

Servant Advisers: The Curious Memoirs of the Duc de Sully

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Abstract

The article seeks to understand some of the cultural work done by servants in the early modern period. By means of a case study, I suggest that gentleman servants may have played an important role in correcting and coaching their masters on manners and civility, a notion which expands Elias' account of the 'civilizing process'. I draw on the unique memoirs of the seventeenth-century French noble Maximilien de Béthune, Duc de Sully, a text which Sully wrote as if from the narrative stance of his servants. Focusing on unpublished early versions of the memoirs begun shortly after Sully's expulsion from court, I examine the complex relationships Sully posits between himself and his gentleman servants, who are presented as narrating Sully's life story while giving him pointers on better behavior. My analysis highlights the importance of the servants' maleness and their less threatening lower status in creating a narrative alter-ego through which Sully could think through personal shortcomings and explore the possibility of improving his manners. By showing that servants were intrinsic to the ways in which nobles thought about self-improvement, I seek to include them in the history of manners and to lessen the elitism sometimes associated with Elias' concept of the civilizing process.

Keywords: Civility, Maximilien de Béthune, Memoirs, Servants, Sully

1. *Introduction*

Over the historical *longue durée*, service in the West went from being a relationship to a profession (McBride 1976; Biow 2002; Bray 2003, 209-210). Domestic servants in early modern Europe enjoyed a highly specific privilege: that of prestige-granting closeness to their masters. They would have recoiled from the assumptions of today's maids and housekeepers who, often by common accord with those they serve, arrange to clean homes at precisely the times when the family is out of the house and no contact is required.

If historians have grasped the distinctiveness of earlier service cultures and noted the comparative familiarity that early modern households struck



up with their servants, there has been less attention to what this closeness has meant, to the impact it had on larger cultural constructs and forms of exchange. Servants have long been recognized as agents of physical labor; their specifically *cultural* work has been less thoroughly explored. By means of a case study, I would like to contribute to rectifying that imbalance by suggesting that the cultural work of servants mattered considerably in early modern France, in particular in relation to that country's history of manners. Drawing on one seventeenth-century nobleman's suggestive memoirs, I would like to position servants as overlooked facilitators of what we now understand as the civilizing process.

To consider servants as vehicles of civility matters is to shift the very tenor of the concept of civility, to re-package Elias' famed notion as something less elite than we often assume it to be. To be sure, Elias *does* describe the rise of European politeness as an effect of increasing social heterogeneity. His key concept of interdependence maintains that early modern nobles, bourgeois, and sovereigns were becoming increasingly entwined and reliant upon one another, with courts mattering less as founts of top-down elite culture than as hubs of cross-class contacts through which new norms were being forged (1978, 235, 425). This said, when Elias depicts warrior nobles being tamed by absolute monarchs, when he describes bellicose *grands* being cut down to size by 'civilizing' court rituals based on shame and peer rivalry, we are presented with a process that seems eminently public, male, and elite. Later scholars have rightfully added to Elias' work by calling attention to the cultivation of civility in the mixed-class, mixed-gender setting of literary salons (Lougee 1976; Goodman 1994; Gordon 1994), but stopped short of asking what kinds of further training uncouth Europeans may have needed or received behind the scenes. Even Elizabeth Goldsmith, who provides an excellent study of France's early modern cultivation of politeness through conversation, and who clearly grasps the position of French *politesse* at a crossroads *between* aristocratic culture and a larger 'grand monde', nonetheless falls back on the descriptor 'exclusive' in the title of her book (1988). The use of the term risks foregrounding elitism and losing the social nuance that Goldsmith's study in fact contains.¹

For his part, Elias expresses interest in servant figures such as the *intendant* or estate manager, but ultimately stops short of giving servants a specific place in his work. Writing in *The Court Society* that 'The court people themselves do not talk much about these serving hands that bear them ...

¹ Edmé Boursault, the dramatist whom Goldsmith discusses in her final chapter as a popularizer of aristocratic codes of conduct, was also a secretary. In *Ésope à la cour*, a Boursault play which Goldsmith discusses at length, the didactic hero and model of conduct is a savvy, ethical servant: Ésope the slave. All English translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

and so in what follows we shall not have much to say about them', Elias effectively dismisses servants, overlooking these go-betweens who would have had tremendous first-hand knowledge of both noble and bourgeois manners, as well as – I shall suggest – the access and trust needed to help both groups shape those manners (1983, 45).²

To rectify this omission we first need to establish a few preliminaries. First, in order to think about pre-modern servants as potentially having desirable qualities to transmit (in particular, heightened emotional self-control and self-awareness), we must bear in mind that domestics were not always as lowly as they sometimes seem, and that 'service' had contradictory meanings. To be sure, servants (or at least those sixteenth- and seventeenth-century French servants I have studied) were often associated with the opposite of civility – namely, coarseness, sexual license, drunkenness and gambling. Male servants were known for violence, and contact with domestics was sometimes argued to be debasing (Le Pelletier 1604, 19-20; Gutton 1981, 133, 140-146, 150, 156). On the other hand, service was also a major idiom and ritual of refined sociability. Nobles and ambitious bourgeois competed for the chance to serve their social betters, and one does not have to delve very far into collections of early modern correspondence to find genteel letter-writers signing off as 'your humble servant'. Moreover, the elaborate system of 'putting out' noble and upwardly mobile bourgeois children to serve in higher-status houses made service a form of prestigious education (Motley 1990).³

