui ne méritent pas de l'estre, & se faire un plaisir de les soulager quand l'occasion s'en présente; en un mot se faire un bon coeur.'¹² The Académie Française offered its definitive view, seeing the *honnête homme* as civil, courteous and polite. 'An honest man has an honest demeanor, way

⁷ François, Duc De La Rochefoucauld, *Reflections; or Sentences and Moral Maxims*, (London, 1871) accessed via Gutenberg.org, Maxims 170 and 202.

⁸ Furetière, *Dictionnaire*, cited in Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century*, (London, 1996), pp. 18-19. [Men's honnêteté concerns their behaviour - a manner or acting justly, sincerely, courteously, obligingly, civilly]

⁹ Chevalier de Méré, *De la vrai honnêteté*, [Honnêteté is nothing less than the epitome of all the virtues. . . nearly so that we do not understand by this word all the qualities of heart and mind that it encompasses].

¹⁰ La Rochefoucauld, *Maximes*, 1745, p. 120. [Falsely honest people are those who disguise their faults to others and to themselves. The real honest people are those who know them well and admit to them].

¹¹ Pascal, *Pensées*, 1669, fragment 647, edited by Lafume, 1963. [One should not be able to say either 'He is a mathematician' or 'a preacher' [. . .] but 'He is an *honnête homme*'. Only this universal quality pleases me].

¹² Joachim de la Chétardie, *Instructions pour un jeune seigneur*, pp. 7-8. [It is not enough to have the quality of the honnête homme, one must have the integrity, and be a good friend, a man of words, . . . to act upon opportunities and to do so with the best intentions].

of speaking, and of seeing the world. The honest man is not concerned with his pride, but he is a man of the world.¹³ The ideal of *bonnêteté* had also gained a wider definition and could refer to a bourgeoisie or one of noble standing. It was not necessarily bound to birth, it was tied to behaviour; in theory at least, *noblesse du coeur* had a chance to outrank *noblesse du cour*.

The period before the 1660s was something of a golden age for works on the *bonnête homme*, and saw the publication of titles such as Du Souhait's *Le Parfait Gentilhomme*, (1600), Du Refuge's *Le Traité de la cour* (1616), Nervèze's *Le Guide des courtisans* (1606), and Grenaille's *L'Honnête Fille* (1640) and *L'Honnête Garçon* (1642). However as Louis XIV's reign progressed, the reputation of the *bonnête homme* declined. No longer regarded as the 'genuine article', the *bonnête homme* was increasingly viewed with suspicion. Indeed the *bonnête homme* had fallen out of favour before,¹⁴ having been the subject of ridicule and satire in the late sixteenth century, but Faret and others had been successful in resuscitating him for a time.¹⁵ The main criticism of the *bonnête homme* was that he was something of an empty vessel. He was all and nothing, and most worryingly, a character who was in danger of displaying the virtues rather than possessing them. This last distinction was the crux of the matter. In addition to this the court itself as a site of morality was under attack. The behaviour of Louis XIV in the 1660s and 1670s in particular was cause for concern for the moralists of the court not simply for the fate of the king's soul, but for the example shown to his subjects. Playing the role of a good courtier needed to be underpinned by something beyond the court itself, and certainly something more than the ideal of kingly virtue. In addition to the king's own failings were the changing circumstances of religious practice and debate in France, the revocation of religious tolerance followed by the growing influence of Jansenist thought impacted upon the notion of virtue as a politically significant attribute. It was argued that the courtesy genre itself could share some of the blame for the decline in morals at the court, after all it had recorded and relayed secrets of truly 'noble' decorum for over a century by this stage. Finally, the irony that moral integrity could somehow be bought in

¹³ *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, 1694, p. 569.

¹⁴ Pauline Smith, *The Anti-Courtier Trend in Sixteenth-Century France* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1966). Several works have been identified as satirical commentaries on the court, parading as genuine courtesy guides.

