

## Introduction

ORGON:

*Mon frère, vous seriez charmé de le connaître,  
Et vos ravissements ne prendraient point de fin.  
C'est un homme . . . qui, . . . ha! un homme . . . un homme enfin.*

IN ACT 1, SCENE 5 OF MOLIÈRE'S *Le Tartuffe*, the blindly obstinate Orgon illustrates some central truths about masculinity. When his family assails Tartuffe, whose deceit and hypocrisy he is unwilling to see, Orgon is only able to muster a stuttering defense: "He's a man . . . who . . . ah! . . . a man . . . a man, you know."<sup>1</sup> Enraptured with Tartuffe, Orgon attempts to enumerate his purported qualities only to fall back on the signifier "man" (*homme*). Conscious that he needs to provide particularizing details but unable to do so—in large part because he is so smitten with him—Orgon opts instead to single out Tartuffe's gender, as if that alone provided irrefutable proof of the accused's innocence, as if the word *man* required no further explanation. Even as Orgon's defense provokes the derisive laughter of spectators and readers, it also encapsulates the logic that cultures have often applied to masculinity. By assuming it is a self-evident, unmarked, and universal category, they seek to preserve masculine power and privilege, much as Orgon does for Tartuffe and, of course, himself. Or at least as he does for a time. In the end, of course, Orgon's clumsy defense is woefully and predictably inadequate, and Tartuffe is revealed to be the imposter he has been all along. Even if Orgon's familial authority seems to be reinstated at the end of the play, it is not because of his own efforts, but rather because of the *deus ex machina* intervention of an offstage, seemingly transcendent king. In the here and now of the play, Orgon's attempts to assert self-evident privilege for both Tartuffe and himself contrast sharply with the vulnerability of these two characters. Just as they are both fundamentally at odds with their prescribed roles as paterfamilias and confessor, so too men can find themselves either deliberately or unwittingly marginalized from the normative masculine roles they are expected to fill.

The irony of Orgon's plight in this scene and throughout much of the play illustrates the central tenets of this book. Orgon's reliance on the term

## Manning the Margins

*man* begs the question about what *sort* of man Tartuffe really is, revealing that the meanings of the signifier *man* are not stable, univocal, and transparent, but rather variable, multiple, and contingent. The claim to power that Orgon makes here and elsewhere is in the long run ineffectual, just as the exercise of masculine authority by any single individual is always inherently unstable. Orgon's marginal position within his family, a microcosm of society at large, is a reminder that men can indeed be relegated to the periphery of social structures, notwithstanding the expectation of dominance that patriarchy lays out for them. And the latent homoeroticism in Orgon's attachment to Tartuffe recalls that cultures use sexuality to distinguish among different masculinities, privileging some and marginalizing others. Most fundamentally, though, since Orgon's appeal to masculine authority through the exclamation "a man, you know!" is framed as a failure, the play in effect invites us to consider how arbitrary his assertion of a "natural" masculine being really is. In this moment, the play implicitly performs the sort of interrogation of masculinity that is the *raison d'être* of this book. As Molière does through the example of Orgon, my study highlights some of the profound uncertainties that surround masculinity. When it comes to the gendered subject *man*, what we think we can take for granted, as Orgon illustrates, turns out to be anything but certain. Thus, I contend that, in contrast to the image of stability painted by patriarchal ideologies (and assumed by Orgon), masculinity is always potentially at risk of being destabilized precisely *because* it occupies the dominant position within the sex/gender system. I argue furthermore that it is through positions of marginality, such as the one occupied by Orgon, that we perhaps best see how normative and dominant masculinities function, how they define what is and is not "masculine," and how these distinctions are made to serve radically asymmetrical power relations *between* men and women, but also *among* men.

The questions raised by Orgon's exclamation "a man, you know!" are among the most important to have been addressed by the burgeoning field of masculinity studies. An outgrowth of feminist inquiry, this field comprises heterogeneous disciplines and approaches that nonetheless strive for similar political goals, namely, the critique of sexist social structures and the philosophical and symbolic traditions that undergird them.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, masculinity studies sets as one of its foremost objectives the difficult task of putting into question the stable and univalent masculine subject upon which feminist thought has often relied in its critique of women's oppression. If masculinity studies occupies an uncertain position vis-à-vis feminism,<sup>3</sup> it has at the very least succeeded in demonstrating that masculinity, like femininity,

## Introduction

is a contingent and relational construction and that one cannot be considered without the other. This field has also demonstrated that, no less than femininity, masculinity is not solely the product of the two-gender binary, even if that binary is a central defining feature. Accordingly, scholars have been diligent in pointing out the intersections of masculinity with categories such as class, ethnicity, race, nationality, and sexuality. If the bulk of the work in this field concentrates on contemporary North American masculinities, historical studies have explored the changing norms and models for masculinity, the “crises” of masculine authority, and marginal masculinities, among other things. Tracing genealogies of masculinity is a crucial task if the promise of this field is to be fully realized. For, to grasp the variability of masculine identities as well as the persistence of masculinist hegemony, an understanding of their forms over the long term is essential.