While the 'honorific' service performed by a page, a royal lady in waiting, or a gentleman companion all strike us as very different from the seemingly more 'real' and physical work of a scullery maid, a cook, or a lackey, it is important to recall that even noble servants had real responsibilities, obligations and pay (Michon 2011, 159, 287). In addition, as Alan Bray has pointed out, the system whereby nobles treated access to their bodies as 'gifts' of friendly nearness meant that high-status favorites, whose service we now think of as purely ceremonial or honorific, may have in fact been putting in long hours of careful and quite physical ministrations (2003, 140-176). As Bray suggests, emptying a noble's chamber-pot, passing down food that had been touched by him or her at table, and providing night-time attendance as a lady-in-waiting or a gentleman-of-the-bedchamber were all prestigious, public signs of noble closeness. We need to realize how extensively different kinds of low and high service, involving both menial and ceremonial tasks, shaded into one another if we are to comprehend the range of what 'serving' comprised and how service spanned across codes of manners.

² See Elias 1983, Appendix II, for his section on *intendants*.

³ Montaigne too describes the pageboy system as 'escoles de noblesse' (schools for nobility); see 'Sur des vers de Virgile' (1965, 3, 883-884).

We can also better grasp servants' purchase on civility if we realize the scope they had for making conduct matter. It is all too easy to imagine early modern domestics as stiff, obsequious figures weighed down by brocade liveries. Period sources bespeak something richer, more loquacious, more filled with exchange. Many servants, both noble and non-noble, developed extremely close relationships with the masters and mistresses they served. Louis XIV was known to have deeply cherished some of his non-noble valets, and the country gentleman Gilles de Gouberville wrote of his delight at being able to spend a rainy day at home reading the *Amadis* romances out loud to his servants (Chartier 1987, 154; Da Vinha 2004, 354-355). Close, personal interaction would have allowed servants to become familiar with their masters' conduct and may have emboldened them to speak out about it. As Montaigne wrote,

Mon valet me peut dire: Il vous costa, l'année passée, cent escus, à vingt fois, d'avoir esté ignorant et opiniastre. Je festoye et caresse la verité en quelque main que je la trouve, et m'y rends alaigrement, et luy tends mes armes vaincues, de loing que je la vois approcher. (1965, III, 924, trans. Frame 1958, 705)⁴

Montaigne here constructs the servant as a plausible – if hypothetical – corrector, presenting the valet as knowledgeable and anchoring that knowledge in contact with the master's day-to-day behavior.

A similar kind of corrective stance is posited in the set of texts I will focus on here, the memoirs of Maximilien de Béthune, Duc de Sully. While Sully's writings and life story can only play a small part in elucidating relationships between masters, servants, and manners, that part is a significant one. Like most men of his station, Sully had an entourage of both noble and non-noble servants. There was the *maître d'hôtel* Étienne de La Font, Sully's childhood teacher La Brosse, as well as more multi-purpose gentleman servants such as Samuel de Morély-Choisy and Jean de Maignan.⁵ These men accompanied

⁴ My valet could say to me 'It cost you a hundred crowns twenty times last year to be ignorant and stubborn'. I give a warm welcome to truth in whatever hand I find it, and cheerfully surrender to it and extend my conquered arms, from as far off as I see it approach.

⁵ For more on the difficulty of determining who is and is not a servant, see Gutton 1981, 11-15. For Sully's ties of friendship and service/clientage, see Barbiche and Dainville-Barbiche 1997 (in particular Annex II). My discussion of the manuscript versions of the memoirs will cite, where possible, the two-volume selection edited by David Buisseret and Bernard Barbiche (Sully 1970, 1988); I have also worked with the relevant manuscripts at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. See Sully 1970 and 1988 – the Buisseret and Barbiche edition – 3:2, 123 for some of the names of servants belonging to the first generation of gentleman familiars mentioned by Sully. We can also piece together a second generation of servant-subordinates, a team of administrative assistants who served Sully during his years as finance chief. These men include the Arnould brothers; Noël Regnouart; Charles Duret;

Sully through the remarkable years of his life, enduring the horrific military campaigns of France's wars of religion, and long lean years in which they received little recompense, but settling at last into the comforts that came as by-products of royal favor when Sully's own chosen 'master', Henri de Navarre, ascended the throne.

Manners were to figure as particularly important in this picture in that Sully, for the most part, sorely lacked them. According to contemporaries, he had a gruff demeanor and a tin ear for style. One source describes his clothes as outdated, and Sully designed his Paris residence with a clunky medieval staircase in the middle of what should have been a graceful courtyard.⁶ It was even claimed that in his retirement Sully liked to walk around the Palais Royal swathed in gaudy diamond chains, flashy baubles said to have gone out of style a quarter-century before.⁷

Sully's position had always been vulnerable. As the only Protestant to whom Henri granted a major state office (that of finance minister), his support network was tenuous, and his famously gruff behavior did little to recommend him. After the king was assassinated in 1610, Sully's rash, uncooperative ways all but ensured he would not be supported by the rising stars of the new regency, and his memoirs, which he embarked upon shortly after his fall from power, begin by expressing the wish that his behavior can be re-tooled in order to win him a comeback at court.

Barthélemy de Savorny, sieur de La Clavelle; Benjamin Aubery, sieur du Maurier, and Jean de Murat. While Sully was clearly close to them, it is important to remember that when Henri IV died most of this second generation of aides left Sully's orbit and allied itself with the new regency. Sully's feelings of betrayal are overtly thematized in the memoirs, which try to grapple with both the meaning of loyalty and where it could go wrong. The Arnaulds are mentioned in manuscripts such as Ms. Fr. 10311 and 10312, but on servant names the 1638 print edition is the most specific; see, for example, the reprint *Mémoires des sages et royales économies d'estat* (Sully 1837, II, 86-87). I will cite Michaud and Poujoulat's edition (Sully 1837) as the most readily available version of the 1638 edition.