¹⁵ A number of sixteenth century works satirized the courtier, including Philibert de Vienne's *Le Philosophe de Court* (1548) and Jean de la Taille's *Le courtisan retiré*, (1573) and Gabriel Chappuy, *Le Misaule ou Jaineux de Court* (1585).

the form of a handbook was not lost on the readership. By the end of the seventeenth century the *honnête homme* was not exactly extinct but he was an endangered species.¹⁶

Courtesy texts more often than not began to include chapters instructing readers how to be truly good, rather than simply playing the part. For the isolated courtier, the Christian theme, and the reliance upon Christian ideals, were welcome and familiar friends. By placing court behaviour in the context of universal Christian expectations of conduct, courtesy works made the transition from country estate to royal court easier, in theory at least. Readers were accustomed to finding guidance in text, and this was no different. The intention of the courtesy writer therefore was not simply to engender Christian virtue in their audience, but to attract an audience with universal and relatable themes, while introducing them to a new social forum. Readers with specific religious loyalties, particularly Jansenist and Jesuit, had many writers to choose from in this respect. What one can observe from many courtesy texts, and indeed from spiritual texts, is the mutual influence exerted by one genre on the other. Ideas of classical republican virtue were joined by Christian interpretations, most interestingly challenging the worth of self-interest put to use in the service of others. Whether one could perform virtue in a meaningful way presented writers and readers with a further dilemma: Could one be virtuous if the performance of such virtue was ultimately self-interest? Indeed was virtue compromised if one exercised it in the hope of eternal happiness, even if one's duties on earth had been selfless? The truly virtuous courtier was indeed a troubled soul.

One particular work that highlighted the difficult decisions facing nobles was Charles de Bourdonné's *Le Courtisan Désabusé ou Pensées d'un gentilhomme qui a passé la plus grande partie de sa vie à la cour et dans la Guerre*. [The Disillusioned Courtier] It was first published in 1658, again in the following year, and then in a further fifteen editions up to 1713.¹⁷ Continued demand for this work is explained in part by the pragmatic approach of the author and by the palatable way in which he explains that the courtier is as much a man of faith as he is a man of ambition and duty. Bourdonné's authority on the subject was

¹⁶ By the mid-eighteenth-century the *honnête homme* had evolved. In 1743 Du Marsais offered his definition of the ideal philosophe, in whom one can find many of the traits of the *honnête homme*. In this respect he was a man of the world, full of honesty and probity, with a duty to society, though ostensibly not a self-serving one, but nonetheless a role that sounded somewhat messianic.

¹⁷ 1658 (Paris, A. Vitré), 1659 (Paris, A. Vitré, and Brussels, Foppens), 1665, (Brussels, Foppens), 1675 (Paris, Vitré), 1685, 1686 (Paris, Le Gras), 1688 (Paris, Le Gras), 1692 (Paris, Le Gras), 1695 (Paris, Le Gras), 1696 (Paris, Bobin), 1699 (no details), 1699 (Paris, Le Gras), 1700 (Paris, Le Gras), 1705 (Paris, Le Gras), 1711 (Paris, Le Gras), 1713 (Paris, Le Gras). WorldCat & BNF catalogue.