At first glance, seventeenth-century France would appear to be a significant and fruitful period for such a larger genealogical project. On many different fronts, the so-called Grand Siècle has long been enshrined as a bastion of male privilege. After all, this was the century of Descartes and Pascal in philosophy, Corneille, Molière, and Racine in literature, Richelieu and Louis XIV in politics, all figures (among many others) who seem to mark the period as one of supreme masculine dominance. But scholarly work on this period over the past thirty years at least should invite us to arrive at a more complex and nuanced conclusion. To be sure, masculinity per se is only beginning to become an explicit frame of analysis, and it is my hope that this book will accelerate work on this as yet nascent topic of inquiry.<sup>4</sup> Still, trends in scholarship in several different fields indicate not only what this topic contributes to our understanding of the period but also what masculinity in seventeenth-century France offers for the broader fields of gender and specifically masculinity studies. For instance, in philosophy, the consequences of (so-called) Cartesian dualism for gender difference are the subject of considerable debate, putting into question the common assumption that the “modern” subject is inevitably masculine.<sup>5</sup> Work on the representations of Louis XIV has pointed to their reliance on the king’s masculinity, making important symbols of his virility and his metaphorical fatherhood.<sup>6</sup> And, in the history of early modern science, the question of how the sexed body was (re)conceptualized during this period and how (or even if) one might consider a history of the male body has provoked considerable interest.<sup>7</sup>

But it is without doubt in relation to feminist scholarship on this period that the study of masculinity holds the most immediate promise. In contrast to the image of a century dominated by men such as Louis XIV, feminist

## Manning the Margins

scholars have demonstrated the important contributions of women in artistic, philosophical, literary, musical, political, and religious life of the period.<sup>8</sup> If it is true that prominent figures such as Marie de Médicis, Anne d'Autriche, Marie-Madeleine de Lafayette, or Marie de Sévigné were never completely absent from traditional historiographical accounts, it is also true that women's overall influence was significantly obscured by a masculinist perspective that concentrated on "great" men and, more generally, did not adopt gender as a category of analysis. Scholarship concentrating on the history of women and women's artistic and literary production has brought into view their increased participation in the cultural sphere during this period as well as the significance of their contributions in general. By restoring to critical prominence the role of certain women, such as Madeleine de Scudéry and Marie-Catherine Desjardins (Madame de Villedieu) in the literary realm, this work has demonstrated that their production is all the more remarkable given the gendered constraints under which they lived. To emerge onto the cultural scene, as scholars have shown, women had to overcome lack of formal education and strictures of "feminine" propriety, among other things.<sup>9</sup> If, ultimately, this scholarship is providing a more and more nuanced understanding of the sociohistorical realities of women's existence and the contours of feminine subjectivity during the seventeenth century, it paradoxically risks reducing the complexity and variability of masculinity to an amorphous and monolithic patriarchy. To be sure, it is important *not* to minimize the masculinist violence against women in this (or any) period. But we must also recognize that masculinity too involves constraints and that masculine privilege is contested among men if we are to get a more complete picture of the relational tensions not only *between* women and men, but also *among* women and *among* men. Thus, for instance, to fully understand the reasons and the significance of women's increasingly prominent role in the literary field, conceptions of masculine authorship must be brought into sharper focus.<sup>10</sup> In short, work on women in seventeenth-century France has arrived at point where the study of masculinity has become imperative.

As an integral part of seventeenth-century French culture, then, masculinity necessarily touches on multiple disciplines and requires diverse fields of competence to be studied in a comprehensive way. The perspectives I adopt here reflect my conviction that masculinity cannot be reduced to a single model for this or any other period. Hence, I resist an explanatory scheme that would purport to sum up all forms of masculinity in seventeenth-century France. I also avoid a strictly chronological organization that would give the impression that there is a straightforward "evolution" of masculinity over

## Introduction

the course of the century. To be sure, there are inevitable and important trends, as I point out at various moments in the following chapters. But my focus here is rather on one aspect of masculinity that persists across most periods and cultures, namely masculine dominance not only over women, but also over men alienated from normative masculinity and the authority it confers.