⁶ See Michaud and Poujoulat's concluding material ('Sully, n'ayant rien changé à sa manière de s'habiller, trouva le Roi entouré d'une foule de jeunes courtisans qui, malgré la présence du monarque, eurent l'impolitesse de rire de sa tournure étrange ...' (Sully 1837, II, 417; Sully, having changed nothing in his manner of dress, found the king surrounded by a crowd of young courtiers who, despite the presence of the monarch, were so impolite as to laugh at his [Sully's] strange attire). The architectural detail was pointed out to me on a guided tour of the Hôtel de Sully during the Journées du Patrimoine, 2005.

⁷ 'Ce bonhomme, plus de vingt-cinq ans après que tout le monde avoit cessé de porter des chaines et des enseignes de diamans, en mettoit tous les jours pour se parer, et se promenoit en cet equipage sous les porches de la Place Royale, qui est près de son hostel. Tous les passans s'amusoient à le regarder' (Talleyrand des Réaux 1960, I, 50-51; This good fellow, more than twenty-five years after everyone had stopped wearing diamond chains and adornments, wore them every day to dress up, and went walking thus attired under the porticos of the Palais Royal, which is near his residence. All the passers-by amused themselves looking at him).

These reflections, preserved in the early manuscript versions of Sully's memoirs, provide unusually poignant insight into how an early modern nobleman thought about civility. For Sully, anger-management and emotional self-control were not things that had come to him naturally as a result of years of competition with court peers. When Sully needed to confront the bellicose ways and hot temper that had helped capsized his career, he did not seek insights from polished social superiors or even social equals. He did not mention conduct manuals, nor did he seek guidance in a salon. Instead, Sully thought and wrote about civility as something he hoped would come from his male servants, whom he constructs in the memoirs as informative, frank, and insightful. It is this role that I would like to explore in detail. While Sully's memoirs are *not* a reliable source on how servant-familiars actually behaved, they reveal how a male French noble thought and even fantasized about servants' insight and knowledge. In particular, we can see how Sully, when faced with the unsettling prospect of needing to alter his manners, seems to have welcomed the idea of input from less-threatening, lower-status males whose assumptions about him differed from those held by nearer-status peers and court competitors.

2. *Servant Memoirs*

Domestics pervade Sully's memoirs in ways both obvious and elusive. First and foremost, servants are the memoirs' narrators, but they are not the authors of the text. In a move that has perplexed and frustrated generations of readers (Marbault 1837, 22, 55), Sully wrote his memoirs himself, but chose to narrate them from his servants' point of view. The servant-narrators who appear in the manuscripts are sometimes given names, and these names correspond to real individuals who worked in Sully's entourage, but there is ample evidence to suggest that Sully wrote the memoirs himself and merely set up the servants in his text as puppeteered voices (Jung 1855; Perrens 1871; Pfister 1894; Barbiche and Dainville-Barbiche 1997, 378-387). The domestics thus speak through a kind of ventriloquization, seeming to reach out to their master as though recounting his life story back to him, and addressing Sully in the second-person 'vous'.

The reliability of this narration has long been discredited, and readers have rightly pointed out the ways in which Sully uses servant-narrators to lend an appearance of third-party objectivity to exaggerated accounts of his exploits and achievements. This is particularly true with respect to the 1638 print edition of the memoirs, which Sully had printed, at his own expense, when he was a very old man and concerned to leave behind a legacy which would be complete and favorable. In the earliest, purely manuscript versions of the memoirs on which I will focus here, however, Sully was writing soon after the king's death and at a time when he had not yet given up on the

possibility of reviving his career (Barbiche and Dainville-Barbiche 1997, 376). Accordingly, the servant narrators are made to play a multi-dimensional role, one which includes cajoling and coaching Sully as well as praising and historicizing him.⁸

When placing Sully's narrators in context, it is important to keep in mind that servant or quasi-servant memorialists and historians were not unheard of at the time. Drawing on sources from Renaissance Italy, Eric Cochrane describes early modern writers of history as falling into three categories: 'lawyers' (jurists and humanist statesmen), 'patricians' (a group which in France better corresponds to retired sword nobles who settled down to write their memoirs) and, finally, 'secretaries' (1981, 61). With regard to the last of these, Cochrane means specifically persons of 'modest origins' (58) who acquired humanist training and took up history-writing as an attempt to prove their erudition and employability.

In France, too, secretaries engaged in a range of erudite writing. We might think, for example, of Étienne du Tronchet, secretary to the Maréchal de Saint-André and to Catherine de Médicis, who published Petrarchan poetry and a widely popular manual on Italianate letter-writing (Sullivan 1931). Another man of letters, Bertrand Du Haillan, used his position as secretary to Henri, Duc d'Anjou to write an entire history of the dukes (1573). When Henri ascended the throne, Du Haillan came to be named *historiographe de France*, and wrote a more encompassing *Histoire de France* (1580-1585), but the title page lists his function as the King's financial and personal secretary before mentioning his role as national historiographer.⁹ This affiliation between secretaryship and history-writing also extends to the (distinct but inevitably related) genre of the memoir, which was employed by figures like Vincent Carloix and Guillaume de Maurillac in their biographies of the masters whom they served.