supported by an impressive military and court career, yet the title of his work suggested that he had a jaded view of the court. He cited fifty years of experience, having started at the court of Louis XIII as a boy of thirteen. By the age of twenty he was with French troops in Holland and he describes the following years as a time in which he did well, he did badly, but, most importantly, he experienced the wider world. Bourdonné's work contains fifty-seven chapters; in all they concern the virtues, the duty one owed to God, and how one might best deal with society at large. Individual chapters explored the themes of wisdom, ignorance, virtue, patience, humility, discretion and modesty before moving on to the Christian ideals, and the specific concerns of the courtier. Throughout the work the reader is reminded of Bourdonné's credentials, his many years at court and on the battlefield. In all it makes for a convincing treatise on the dangers and pitfalls of court life, and what can be done to maintain one's dignity in the face of so many temptations. The particular charm of Bourdonné's work is his personable and accessible style as an author. He readily shares with his reader the faults of his own character. Where many courtesy works might distance their readers, in presenting unattainable heights for them to scale, Bourdonné acknowledges the dangers posed by court society, by the desires of the flesh, and by what the eye covets. 'Quand nous avons perdu tout un jour à la Comédie, dans la ruelle du lict d'une dame, ou à quelque autre amusement de cette nature, nous disons, nous nous sommes aujourd-huy bien divertis'.¹⁸ He names women, ambition, greed, gambling and alcohol as man's greatest enemies. He confesses that the latter is his own particular vice. 'J'avouë que la tyrannie de ce dernier m'épouvante, d'autant plus que la providence m'a établi dans un païs, où j'en ay remarqué à toute heure les déplorables effets'.¹⁹ In his engaging tone and style, Bourdonné offers his views on a mix of subjects, on the nature of nobility, on marriage, on penance, death and vengeance, on enemies and on friendship. His eclectic mix of subjects reflects his fondness for Montaigne²⁰, and indeed his consideration of knowing oneself is highly evocative of the sixteenth-century writer. 'Considerons-donc bien toutes ces choses, & travaillons tout de bon à acquerir la connoissance de nous-memes, puis que c'est la

¹⁸ Bourdonné, *Courtisan Désabusé*, (1658), p. 380.

¹⁹ Bourdonné, *Courtisan Désabusé*, (1699), p. 202.

²⁰ Gilles Banderier, 'Un lecteur de Montaigne au XVIIe siècle: Charles de Bourdonné et le 'Courtisan désabusé', in *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne* (1994), Vol. 7, n. 37-38, pp. 67-77.

science des sciences & la plus important de toutes'.²¹ This fascination with the self was something Jansenist writers like Arnauld, Nicole and Pascal would shortly after take issue with in their critiques of Montaigne's works.²² Through all of this Bourdonné claims his devotion to God has steadied his nerve, and credits this spiritual duty with his overall good fortune, though his inclusion of God at times seems formulaic. Where real Christian virtue comes into play is in the passages in which he exhorts true gentlemen to return to their noble duty on the battlefield, and at times this work is very much a call to arms. Indeed this appears to signal his primary disillusionment with the court. He views old-fashioned military endeavour as the true mark of nobility, calling it the most honourable thing a nobleman can do; to fulfil his duties in battle, and that courage, rather than anything, signified his place in the world. Certainly the Christian ideal of self-sacrifice formed part of this noble duty, but so too did it symbolise the noble's contribution to the authority of the king and to the good of the 'Patrie'.²³ The advice to courtiers is qualified by a number of caveats. To really be noble one must fulfil one's duties on the battlefield, and this martial service is likened to the plight of the saints who fight their unruly passions.²⁴ The courtier should not pay attention to those who might torment him, as the wicked always persecute the good. Instead one should view such annoyances as opportunities for salvation; earthly annoyances will earn heavenly peace; in the absence of military service, the nobleman could still fight the battle for his soul. The recurring themes of suffering and salvation highlight Bourdonné's view that the courtier is a much maligned figure. Certainly there are those who abuse their position, but there are many more who want to fulfil their ancient noble duties, and reap both earthly and heavenly rewards.

Between the issues of social niceties and Christian duty is the place of the self in Bourdonné's work. In relation both to how one interacts with others, and how one is inspired by Christian ideals, specifically the intervention of the Holy Spirit, Bourdonné places the self at the centre of these concerns. All action and reaction concerns the progress of the self, and he declares that one is happiest when understanding the self.

²¹ Bourdonné, *Le Courtisan Désabusé*, p. 299. [We consider therefore all these subjects, and endeavour to gain a better knowledge of ourselves, since this is the science of sciences, and the most important of them all].

²² Nicholas Paige, *Being Interior: Autobiography and the Contradictions of modernity in seventeenth-century France*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), pp. 39-40.

²³ Bourdonné, *Courtisan Désabusé*, pp. 123-124.