### MASCULINE DOMINATION

Throughout this book, I concentrate on how seventeenth-century French masculinity is defined by tensions between submission and dominance. The theoretical model I rely upon is inspired largely by Pierre Bourdieu's landmark *Masculine Domination* (1998), which insists on the agonistic construction of masculinity.<sup>11</sup> In this model, the binary of the *dominant* and the *dominated* functions on both the level of the social, though interpersonal relations, and the level of the individual, through the gendered *habitus*, the largely unconscious dispositions acquired through experience in social interactions. Thus, gender positions are constructed relationally within various social fields, but these positions become naturalized as the habitus, which is experienced through and as the body. The masculine habitus, according to Bourdieu, strives for a relation of domination within social interaction, which is by definition a site of struggle. Consequently, some men are successful, while others are not. What this means is that masculine domination, especially in its bodily form, must be continually reaffirmed, not only in relation to women but also—and even more so—to other men. For individual men, the masculine habitus is always unstable, and dominance, once achieved, can easily be lost.

What is at stake here is not only the struggle for dominance in social interaction, but also *within* the masculine subject. For Bourdieu, this is true first of all in the well-known sense of domination requiring submission to its strictures: “Structure imposes its constraints on the two terms of the relationship of domination, and therefore on the dominant themselves, who can benefit from it while being, in Marx’s phrase, ‘dominated by their domination’” (69). Even though the domination of the dominant (so to speak) yields rewards, it also entails a constant oscillation between hegemony and non-hegemony.<sup>12</sup> The masculine subject occupies the positions of dominant and dominated and thereby applies to himself a structure that is homologous to the asymmetrical gender opposition “masculine” versus “feminine.”<sup>13</sup>

## Manning the Margins

Hence, the relational construction of masculine subjectivity occurs not only in the mixed-gender and same-gender interactions of the social field, but also, by homology, within the psyche of the masculine subject. In sum, the constraints and instabilities to which masculinity is constantly exposed and which masculine domination must continually negotiate occur simultaneously on the levels of both inter- and intrasubjectivity.

Ultimately, the understanding of dominated masculinity provided by Bourdieu's model has the advantage of accounting for multiple variables that are often treated separately.<sup>14</sup> Dominated masculinity is produced by interactions within the social field as well as by the psychic and bodily effects of the masculine habitus, and it results from asymmetrical power arrangements between men and women, but also *among* men. In addition, Bourdieu's model addresses at least two concerns central to the field of masculinity studies that has developed in English-speaking cultures. First, there is a recognition that masculine positions are multiple and hierarchically situated among themselves. To speak of masculinity is in fact to speak of masculinities. And second, Bourdieu's model provides a different way of approaching the "crises" of masculinity, a recurrent theme of much work in the historical and cultural branches of masculinity studies. If the "crisis" model emphasizes the variability of masculine roles and identities over time and gives nuance to the image of a monolithic patriarchal masculinity invoked in some feminist work, it also tends to imply that masculinity is "in crisis" at certain times, and *not* at others, and ultimately ignores the persistence of masculinist oppression. Bourdieu's theory of masculine domination provides a corrective on both counts. According to this model, masculinity is perpetually in crisis, although this fact is not overtly acknowledged by the masculine habitus; and yet, in spite of this fact, masculine hegemony remains in effect across cultures and time periods.<sup>15</sup>

This book begins with the recognition that the risk of submission—of being dominated or of losing a position of dominance—drives the elaboration of most masculine ideals. Accordingly, my focus throughout is to show how dominant masculinity creates positions of submission—and thus positions of marginality—so as to (re)affirm its own hegemony. However, I also concentrate on the constant movement of oscillation within dominant masculine subjectivity. Following Bourdieu's model, the dominant masculine subject incorporates within himself the dominated position, not only as a subject who submits to the dictates of a norm, but also as a subject who, in the midst of this sort of submission, must always consider the possibility of not measuring up to that norm, and specifically, of being confined to the realm of

## Introduction

dominated men, who, with women, are confined to the margins of social power structures. In short, assuming a position of dominance always involves putting oneself in a position of submission, and this latter position always threatens to undo the hegemony that the dominant masculine subject assumes is “naturally” his own. But this threat is not (always) explicitly articulated, and my analyses tease out the signs of this threat within discourses that seek to establish a masterful dominance by ostensibly banishing any traces of submission and thus marginality. Put another way, this book uncovers how dominant masculine subjectivity “mans” the margins of its own dominance, how it attempts to use these positions of submission to (re)affirm its own hegemony. The margins are “manned” in the sense that they are occupied by the dominant subject position seeking to avert the submission that lurks within it and threatens to destabilize it, not unlike the way a soldier “mans” a post, awaiting omnipresent but unpredictable threats. But also like the soldier, the dominant masculine subject can be overwhelmed by these same threats.

The analyses in *Manning the Margins* are informed by Bourdieu’s understanding of masculine domination, but they do not endeavor to “apply” this model in an explicit way. Instead, I use the notion of a dialectic between dominant and dominated masculinities as a general lens through which to explore specific instances of marginal masculinities in seventeenth-century French culture. Overall, my concern is to foreground and articulate this complex dynamic in three general discourses where masculinity emerges as a problem within the cultural and literary imaginary of seventeenth-century France: the discourses of civility, sexuality, and the gendered body.