Given these considerations, Sully was not being wholly implausible in setting his servants up as memorialists, and there were other benefits to boot. Secretarial authorship fell in keeping with what many sword nobles increasingly wanted from the genre of the memoir. In an era in which writing was increasingly coming to connote specific kinds of educational and professional training, noble memorialists of the sixteenth century frequently distanced themselves and their memoirs from those of the rising *robin* intelligentsia, even those whose career histories included (as was increasingly

⁸ In keeping with its greater preoccupation with Sully's legacy and the impression he was leaving behind, the 1638 print edition also mutes the servants as individuals, lumping their voices into a single, collective (and seemingly more authoritative) 'nous'.

⁹ 'Par Bernard de Girard, seigneur du Haillan, conseiller du roy, secretaire de ses finances, & de sa chambre, & historiographe de France' (By Bernard de Girard, lord of Haillan, counselor to the king, secretary of his finances, and of his bedchamber, and historiographer of France).

the case) important works as ambassadors, counselors, and financial managers. ‘Sword noble memoirs’ thus developed as a socially self-aware genre that took occasional jabs at non-military robe nobles. Sword nobles writing in this vein developed distinctive tics and disclaimers, often beginning their works with a conspicuous refusal of eloquence, what Marc Fumaroli calls ‘cet idéal de *vera et pura narratio*’ (1998, 222). Announcing their intention to write in a low and ‘naïf’ style and on the basis of personal, first-hand experience, noble memoirs tend to locate part of the value of their histories in an unfussy demeanor, supposed closeness to the truth, and deliberate distance from bookish compilations.

As we shall see, narration by servants tends to follow along similar lines. In her description of the rise of an ‘epistemic’ or ‘bystander’ model of witnessing in early modern French writing, Andrea Frisch points to the example of Rabelais’ character Alcofrybas, ‘the *serviteur à gages* [hired servant], a witness who is meant to be imagined primarily as the human-sized companion of the giant whose chronicle he composes’ (2004, 67). For Frisch, servants become witnesses and narrators whom French writing associates with stylistic accessibility and, to a large extent, with trustworthy first-person reporting. Guillaume de Marillac, a secretary who wrote a memoir for his master, the blood prince Charles de Bourbon, took pains to stress his direct, personal nearness to the prince, noting that he served him, ‘from his childhood until he passed’ (1605, 213). When Mme de La Fayette wrote her memoir about and with the princess Henriette d’Angleterre, she specified precisely when she had first come into contact with the princess and the nature of her access to her (1967, 2-3). Though Sully was imagining and ultimately fabricating his servant narrators’ stance and style, he nonetheless drew on similar kinds of associations, positioning his narrators as plain-speaking eye-witnesses.¹⁰

In addition, Sully may have understood that third-party servant narration could shield him from criticism, facilitate exaggeration of his military exploits and statecraft,¹¹ and lastly, lend his memoirs – by definition a subjective,

¹⁰ This move was probably also aided by examples like Philippe de Commynes’ *Chronyque et histoire*. An advisor and retainer of Charles the Bold and Louis XI, Commynes offered his readers an example of dignified French-language history writing that could capitalize on prestigious subordinate roles in state service. Frequently published in the sixteenth century and beyond, Commynes’ work showed early modern French nobles how to write memoirs from below and how to do so without compromising a noble identity.

¹¹ Texts such as Vincent Carloix’s memoir of the Maréchal de Vieilleville (1838 [1757]), and Thomas Du Fossé’s life of Louis de Pontis express admiration for these men, and insist on granting them lively life stories. In their accounts of these men’s exploits, both on the battlefield and at court, these memorialists frequently render their subjects larger than life. In this sense, both of these memoirs, with their outsiders’ perspectives on men who come to look like heroes, anticipate the memoir genre’s increasing intersection with the seventeenth-century novel, in both its heroic and historical dimensions. See Pontis 2000.

biased genre – an appearance of *gravitas* and objectivity. As Simone Bertière notes, speaking specifically of non-first-person memoirs,

A la fin du XVI^e siècle et au début du XVII^e siècle, la rédaction des mémoires ... témoigne d'une volonté d'entrer dans l'histoire par la grande porte ... Les mémorialistes, qui se sentent en même temps dépendants et rivaux des historiens, cherchent à se substituer à eux et croient parfois bien faire en s'appropriant leurs pratiques narratives, notamment la forme impersonnelle. (Quoted in Kuperty-Tsur 1979, 73)¹²

The use of a secretarial voice and of third-person narration could thus inflect a set of memoirs with the respectability and truth-value often associated with history.

3. *Constructive Criticism*

These factors were all-important for Sully, and yet it is clear that the servant-narrators he injects into his text operate on several other levels as well. The narrators are a highly affective presence; they are also presented as instructive and constructively critical. Indeed, from the earliest pages of the memoirs, the (fictive) secretary-narrator who opens the text points out distinct and substantive shortcomings in Sully. Noting that the stakes are high, for if the ousted minister cannot get himself back into power the price to be paid will be high, the narrator points out the core reason why his master is disliked:

[vostre esprit] seroit tenu de tous pour admirable ... s'il avoit un peu plus de patience et moins d'impetuosité, et s'il n'estoit estimé pour mespriser tous les autres esprits a son respect, ne considerant pas avecq une moderation convenable et tousjours bienseante a ceux qui sont constituez en dignité, qui s'entremeslent des affaires publiques et qui ont a traicter avecq toutes sortes d'esprits et de personnes. (1970, I, 6)¹³

These remarks are no mere overture to plain-speaking. Rather, they identify debilitating faults: scorn for others, lack of patience, moderation and seemliness. This list of criticism situates the servant as a vehicle of knowledge, showing that Sully was willing to write about his retainers as acceptable authorities on social interaction and conduct.