²⁴ Bourdonné, *Courtisan Désabusé*, p. 130.

Controlling the self and one's behaviour lies at the heart of many of these works. Christian duty formed one path to success, however the courtier must also be aware of his weaknesses and the manner in which he might overcome them. Bourdonné reminded his readers of this: N'escoute que la chair & ses allechemens, Tiens sous tes passions ta raison asservie, Enfin il faut mourir, & dans l'éternité paroître au tribunal d'une divinité.²⁵

While it is unsurprising to find God mentioned in a seventeenth-century work, what is noteworthy is the number of works bridging the genres of courtesy and spiritual guidance. Erasmus' *Enchiridion* had done this to some extent in 1503, and Jesuit educational practice already placed the concept of habituation and performance of virtue in a literal context.²⁶ Throughout the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the theatrical performance of virtue and vice was an educational practice in Jesuit schools, where the outward display of virtuous acts was believed to imbue the performer with that virtue.²⁷ By the 1670s and 1680s it is possible to find more and more works devoted to combining Christian virtue with social conduct; not just the performance of good deeds, but the performance of social niceties too. This came about in the midst of growing opposition between Jansenist and Jesuit authors over the true demonstration of the Christian life. The publication of Pierre Nicole's *De la civilité chrétienne* in 1670 as well as the works of Pascal were among the more popular treatises stating the Jansenist view on human conduct. The Jansenists viewed virtue as a deceptive thing, tainted by conscious human intention. They also took the Society of Jesus to task over their promotion of virtues that, Jansenists would argue, were simply vices in disguise. Thus the paradox of virtue was that one was disingenuous if one consciously practiced it, and if one believed oneself to be virtuous then one lacked humility and was, therefore, once again morally corrupt. This strikes the reader as a lose-lose situation.²⁸ The use of virtue for social or political advancement was perilous, even if undertaken in the spirit of serving others. If virtue was a manifestation of pride, and amour-propre the result of self-interest, then those who sought guidance were already in a spot of bother.

²⁵ Bourdonné, foreword (1699), [Do not listen to the flesh and its attractions, As such your passions, your reason are enslaved, Finally we must die and in eternity and appear in the court of the deity.]

²⁶ Mark Motley, *Becoming a French Aristocrat* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) has shed light on some aspects of aristocratic education between the reigns of Henri IV and Louis XIV.

²⁷ Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, pp. 128-146. The traditional fears and suspicions of actors and actresses seem to have been put aside for the purpose of education.

²⁸ Herdt has pointed to some of the problems with Jansenist writings on virtue, *Putting on Virtue*, p. 342.

The worldlier Jesuit stance can be found in a great number of works. One of the key works of the 1670s, one which encapsulated the problem with the *bonnête homme* and the essence of nobility, was written by the Jesuit priest Dominique Bouhours. Père Bouhours' *Les Entretiens d'Ariste et d'Eugène* published in 1671 was an immediate and sustained success, warranting multiple reprints in the following decade. Its most famous section dealt with what has become a quintessentially French expression: the '*je-ne-sais-quoi*'.²⁹ Amidst the many works that sought to package and sell the essence of nobility Bouhours seemed to sum it up perfectly: '*je ne sais quoi* is as hidden and as inconceivable as the others; to make it visible is not in order to know it better nor to define it more easily. . . it is neither precisely beauty, nor a nice expression, nor good grace, nor the enjoyment of humor, nor brightness of spirit, since we can see anytime persons who have all these qualities without having what pleases, and . . . we see others who please us very much who possess nothing agreeable except *je ne sais quoi*'.³⁰ It was beyond qualification, beyond simple acquisition. While it was an unsatisfactory answer, especially by Jesuit standards, it did encapsulate the previous decades' dilemma of what made the *bonnête homme*. The traditional functions, as soldier, courtier and scion, were more than open to those with the financial means to ascend the ranks. As the nobility became increasingly accessible and permeated by lower ranks, what precisely made one noble was obviously up for debate. Could one buy nobility? Could one fake it? Probably the best way to appease true nobility, particularly the nobility of the sword, was to assign an element of mystery to it. If one could not define it then certainly one could not 'perform' it.