## CIVILITY AND THE MARGINS

Part I considers some of the consequences for men and masculinity of discourses of civility (conceived broadly as both etiquette and courtliness, and called such things as *civilité*, *honnêteté*, and *galanterie* in the seventeenth century). Work to date on civility in this period has for the most part neglected to focus on gender—and especially masculinity—in a central way, privileging instead its aesthetic, ethical, and sociopolitical ramifications.<sup>16</sup> This neglect is all the more surprising given that the vast majority of texts about civility are specifically addressed to men and codify *masculine* conduct. The gender of intended addressees is made clear in the titles of such works as *L’Honnête homme ou l’art de plaire à la cour* (Nicolas Faret, 1630), *Traité de la*

## Manning the Margins

*fortune des gens de qualité et des gentilhommes particuliers* (Jacques de Caillières, 1658), *Instructions pour un jeune seigneur ou l'idée d'un galant homme* (Trotti de la Chétardie, 1683), and *Le Portrait d'un honnête homme* (Jacques Goussault, 1692). Although prescriptive conduct literature has a long history, going back to the *Miroirs des Princes* and the *Contenances de Table* in the Middle Ages (not to mention antecedents in antiquity), the seventeenth century witnessed an unprecedented popularity and publication of such texts under the influence of Castiglione, Della Casa, and of course Montaigne. To these works should be added the pastoral and heroic novels and much of the poetry of the first half of the century, whose role in defining "refined" conduct for both women and men was significant.<sup>17</sup>

At first glance, it is difficult to measure how the seventeenth-century discourse of civility influenced gender norms, especially if we take our cue from Norbert Elias's notion of the "civilizing process," which purports that a gradual reduction in interpersonal aggression resulted from increasingly stronger internal constraints on the individual level and a growing monopoly on violence at the level of the state. At best, gender is a latent category in Elias's work, which devotes almost no attention to gender-specific behavior and seems to approach the changing norms observed in conduct literature as applying unequivocally to both men and women, in spite of an explicitly masculine purview.<sup>18</sup> Still, his descriptions of the civilizing process as an internalization of external constraints that often induces inner conflict are useful for uncovering the dynamic of masculine subjectivity within the discourse of civility, especially when considered alongside the dialectic of dominant versus dominated positions.<sup>19</sup> Civility offers the promise of dominance (within prescribed limits, to be sure), yet the attainment of that promise is predicated on a submission to rules that results in a constant struggle, both with others and with oneself. Within the broader discourse of civility, it is no doubt true that a similar submission and thus struggle apply to women. But both the positions of dominance they may envision and the submission to which they are subjected are qualitatively different than those foreordained for men, first and foremost because of the prevailing structure of masculine domination.

Beyond emphasizing the category of gender in the discourses of the civilizing process, my objective is to highlight the persistence of aggression or struggle within them. This is to say that the discourse of civility required aggression in the form of the oscillating tension between dominant and dominated positions, whether or not Louis XIV succeeded in "pacifying" the nobles at court (by restricting the traditional aristocratic right to vengeance, for

## Introduction

instance). To aspire to the recognition accorded polite refinement is to overcome the risk of social debasement, which theoretically is always—indeed, must always be—a possibility. For male nobles (and even for bourgeois men), this oscillation meant that an *intrasubjective* aggression would persist, even if aggression were no longer a readily available option in the realm of interpersonal physical combat such as the duel. And if it were (as Stuart Carroll’s recent work on “vindicatory” violence in early modern France seems to show),<sup>20</sup> this self-subjected violence existed alongside, and at odds with, an interpersonal, physical violence. Contrary to the assumption or even the appearance that the civilizing process resulted in a reduction in anxiety and aggression, quite the opposite was true. Of course, seventeenth-century moralists such as La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère were keenly aware of this, noting that the *paraître* of docile refinement could mask an *être* of cold and calculating ambition. And, closer to our own time, the aggression at the heart of *honnêteté* is one of the central arguments of Domna Stanton’s seminal *The Aristocrat as Art*.<sup>21</sup>