¹² At the end of the sixteenth century and at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the writing of memoirs ... bears witness to a wish to make a grand entrance into [the genre of] history ... Memorialists, who simultaneously feel dependent on and rivals of historians, seek to take their places and sometimes believe it's good to adopt their narrative practices, notably impersonal forms of speech.

¹³ [your mind] would be considered admirable by all ... if it had a little more patience and less impetuosity, and if it wasn't held to scorn all other minds, not thinking with the kind of moderation that is appropriate and always seemly to dignitaries, who deal in public affairs and who have to deal with all kinds of minds and people.

Later, the narrator develops this line further still, telling Sully in almost aphoristic terms that ‘il est plus a propos de s’accommoder [à la diversité de ces esprits] que de les vouloir reformer a vostre sens’¹⁴ and urging the fallen minister to accommodate, rather than pummel down, minds which differ from his own. The narrator quickly tempers this boldness with roundabout expressions of praise, suggesting that Sully misunderstands other minds because his own is so remarkable, but the closing words of the passage once again underline the damage caused by Sully’s touchy manner: ‘[ces esprits] sont par vous mesprisez et leurs conseilz rejettez’ (1970, I, 6).¹⁵

These remarks, part of a prologue which immediately precedes the account of Sully’s childhood, establish this servant-narrator (and several others who are made to follow) as constructive critics, figures who will judge, steer, and gently correct Sully in the course of telling his story. That such free-speaking involves a degree of risk is suggested by this early narrator’s affirmation of loyalty, in which he cautions Sully that his remarks have been ‘dict par forme d’avertissement venant d’un loyal serviteur, et non pour vous blasmer ny pour vouloir faire le censeur de vostre vie’ (1970, I, 6).¹⁶

Subsequent narrators adopt similar stances, offering stories that at once remind their subject of past events and humble him. One, for example, recalls a war-time incident in which Sully installed a mine which at first failed to explode, and then exploded with an excess of violence (1970, I, 356). In another tale, a narrator chides Sully for having been stubborn (‘opiniastrez’) when he and several comrades insisted on pulling over a tub which they believed was filled with wine, but which instead coated them with manure:

Et vous, Vaubrot et Aventigny vous estants attachez a une grande cuve a vin, et opiniastrez a la renverser, vous fistes tomber sur vous cinq ou six barriques remplies de fumier, soubz lesquelles vous fustes tous trois embarassez, et eusmes toutes les peines du monde a vous en retirer. (1970, I, 162)¹⁷

Clearly, this is not a text from which Sully always emerges covered in glory, or even with clean pants.

Varied in their subject, the at-times unflattering images which the servant-narrators offer often coalesce around the issues of social interaction, self-

¹⁴ ... it is more appropriate to accommodate oneself to [the diversity of others’ minds] than to want to re-shape them to your way of thinking.

¹⁵ [these minds] are, by you, scorned and their advice rejected.

¹⁶ ... said as a warning coming from a loyal servant, and not to blame you nor to be a critic of your life.

¹⁷ And you, Vaubrot, and Aventigny, having grabbed on to a big wine tub, and [being] determined to turn it over, you dumped on yourselves five or six barrels of manure, under which you were all three encumbered, and we had all the trouble in the world getting you out.

discipline and conception of self that are central to what Elias understands as the civilizing process. In the prologue quoted from above, the servant highlights ‘impetuosité’, lack of ‘moderation’ and inadequate ‘bienveillance’ or seemliness in Sully’s treatment of others; all are key aspects of the self-discipline and calibrated politeness that Elias found to be so difficult for the early modern sword nobility to achieve.¹⁸ When we see Sully repeatedly getting into quarrels, or hear the views of his childhood tutor, who found him ‘un peu trop prompt a blasmer ceux qu’il voyoit estre trop tardifz a comprendre ce qu’il proposoit’ (1970, I, 16),¹⁹ we know this forebodes a lifetime of trouble in the mixed-crowd setting of the court.

In the prologue it is not just impoliteness, but also a disproportionate sense of self that earns disapproval from the servants. Sully’s stubbornness and rigid attachment to his own ideas are made to contrast with the urbane flexibility of his fellow statesmen, persons who likewise ‘ont a traicter avecq toutes sortes d’esprits et de personnes’ (1970, I, 6).²⁰ Unable to share this breezy adaptability, Sully emerges from his servants’ descriptions of him as talented but blinkered. Intriguingly, the memoirs themselves are offered as an antidote to this problem, a form of full immersion in others’ thoughts and perspectives. The narrator-scribe who is imagined receiving memoirs handed down from other servants is staged presents them to Sully as products ‘de l’imagination de l’autrui’ (1970, I, 4; of the thoughts of others). In part, this phrase offers a gesture of self-defense (the servant is meant to seem worried about how Sully may respond to the text, and therefore as presenting himself primarily as a scribe rather than an author). However, the decision to summarize and present the text in terms of otherness and of other minds clearly resonates with Sully’s grudging, anxious admission of inadequacy in this respect.