Joachim Trotti de La Chétardie's *Instructions pour un jeune seigneur, ou l'Idée d'un gallant homme*, and its companion volume *Instruction pour une jeune princesse*, both appeared in 1682.³¹ While not a Jesuit himself, La Chétardie became closely aligned with Jesuit elements at the court, and in addition to becoming the curé of Saint Sulpice in 1696, he

²⁹ The term 'je-ne-sais-quoi' had been in use prior to Bouhours' work, but in the 1670s was used effectively to mystify the notion of nobility for the first time. See Richard Scholar, *The Je-Ne-Sais-Quoi in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³⁰ Dominique Bourhours, *Les Entretiens de Ariste et Eugène* (Paris, 1671), p. 60 'ce dernier je ne s,ay quoi est aussi caché & aussi inconcevable que l'autre: pour etre visible, il n'est est pas pour cela plus connu, ni plus aisé à définir. Car enfin ce n'est précisément nu la beauté, ni la bonne mine, ni la bonne grace, ni l'enjouement de l'humeur, ni le brillant de l'esprit: puisque l'on voit tous les jours des personnes qui ont toutes ces qualitez sans avoir ce qui ont toutes ces qualitez sans avoir ce qui plaist; & que l'on en voit d'autres au contraire qui plaisent beaucoup, sans avoir rien d'agreable que le ne ne sçay quoy'.

³¹ The early 1680s appear to have been a particularly strong period for the sale of courtesy works. As well as new publications, many older works were re-issued during this pivotal time for the court as it took up permanent residence at Versailles in 1682.

also became a close confidante of Mme de Maintenon. Indeed his work came to be closely identified with another of Mme de Maintenon's close friends, the abbé Fénelon. La Chétardie's advice to the young, and it is a young audience he addresses, is to be mindful of God's role in their lives. Christian duty is one thing however, and a great deal of the work would prove the Jansenist charge that Jesuit spirituality was too worldly for its own good. The place of God in one's life is often mentioned by La Chétardie before he moves to on to the real issue of one's station in the world, and interestingly it is the World, not God, that is the ultimate judge of one's honour, and the World pardons nothing.³² La Chétardie advises his reader to pay attention to the 'Maxims of the World', and while he cautioned against ignoring the teachings of the Gospel, the seed of doubt in the word of God was planted. He recognized that the courtier had no easy task ahead of him, indeed he dissuaded him from entering the court at all, before admitting it was unavoidable. Considering all the temptations and moral pitfalls that one could face La Chétardie compared a man's soul to a battlefield, one which could have strong defenses against vice, but ultimately there were weaker points which would allow immoral tendencies to claim victory.³³ However La Chétardie is quick to show the reader how to succeed, and his advice is resolutely practical. He does not hesitate to warn against defects in behaviour, not so much for the moral failings they may represent but for the advantage they handed to one's competitors.

Another Jesuit work, Jean-Baptiste Saint-Jure's *Conduites pour les principales actions de la vie chrétienne* advised that every action needed to be devoted to God.³⁴ While this work is very much concerned with the spiritual life, Saint-Jure also wrote on the values within noble life, and his most famous work was *La vie de M. de Renty*, a biographical study of Gaston Jean-Baptiste de Renty, whom he had served as spiritual advisor. He advises that good deeds must rest upon the virtues, and that good deeds are nothing without the foundation of the relevant virtue. One cannot be humble without experiencing humility, or patient without practicing patience. However one must also recognize that it is virtue which produces such acts. 'Il est encore à remarquer, que comme les actions produisent la

³² Joachim Trotti de la Chétardie, *Instructions pour un jeune seigneur*, 3-4. 'Après Dieu, rien ne vous doit estre si cher en ce monde que vôtre honneur. Vous devez songer que la perte en est irréparable; que c'est le monde qui en est le Juge; que le monde ne pardonne rien, moins encore aux Personnes de vostre rang, qu'à ceux que la naissance, ou la mauvaise fortune, ont placé dans un étage plus bas. . '

³³ Joachim Trotti de la Chétardie, *Instructions pour un jeune seigneur*, pp. 69-72.