But the more fundamental point I want to make here is that the inner conflict induced by the discourse of civility had particular consequences for ideals of elite masculinity in seventeenth-century France. This is true first of all because the inner struggle required by this discourse is inseparable from intersubjective relations. The quest for the dominant masculine positions envisioned by civility involves a dialectical struggle with dominated masculine *and* feminine positions—both a distancing from them in social exchange and an internal oscillation between dominance and submission. Thus, for instance, Faret’s *honnête homme* had to aspire to the glory won on the battlefield but, doing so, had to avoid resembling, among many others, the “blowhard” (*fanfaron*) who speaks of nothing else but his martial prowess<sup>22</sup> and the “overdressed man” (*homme trop ajusté*) whose preoccupation with his appearance supposedly resembles women’s (93). To gain the prestige of the “profession of war” required not only visibly distancing oneself from these and other marginal masculine positions, but also interiorizing the risk of resemblance with them and oscillating between the dominant *honnête homme* and the marginal *fanfaron* or *homme trop ajusté*. But if dominant masculine positions, such as the *honnête homme*, must confront their marginal others, it is because these latter are produced by the discourse of civility. And, by producing them, this discourse makes them available as weapons in an arsenal that can be deployed in the struggle for “civilized” masculine dominance. For example, the *honnête homme* can attempt to assert his status as such by qualifying other men as *fanfarons* and *hommes trop ajustés*.

## Manning the Margins

Over and beyond providing for an agonistic masculine ideal, the seventeenth-century moment of the civilizing process placed particular importance on heterosocial (male-female) relations. In a reiteration of a commonplace from courtly love and Petrarchanism, men were enjoined to seek out women's refining influence, through conversation and love. And this recurring imperative was a fundamental justification for men's participation in the mixed-gender salons that flourished throughout the century. After describing the beauty, difficulty, and benefits of conversation with women, Faret tells his would-be *honnête homme* he must "go into the city to see which noble Ladies are deemed to be the most *honnête* women and in whose homes are the most beautiful salons (*les plus belles assemblées*)" (90). Ostensibly, men's interaction with women in sociable settings required a reversal of the usual power differential among the sexes. At least for the duration of salon meetings or the courtship ritual, men were to defer to women's authority in matters of cultural taste and love.

Many scholars take these injunctions at face value, arguing as Benedetta Craveri and Claude Habib have recently that this discourse cleared the way for increased agency by women and greater exchange between the sexes.<sup>23</sup> Although these claims are not entirely without merit, they overlook the consequences of masculine civility.<sup>24</sup> Thus, against an idealized view of male-female sociability that pervades much scholarship on this period, I will contend that there is more to this dynamic than meets the proverbial eye. In both theory and practice, the posture of submission that men were to adopt frequently became a cover from which men were able to reassert their own authority over women. But at the same time, the ostensible submission to women carried the marginalizing risk of effeminacy: bowing to women's taste could be—and was—perceived as becoming *like* women, as renouncing the dominant for the dominated position. As prescribed by the discourse of civility (if not the actual interaction of the salons), women's room for maneuver was by definition constrained; but so too was men's. This does not mean that women and men were on an equal footing within the bounds of male-female sociability. But it does indicate that there is reason to seek a nuanced middle ground between what are sometimes two extreme visions of seventeenth-century salon life in particular. Neither a utopia for women and heterosocial relations nor a locus of conservative reaction, salon meetings entailed constraints on both women and men.<sup>25</sup> Considering how the discourse of civility sought to regulate heterosocial relations so as to preserve masculine domination brings into focus the broader tensions within elite masculine subjectivity.

## Introduction

These tensions are the focus of the first four chapters of *Manning the Margins*. Chapter 1 examines perhaps the most prominent masculine ideal of seventeenth-century France, the *honnête homme*, or honorable gentleman, who is only rarely treated as a gendered construct. Concentrating on the writings of the preeminent theorist of *honnêteté*, Antoine Gombaud, chevalier de Méré, I argue that this decidedly masculine ideal necessitates a process of approximation and rejection of both masculine and feminine models so as to gain the upper hand in mastering the *art de plaire*, the art of captivating others. But this goal is elusive, I argue, and the only sure means of managing all the contradictions of *honnête* masculinity is to be endowed with the *je ne sais quoi*, the transcendent sense of the sublime that appeals to an ideological ruse.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4, as a group, turn to the dynamics and risks of salon masculinity. The benefits men, and especially male writers, stood to gain from participating in salons were considerable; yet salon masculinity was often equated with effeminacy because of the allegiance owed to women and their tastes. Each of these chapters highlights different aspects of the inherent instability of salon masculinity. Chapter 2 begins with an overview of the signs and “causes” of early modern effeminacy before moving on to the uses of this satirical charge in relation to court and salon culture. I then examine the aesthetic and sociable ideal of *galanterie*, prized in most seventeenth-century salons, and argue that it exposes the destabilizing effects of civility’s attempts to refashion the relations between men and women. This chapter then concludes with a consideration of satirical reactions to salon culture and traces how the figure of the *précieuse* comes to absorb anxiety about effeminacy, but also how this anxiety reappears in the *petit-mâitre* at the very end of the century.

Chapter 3 pursues the exploration of salon masculinity by concentrating on the legacy of Vincent Voiture, the quintessential *galant homme* whose posthumous works became a vade mecum for male salon-goers. The rhetoric of *galanterie* he employs both reiterates and complicates the neo-Petrarchan stance of the submissive lover, but the subtlety of this posture was easily misconstrued. I show how male writers hostile to his legacy derided its effeminizing effects, while those more hospitable to it sought to reconceive it as a refinement that retains “feminine” elegance while conveying “masculine” strength.