For Elias, the civilizing process had to involve at once the mind, the body, and the body politic, translating new habits of emotion into new political subjectivities, and vice versa. Sully’s servant narrators further this process most concretely when they place Sully in context, cautioning the minister that his skills and originality do not allow him to set his own rules. Accounts of bungled negotiations and reproaches from royal and social superiors serve to remind the fallen duke that he is, and has always been, dependent on and subject to others.

¹⁸ For a similar remark even quite late in the memoirs, see the observations of several narrators in Ms. Fr. 10312, 171, and Sully 1837, III, 389, ‘comme vostre naturel est franc et libre et soudain, et quelquefois un peu trop pour vostre profit, vous ne vous peustes empescher de dire ...’ (since your nature is frank and open and sudden, and sometimes too much so for your own good, you couldn’t refrain from saying ...).

¹⁹ ... a little too hasty to criticize those whom he saw as too slow at understanding what he was suggesting.

²⁰ have to deal with all kinds of minds and people.

A widely-read study by Jonathan Dewald (1993) has suggested that early modern nobles shared common, unsettling experiences of modernity, selfhood, and striving. This said, readers of Sully's memoirs may find little to suggest that this shared experience led to enhanced mutual understanding or exchange of advice among fellow nobles. In a sense, Sully had no shortage of potential interlocutors. His career brought him into contact with some of the most important men and women of his day. Moreover, Laurent Avezou has shown how eagerly contemporary satire engaged with his foibles, mocking his gruffness, his temper, his iron hand (2001, 47-59). In the memoirs themselves, Henri IV's mistress Gabrielle d'Estrées is made to say that 'tant de gens se plaignent [de lui]' (1988, II, 282; so many people complain [about him]). The interesting question, then, is why, out of all his many colleagues and the even wider range of his critics, Sully chose his personal servants as the friend-correctors to take most seriously and to enshrine in his text, and whose words he himself must have mulled over repeatedly during the long process of writing his memoirs from *their* point of view.

To broaden our sense of Sully's writerly and social choices, we may note that in the memoirs he appears alongside important fellow statesmen – De Sancy, Bellièvre, Villeroy – as well as military leaders. We see men of higher status, such as the Connétable de Montmorency, and nearer equals, like Henri de Schomberg, who shared with Sully an active military background, an interest in finance, and enough personal compatibility (it was rumored) to have attracted Sully's wife as a lover (Barbiche and Dainville-Barbiche 1997, 637). Even fellow Protestants, such as the Duc de Bouillon, and persons specifically marked in the memoirs as 'friends', such as Jacques Davy Du Perron and Pierre Séguier, are quickly passed over and fail to gain solidity in the text.²¹ Sully worked with these men extensively, and both his own writing and external sources allude to confrontations with them which cannot have failed to offer some kind of socio-professional feedback. Why is it then that none of these peers nearer to Sully in role and status are given meaningful voices in the text? Why are so many reproaches from the court reduced to a murmur, and what does Sully's memoir, for all its fabrications, nonetheless reveal about his preferred sociology of correction?

²¹ See, for example, the reference to Du Perron as Sully's 'singulier amy' (1970, I, 364; singular friend), even though he appears in very few other places. Pierre Séguier (the 2nd) appears once as a dinner guest at Sully's home (*ibid.*, 327-328), but never thereafter. The Duc de Bouillon is mentioned as having taunted Sully in his youth, and emerges in several places as an ambitious leader, but is not developed further. While the servants associated with Sully's early years are largely Protestant, one of the most important, Étienne de La Font, the first servant who is mentioned by name in the memoirs, and who is presented/imagined as the coordinating force behind the project, was Catholic. Later *protégé*-friends (such as La Clavelle and Duret, who served under Sully in the royal finance *bureaux*) were Catholic as well; the same is true of (Bishop) Du Perron. Thus, while one should certainly consider religion as a factor which shapes Sully's social network and his receptivity to others, it does not seem to have played a determining role.

4. *Past vs. Future*

Two factors emerge clearly. First, whether rightly or wrongly, Sully attributes to his peers nearer in status a tendency to view him as anchored in the past, and therefore as insensible to correction. For example, when the memoirs show Sully beginning to come to prominence on the king's finance committee, the text presents his fellow courtiers as opposing his rise because they believe Sully can never throw off his brash military background:

Tous vouloyent ... persuader [au roi] que vous n'entendiez ny n'entendriez jamais rien [à la finance], ce mestier estant de trop difficile discution et intelligence pour un esprit impetueux comme le vostre, qui ne vous estiez jamais meslé que de porter une harquebuse, endosser un harnois et faire l'estradiot, susciterent tous les princes et grands, et notamment M. le Connestable ... pour ... aller faire des plainctes [au Roy]. (1988, II, 107)²²

In their emphasis on Sully's static mentality and their denial of a future tense ('n'entendriez jamais rien'), both Sully's noble robe rivals and the 'princes et grands' are shown as understanding the future minister solely in terms of his military past, rather than as a work-in-progress. Intriguingly, through their posited thoughts we find one of the main criticisms levelled by the servants – the idea that Sully is 'impetuous', that he reacts too quickly. Here, however, this criticism constitutes only one current in a broader flow, and the point of the passage is not to correct Sully, but to ironically foreshadow how wrong these naysayers will turn out to be. Though the Connétable and his friends are presented as understanding the difference between an aggressive warrior and a courtly finance chief, Sully as author portrays them as blind to his present and potential administrative skills.