³⁴ Jean-Baptiste Saint-Jure, *Conduites pour les principales actions de la vie Chrétienne*, p. 133.

vertu, la vertu aussi produit les actions'.³⁵ Not exactly comforting for the confused student, but for the courtier it implied, like other Jesuit works, 'Act upon virtue and virtue will act upon you'. While Saint-Jure argues that virtuous acts are required of the virtuous, he contends that virtue resides only within the 'esprit' and that these acts are but the bark of the tree, a motif he returns to again and again.³⁶

Courtesy texts like the hugely successful works of Antoine de Courtin make increasing reference to the importance of recognizing the characteristics of this interior and exterior vision of the self in relation to appearance and behaviour. De Courtin published two very popular works, *Nouveau Traité de la civilité* (1671)³⁷ and *Suite de la civilité française* (1675), which as well as detailing the usual niceties of behaviour, also included discussions of civilité (which he deemed essential to the true standing of the nobility) but also messages of humility to his audience. Courtin's works are pragmatic, practical guides, which according to the prefaces were prompted by the requests of noblemen whose sons had acquired very little learning at their academies, but who had called upon the author's expertise. As a young man Courtin served as a diplomat at the Swedish court, before entering the service of Louis XIV. While this certainly gave him the inside track on court intrigue, he nonetheless makes great use of Della Casa's *Galateo*, and an early study identified a close resemblance between a Jesuit manual *Bienséance de la Conversation entre les Hommes* (1617) and Courtin's work.³⁸ However this Jesuit work too has also been accused of borrowing from *Galateo*. Such recycling thus reflects the ways in which long-standing views of the court were adopted and adapted in the light of changing circumstances at the court. Courtin's *Nouveau Traité* was persuasive not least because it counseled readers on how to minimise confusion in the noble ranks, especially between the *noblesse de l'épée* and the *noblesse de la robe*. Courtin cautioned the reader to be mindful of the duties of their rank in their treatment of their inferiors in particular, in the careful art of conversation with their equals, and in their resilience and reserve in dealing with their superiors. It advised against conflict within one's own rank, certainly a key concern regarding the instances of duelling between young men. Courtin advises his reader to pay

³⁵ Saint-Jure, *Conduites pour les principales actions de la vie Chrétienne*, p. 138. 'It should still be noted, that as behaviour inspires virtue, so too does virtue inspire behaviour'.

³⁶ Saint-Jure, *Conduites pour les principales actions de la vie Chrétienne*, p. 140.

³⁷ There is no evidence of Courtin having published a 'Traité Original' or similar.

³⁸ Virgil B. Heltzel, 'The Rules of Civility (1671) and its French Source', in *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (Jan., 1928), p.19.

close attention to the distinctions of the inner and outer characteristics of any company he might keep.³⁹

Distinctions of the outer life were joined by considerations of the inner turmoil of man's existence. Antoine Le Grand's *Les caractères de L'Homme sans passions* (1662) dealt extensively with the problems presented by man's emotions and their uncontrolled counterparts, the passions. Le Grand was a Catholic theologian whose work took him to England, where he championed the cause of Descartes' philosophy until the end of his life. His most comprehensive work on Descartes appeared in 1694: *An Entire Body of Philosophy According to the Principles of the Famous Renate des Cartes*. While a large part of Le Grand's work concentrated on justifying and defending Descartes' work, his early works were influenced by the philosophies of Seneca, specifically the Stoical belief that the moral man had a duty to control, if not expunge, the passions. This was a view he later modified, bringing his beliefs more in line with Descartes, who believed that the passions needed to be controlled rather than expelled from the moral life.