Chapter 4 considers the model of masculinity developed in Madeleine de Scudéry’s novels *Le Grand Cyrus* and *Clélie* and apparent in the archival record of her salon, the *Chroniques du Samedi*. Effeminacy is not a primary

## Manning the Margins

concern for Scudéry, who concentrates on the *lack* rather than the *excess* of masculine submission and refinement. Her vision of ideal masculinity, which I call “tender masculinity,” entails a reiteration of the neo-Petrarchan topoi of male submission, suffering, and sensitivity; an innate “tenderness” (*tendresse*) or extreme form of empathy; and melancholy, a sign and affect of tenderness. I then turn to the gendered role playing in Scudéry’s salon, which extends the ideals elaborated in her novels but modifies them as well. The men and women of the *Samedis* were self-conscious actors who used the ideal of tenderness to scrutinize the distance between the gender dynamics of the salon and the outside world.

### SEXUALITY AND THE BODY AT THE MARGINS

In part 2 of this study I consider how sexuality and the gendered body were used to produce marginal masculinities in seventeenth-century France. That is, I explore how masculine domination was put in tension with male same-sex desire on the one hand and with cross-dressing on the other, resulting in marginalized positions that were products of the evolving regulation of sexuality and the body by broad mechanisms of power.

The seventeenth century has often been seen as a key moment of rupture or transition in the “production” of modern sexuality and the body.<sup>26</sup> In *History of Madness*, for instance, Michel Foucault describes what he calls the “Great Confinement,” the surveillance and incarceration of a broad range of “deviants” in seventeenth-century France, as evidence of a “new” preoccupation by church and state alike. As he concludes, “confinement was an institutional creation peculiar to the seventeenth century.”<sup>27</sup> The working poor, the unemployed, the mentally ill, the physically frail, and the sexually “deviant” increasingly became objects of concern on secular rather than religious grounds, and were increasingly deemed to represent a threat to “order” and “reason,” which became justification for their confinement. In the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault uses a different conceptual frame to pursue his reflection on the emergence of this regulatory intervention, showing its effects on conceptions of sexuality and the body. But, once again, he situates the seventeenth century at the threshold of a new era, when a period of supposed discursive freedom gave way to one of expanding discursive control, especially through Tridentine confessional practices, and when the state’s “right of death” began to transform into the “power over life” (or “bio-power”).<sup>28</sup> For Foucault, these changes in regulatory practices were

## Introduction

central to the seventeenth century and mark it as a period when sexuality and the body were increasingly probed and interrogated so as to produce the “truth” of the subject. If later periods witnessed other crucial developments in the “incitation to discourse” that characterizes “modern” sexuality, the seventeenth century remains something of a *terminus a quo* for Foucault, even as he recognizes that its own regulatory practices were the result of long-term continuity. “This scheme for transforming sex into discourse had been devised long before in an ascetic and monastic setting,” he says. “The seventeenth century made it into a rule for everyone.”<sup>29</sup> No matter how imprecise and undeveloped, the importance of the seventeenth century within Foucault’s genealogical project makes it a useful starting point for the study of sexuality and the body in this period.

Although the place of gender within Foucault’s project is not at all clear, as feminists in particular have noted,<sup>30</sup> I follow the lead of promising work applying Foucauldian paradigms to gender and especially to masculinity so as to sketch out genealogies of male same-sex sexuality and the male body in seventeenth-century France. But at the same time, I also foreground the relationality of power along the lines of Bourdieu’s model of masculine domination. For, in spite of diverging understandings of power, Bourdieu’s model of the tensions between dominant and dominated positions accounts for a gendered specificity that is otherwise missing from Foucault’s narrative of the power relations subtending the discourses of sexuality.<sup>31</sup> My contention is that being attentive to the dialectic of masculine domination within any genealogy of sexuality and gender brings into focus the marginal positions produced by normative discourses of gender and the body. Adopting this perspective means uncovering the mechanisms by which those positions of marginality are created, as well as the parameters of their conflict with normative discourses.