To find this view placed in the mouths of fellow sword-elites is interesting, and not surprisingly, Sully has it recur in the mouths of *robins*. The realm's leading statesman, for example, the Chancelier de Cheverny, is represented as complaining when Sully arrives late to a meeting: 'Monsieur, monsieur, il y a longtemps que nous vous attendons, le Roy croit que vous soyés des plus dilligents, et neantmoins vous venez quasy tousjours le dernier' (1988, II, 178).²³ By reproaching him for lack of diligence and consideration for others, Cheverny

²² Everyone wanted ... to persuade [the king] that you didn't understand and would never understand anything [about finance], this profession being too difficult to discuss and grasp for an impetuous mind like yours, which had never dealt with anything but carrying a harquebus, embracing the profession of arms and being a cavalry man, they incited all the princes and great nobles and notably M. le Connétable [a top military role] ... to ... go and complain [to the king].

²³ Sir, sir, we've been waiting for you for a long time, the king believes that you are among the most diligent [of his men] and nonetheless you almost always arrive last.

is shown as projecting an image of Sully as unable to apply himself to his job, lacking the self-discipline and courtesy needed to get himself to the meeting on time. The reader, however, knows that Sully has invested deeply in presenting himself in precisely the opposite terms, offering us, and at times Cheverny, scenes of late-night book-keeping, endless report-writing, careful saving and household-management, scenes which help constitute *the* organizing figure for his career and indeed for the memoirs – the *CEconomies*. To be sure, we also learn of Sully hiding some aspects of his ‘diligence’, for example, the elaborate (and in many ways shameful) commercial horse-trading with which he admits financing his early years as a gentleman-soldier and his participation in the religio-civil wars (1970, I, 125). Nonetheless, as author, Sully suggests that he had offered his peers enough proof of compunction for these acts to have merited more support from their corner.

For Sully to have been seen by others as static, or as a remnant of the past, would have been especially distressing in the light of what exactly was implied in ‘civilizing’ a sword noble. For an elite military male to admit that he needed new forms of manners and clout was to admit that the old ways were no longer good enough, that his family had failed to give him a proper education, that his social standing was shaky and perhaps had never been quite up to snuff. Low standing and inadequate upbringing are aspects of the ‘pastness’ confronted in the process of Sully’s self-improvement, aspects he accuses his social peers and near rivals of dwelling upon too much.

On this score, the memoirs construct Henri IV’s sister, Catherine de Bourbon, as a particularly unwelcome corrector. When Sully appears before her on an embassy, Catherine is shown critiquing the statesman’s ‘impertinent’, ‘insolent’ speeches, and as insisting

[que] des affaires tant espineuses et difficiles ... debvroient estre traictées par gens d’autre condition que de petits gentilshommes comme vous, de qui le plus grand honneur est d’avoir esté nourry de jeunesse en nostre maison, et que tous les vostres en ayent tousjours esté serviteurs, et de vous estimer capable de reigler ceux qui sont sy proches parents, lesquelz s’accorderont tousjours à la fin. (1970, II, 80-81)²⁴

Reproof for impolite behavior here mingles with suggestions that nothing better can be expected of a ‘little gentleman’ such as Sully, whose family can claim no greater honor than that of being servants to Catherine’s own. The memoirs present the royal sister as viewing Sully’s behavior as beyond all hope of remedy, and wishing that she could replace him with a noble of

²⁴ [that] such thorny and difficult matters ... should be handled by people of another condition than little gentlemen like you, whose greatest honor has been to have been brought up in your youth in our household and to have your family be [our] servants, and [it has been part of your greatest honor] for you to judge yourself capable of managing those who are such near relatives, who will always come to their own agreement in the end.

higher standing who will act more appropriately. In this perspective, Sully's family identity is damning; he cannot escape it, and Catherine's speech, ending as it does with the cutting affirmation that 'near relatives' will always sort things out for themselves in the end, draws a firm line between Sully's (comparatively) low parentage and the exclusive, self-regulating royal family which does not need his arbitration.

5. *Female vs. Male Correctors*

This genealogically-focused condemnation of Sully as a 'petit gentilhomme' who does not deserve correction is one which the memoirs present as particularly painful for Sully; he has the servant narrators report that he became ill, that the criticism cut to the quick ('[cela] vous tenoit un peu au cœur'²⁵ [1988, II, 82]). However, this explosive encounter between Sully and Catherine is also important in that it echoes a truly primal scene in the memoirs, an anecdote about a violent mother and the child whom she beats. This Sully tellingly places at the beginning of the memoir proper, where it introduces his account of his childhood. Perhaps still smarting from his adult run-ins with powerful women, including the conflicts with the regent that led to his dismissal, Sully emblematically opens his text with a scene of female aggression, a scene which also leads back to the topic of servants. It is a boyhood evocation of a mother outrageously beating her child. Presenting himself as watching this violence from the street in the company of his tutor, Sully describes his boyhood self as piping up:

Ma mie, vous estes une mauvaise femme de battre avecq telle furie vostre enfant et de le vouloir envoyer a l'escole a coups de pied et de poings; sy c'estoit moy, vous me tueriez plustost que j'en fisses rien. Mais je m'assure qu'en le caressant et persuadant par raison il vous obeyroit plus que vous ne voudriez, car la nature l'y oblige et pour mon regard j'en userois ainsi. (1970, I, 8)²⁶

As the first of the memoir's self-contained anecdotes, the encounter with the 'bad mother' marks the text as a work profoundly concerned with the *process* of correction. More importantly perhaps, it also signals Sully as a writer opposed to women and attuned to male servants as his preferred agents of self-improvement. Only sentences later, young Sully's tutor is said to have learned from his pupil's

²⁵ '[it] went a bit to the heart'.