Le Grand's message is clear and supported by a variety of sources: 'Les passions qui ne sont que les maladies des fous, luy ont servi de pretexte: car voyant que des illustres Philosophes vouloient les détruire, qu'ils les regardoient comme des monstres de la nature humaine'.⁴⁰ Le Grand's distaste for the passions is demonstrated forcefully in his introduction; neither virtuous or vicious ones are of any use to the wise man, to the philosopher: 'Les passions sont donc inutiles aux sages; il n'y a que les foibles ou les insensés qui les ressentent: & si nous consultons même ceux qui leur ont donné des bons usages, ils confesseront avec nous qu'elles favorisent plutôt le vice que la vertu, qu'elles sont plus criminelles qu'innocentes, & qu'elles sont plus propres à former qu'à détruire les désordres de notre âme.'⁴¹ It is a theme he continues to elaborate upon for the first half of the work. In the second part he turns his attention to the sins that disrupt human nature, to the distractions of beauty and vanity, and the pitfalls that await those driven by avarice or vengeance; indeed the seven deadly sins resonate throughout the work.

³⁹ Antoine de Courtin, *Nouveau Traité de la Civilité*, pp. 193-196.

⁴⁰ Le Grand, *Les caractères de l'homme sans passions*, 2. ['Passions were but the diseases of fools, illustrious philosophers sought to destroy them, they looked upon them as monsters of human nature'].

⁴¹ Le Grand, *Les caractères*, 14. ['The passions are of no use to the wise, they are more likely to give rise to vices than virtues, he argued, they are more criminal than innocent, and they are more likely to destroy the order of our souls, so one must be careful to give them control in one's life].

Le Grand's tone and his choice of subject matter do not lend themselves to promoting a benevolent or social picture of the learned man. Indeed his view of the 'sage' is that not only should the passions be contained, the scholar is not particularly social, nor empathic: 'Que le sage est heureux dans le bannissement & la prison. . . Que la compassion & l'envie sont ennemis de la sagesse'.⁴² Le Grand's work represents an interesting juncture between courtesy, spiritual guidance and indeed the changing philosophical landscape. While this work pre-dated his 'Cartesian' years, it suggests that for many thinkers and writers of the period, penning a work that dealt with the inner turmoil of man, and his attempts to reconcile himself with society at large was a vibrant subject on which to publish.

The proliferation of courtesy texts by no means indicates a society reliant upon the centralised court system, instead it points to an audience and authorship intensely concerned with much wider discussions of their personal and spiritual worth within (r)evolving social and political circles. These discussions of virtue in the interests of amour-propre also pre-empt Enlightenment discussions of social utilitarianism as outlined by Helvetius, and indeed in relation to the general will. The voluminous debates over what made one good, on one hand the worth of humanly acquired virtue over, on the other, 'true' Christian virtue, would later concern writers such as Kant, Hume, Voltaire and Rousseau. While Elias and others would view *courtesie*, increasingly identified with an affirmation of Christianity, as giving way to civility, and as an affirmation of the individual in relation to their place in society, it does not appear to be so clear-cut. Themes of Christian duty do prevail in such works but it was far from a linear progression. In the context of judicial virtue, once the domain of the noble class, it raises interesting questions regarding the changing social composition of French legal administration, parlements, and in turn what that can tell us about the changing ideals of political virtue in the early eighteenth century. Works called for a return to the pragmatic virtues of nobility, in particular the judicial and martial duties which had been neglected in favour of courtly ones, and this is certainly present in texts of the 1670s. With the evolution of the *honnête homme*, an identity that did not make distinctions of rank, and the elevation of virtue, courtesy literature was significant not just in revealing the professionalisation and civilizing of the noble classes, but also in understanding the changing views of political duty, goodness, and the place of the individual in widening

⁴² Le Grand, *Les caractères*, preface. [A wise man needs exile and isolation, compassion and desire are his enemies].

social contexts. Along with their duties to the world around them, readers were also instructed to explore the world within, whether a member of the court or not, to develop a sovereignty of the self, a certainty that could in some ways counteract the ambiguity of becoming and being noble.