Specifically, then, I explore how the masculinity of the (elite) sodomite and male cross-dresser in seventeenth-century France was or was not marked and what was or was not perceived to be threatening about each. As I will show, there are both differences and similarities with our own contemporary expectations about the masculine positions that such sexual and gendered desires produce. I am as interested in the differences that these positions present as I am in the continuities with our own understandings of sexuality and gender. And, accordingly, I side neither with those who wish to emphasize the historical ruptures between past and present sexualities nor with those who, on the contrary, accentuate the continuities.<sup>32</sup> Instead, I wish to exploit something like the ambiguity that marks Foucault’s own account of seventeenth-

## *Manning the Margins*

century sexualities, which he variously characterizes as similar to our own (in the multiplication of discourses, for instance) and yet as different (in the regulation of sexual acts rather than desires, for example).<sup>33</sup>

Of particular interest to me is the extent to which the sodomite and the male cross-dresser could affirm his desires in the face of considerable constraints. To do so, of course, is to assert the possibility of an agency and a resistance that both Foucault's and Bourdieu's models of power would seem to render difficult if not impossible. I do not contest the claims by both theorists that resistance is made possible by the hegemonic power being resisted and that resistance often ends up reiterating that power. At the same time, however, I argue that the cases of Théophile de Viau (chap. 5) and the Abbé de Choisy (chap. 6) nonetheless suggest how positions of masculine marginality can sketch out, if only tentatively, alternatives to the predictable dynamics of masculine domination. Thus, I go beyond the dialectic between submission and domination among and within masculine subject positions in order to consider how dominated men, at the margins of the sex/gender system, sometimes reject the telos of hegemony and assert their submission as a telos in its own right. What these chapters consider, then, is how men who are unable to exert masculine dominance (attempt to) affirm masculinities that seek something other than dominance.

The broad outline of this scenario has been the object of important work by queer theorists, who from different methodological perspectives have sought to account for the process by which marginalized sexualities may be affirmed in the face of social oppression. Specifically, I am thinking here of models that describe how subjectivity formed through social stigma can exist and, further, affirm its existence. Particularly useful for my purposes is the theorization of gay "abjection" by David Halperin, who rejects the psychoanalytic understanding of this notion in favor of a dynamic, dialectical process that is not buried in the unconscious, but is partially if not fully intentional.<sup>34</sup> Halperin's theory gives us a way of seeing how subjected populations (and not only those stigmatized because of their sexuality)<sup>35</sup> might search for release from the pain of domination—a search for indifference to its effects—through a process equivalent in many ways to religious asceticism. Through this search, they might even transform their suffering, shame, or humiliation into pleasure, pride, or elevation. The result, Halperin concludes, is that one becomes "unfindable" to one's oppressors through a sort of reversal of power relations (76). Rather than being controlled by the oppressor, the oppressed control the pain directed toward themselves and channel it into self-affirming uses.

## Introduction

As it has been deployed within queer studies, the model of a self-affirming stigmatized subjectivity applies first and foremost to *sexual* subjectivity. In chapters 5 and 6, I do indeed consider the question of sexuality—that is, same-sex sexuality—and the subjective positions it entails among selected writers. But my objective is also to explore the links between sexuality and masculinity and to show how a stigmatized sexuality creates a stigmatized masculine subject position, which certain writers then (attempt to) affirm and transform in ways reminiscent of Halperin’s account of abjection. Referring once again to my title, I would contend that these writers, specifically Théophile de Viau and the Abbé de Choisy, “man” the margins of masculinity, affirming their own stigmatized positions as *masculine* alongside the dominant and normative positions.

In chapter 5 I consider the tensions between normative masculinity and male same-sex desire in seventeenth-century France. To highlight these tensions and to avoid a simplistic narrative about the “emergence” of the homosexual or the repression of same-sex activity, I focus on three distinct moments in reverse chronological order. The first section examines the satirical discourse on sodomy (to use the terminology of the period) in a group of manuscript songs and poems from the second half of the century (1660–1715) and traces a shift from politically motivated satire to an ambivalent fascination and disgust with sodomy that aims to give consistency to a distinctly heterosexual masculine norm and to counteract the fluidity of same-sex and different-sex desires prevalent until this period. The second part of the chapter examines two scandals that concerned François Le Métel de Boisrobert (1592–1661), a prolific poet and playwright in the entourage of the Cardinal de Richelieu. The first, more traditional, was motivated by retribution for court intrigue, but the second, more recognizably modern, had no other reason than to draw attention to his perceived sexual inclinations. The third section then moves to the highly unusual expression of what I call a sodomitical “self” in the prison writings by Théophile de Viau (1590–1626). Tried for free-thinking and sodomy, the poet defended himself by creating a sodomitical persona that can emerge for public view only to the extent that it rejects fixed sexual roles and embraces contradiction, but in the private correspondence addressed to his close friend Jacques Vallée Des Barreaux after his partial acquittal, he develops an ideal of male friendship in terms not unlike Michel Foucault’s call for a new “way of life” transforming relations among men and society as a whole.

Chapter 6 takes a fresh look at the cross-dressing narratives of the Abbé de Choisy, both his autobiographical *Memoirs of the Abbé de Choisy Dressed*

## Manning the Margins

as a *Woman*, and a novella, “The Story of the Marquise-Marquis de Banneville.” Unlike most critics who interpret the cross-dressing in these texts as either pathological (as a psychological disorder or a cultural symptom) or exclusively performative (as drag), I argue that it should instead be understood as transgendered experience. In the *Memoirs*, I contend that Choisy questions his self-identity as a masculine subject by insisting on the pleasure of his feminine personas and the ease with which he “passes” as a woman. I show how in the novella, about a boy raised as a girl, the Marquise de Banneville, who only learns of her/his “true” sex after falling in love with a cross-dressed young man, Choisy departs from literary convention by allowing the couple to retain their adopted genders at the end of the story, all the while enjoying the benefits of heterosexual desire. Ultimately, this chapter asserts that in both his *Memoirs* and his novella Choisy is caught in between genders, striving for womanhood but tied to manhood.



Studying civility, sexuality, and the body tells only part of the story of masculinity in seventeenth-century France. In this book, I do not cover every possible aspect of even these topics, and in no way do I provide an encyclopedic overview of the many forces upon and manifestations of masculinity in this period. Similarly, I do not engage every single social category (such as race, class, ethnicity, and nationality) with which masculinity is necessarily imbricated. To give such a narrative, assuming it were possible, would demand a much longer study and preclude the sorts of close readings of texts I rely upon in this book. This said, I do seek to integrate as many other questions and categories of analysis as possible and as necessary. But there remain other points of entry into this topic, and I do not in any way claim to have covered all of them. In particular, the place of masculinity in medical discourse, political history and theory, nonelite culture, religious discourse, and French colonial expansion are all subjects I regret not having been able to address in an extended way. Hence, their absence should not be interpreted to mean that they are unimportant (quite the contrary is true); it is instead the consequence of my efforts to construct a study with a relatively limited and cohesive focus.

As for what I *do* in this book, I have already made clear my debt to work on women and especially women’s writing in seventeenth-century France. My study builds upon this (now considerable) body of scholarship and extends it, inviting readers to consider women and their writing along with men

## Introduction

and *their* writing. But it is my hope that *Manning the Margins* will make a further contribution by charting one course (among others) for moving beyond the binary understanding of gender that work on women in early modern France has often promoted. Thus, rather than relying on a conception of women and femininity as “marked” categories opposed to men and masculinity, the “unmarked” universal, I show that men too can be and *are* “marked” and how this status shaped masculine subjectivity and relations among men and between the sexes. Now, this is not to deny the important fact that in the broader sex/gender system women are indeed the “marked” category and that masculine domination works to obscure its own historical and structural contingency, as Bourdieu for one insists.<sup>36</sup> Still, my aim here is to encourage ways of thinking about masculinity *and* femininity as categories that are multiple, dynamic, and constantly in flux. In other words, although the gender binary has obvious political relevance, it needs to be understood in conjunction with the complex tensions within and between each of its terms. Considering the struggles *among* masculinities and *among* femininities and the links *between* these struggles helps us to see the binary itself as a constantly evolving structure. Reconceiving the study of gender along these lines has particularly important consequences for the field of seventeenth-century French studies, which must constantly struggle against the ossifying effects of monumentality. For gender and culture more generally are dynamic, and the so-called Grand Siècle was no less so than any other period.

Finally, two features of this book warrant special mention. First, in several chapters I examine the links between an author’s work and her or his biography. But my approach is decidedly not that of positivist literary history, with its emphasis on the now much-scorned *l’homme et l’œuvre*. I do not reduce the meanings of the texts analyzed to the lives of their authors; on the contrary, I am interested in the ways that their texts exceed their lives and presumed intentions. More specifically, I endeavor to draw out the often implicit and unacknowledged gendered meanings an author’s writing might assume over and against the context of her or his life and its connections to literary and social practices. Such an approach is all the more justified, I believe, because the distinction between life and work we rely upon today was largely inoperative for the period and texts I study here. The aesthetic of galanterie so central to Voiture’s letters and Scudéry’s novels and salon writing, and the autobiographical references in Théophile’s and Choisy’s texts foreground the interpenetration of life and work, but without making the work the “authentic” replica of the life.

Second, many of the authors and texts I examine might be considered

## *Manning the Margins*

“minor” when set against the traditional canon of seventeenth-century French literature. Besides the many well-known problems of reading practices beholden to the notion of a canon, it should be noted that almost all of the authors in this study were anything but minor figures in their day, and several of them have seen a dramatic renewal of critical fortune in recent years. Still, it is perhaps fitting that a study focusing on marginality includes authors and texts that are, in the main, “marginal” by the standards of a restrictively canonical view of this period. Although it is not my primary objective here to contest such a view, central to my approach, as I have already made clear, is the belief that the “marginal” has much to tell us about the “dominant,” something as true for literary canons as it is for gender ideologies. For what the marginal reveals is so often a central truth that the dominant works to obscure.