²⁶ My dear, you are a bad woman to beat your child with such fury and to want to get him to school by means of kicks and punches; if it were me, you'd kill me before I'd do anything. But I'm sure that by coddling him and persuading him with reason he would obey you even more than you wish, for nature obligates him to and for my part I'd do it thus.

remarks and successfully changed his own methods of correction. The text thus singles out male servants as effective and gentle advisors.²⁷ Anticipating the memoirs' construction of Catherine, and later Marie de Médicis, as women who chastise Sully in rage and derision rather than by means of kindness or persuasion, this *leitmotiv* of the harsh female corrector signals gender as an important factor in Sully's sociology of counsel: he would prefer to be reproved by a man.

As we look back on the minister's life and his representation of it, we see that Sully very rarely situates himself in activities organized by women. Although he does describe the festivities at the 'Printemps de Nérac', an important civilizing episode for the Protestant military elite, and one that was inspired and led by women (Viennot 1993, 122), Sully offers no further instance of being involved in this kind of female-led sociability. Despite living through the heyday of Paris salon activity, Sully remained wholly apart from this *milieu*. Sully's aversion to hearing out female correctors is particularly clear in the conflicts the memoirs stage between Sully and Henri IV's wife, and in passages such as that in which Sully is shown rebuffing criticism from his own second wife, Rachel de Cocheilet (Barbiche and Dainville-Barbiche 1997, 427). While the memoirs obviously on some level lend an ear to Catherine de Bourbon – the remarks attributed to her in the account of the 1596 embassy are granted more space and detail than almost any other failed negotiation scene – Sully clearly re-visits them with pain, and half-dismisses their speaker by means of misogynist stereotypes.

6. *Banking on the Future*

In writing in this fashion, Sully calls our attention to an over-looked niche in early modern masculinity and manners: the men who perhaps could have been won over by female civility, but who clearly never made it. So why does Sully imagine that correction from servants might be more effective and less painful? Are the servants set up as replacements for civilizing women? Is their status difference effeminized? Or does Sully make them function in different ways altogether?

²⁷ The passage most specifically applauds one of Sully's childhood *précepteurs*, Liberge, who is said to have been listening when the boy Sully pipes up and corrects the 'bad' mother. Liberge, having previously stood in a relation of 'desgout et aversion' (disgust and aversion) to his pupil, gleans from the boy's words a new and gentle way of guiding him. Applying the new method, he finds that '[elle] reussit tant heureusement' ([it] succeeded so readily) and Sully comes to show great 'assiduité' (assiduity) of body and mind (1970, I, 8). Obviously, this anecdote locates the ultimate source of proper correcting within Sully himself, thus leading us back to the upper nobility as the fount of propriety. However, insofar as the author clearly admits his own inadequacy in schooling himself, the celebration of Liberge remains important.

In turning to these crucial subordinates, it is worth noting that while aristocratic women, incredulous *grands*, and jealous statesmen are shown as viewing Sully primarily through the lens of his past, he imagines his servant-narrators as understanding him in terms of the future. Indeed, the servants are made to express worries when Sully falls temporarily out of favor, or when they see his unproductive behavior as holding him back; they claim that they want him to advance, and have banked on his skills in bringing a long work-in-progress to fruition.

In many respects, this makes perfect sense. The servant-narrators who emerge early in the text appear in the role of personal retainers, a kind of role which implied hitching one's career to the success of someone else. Real servants of this kind would have had every interest in viewing their master as a long-term investment, someone whose prospects were still unfolding. Near-contemporary advice manuals, such as Callière's *La Fortune des gens de qualité*, urge the would-be gentleman servant to make his choice of master carefully on the basis of what the latter can *become*, rising indefinitely or remaining 'useless', building 'true friendship' with his familiar, or crushing the servant's good will under humiliating subjections (1668, 175, 203, 211, 237-238). Forecasts and conjectures of these kinds may explain why it made psychological sense to Sully to people his memoir with servants, why the anxious statesman turned to an image of *them* when he wanted to think not only about his past but also about his future and prospects of self-change. Viewed through other social lenses, the prospect of a comeback to court might have seemed abrupt, or even demeaning: a cheap bourgeois turnaround in a man who had been brought up to construct his identity in terms of martial honor. Yet such desires could not improperly be attributed to servant familiars. In the social logic which the memoir both reveals and defends, servants already understand their masters as malleable.

At the outset of the text, one narrator's remarks clearly establish this servant orientation toward the future. With Henri IV dead and Sully ousted from his job, the narrator is made to express concerns about his master's declining prospects. These worries may seem purely self-interested, the sighs of a social climber dramatizing a wish for personal gain. To be sure, Sully was only too aware that gentleman servants *did* have ambitions and interests of their own. However, bitterness at this is concentrated near the end of the memoir; for much of the text, Sully makes his servants' orientation toward the future a source of reassurance. As the ousted statesman constructs his fantasy team of familiars, he nearly always mingles their careerism with kindness.

In the pages which relate the statesman's falling-out with Catherine de Bourbon, for example, the servant who recounts the episode adds that he gave advice to his master, keeping Sully mindful of his future while offering gentle consolation. Having listened to Sully rant, lament, and tentatively decide to hold firm in the face of the threat of being dismissed by the king, the servant is made to explain that

Ayant escouté attentivement tout ce discours, je le louay en moy-mesme, vous consolay autant que la dextérité de mon esprit m'en donna de moyen, et vous confortay par toutes les raisons I je me peus adviser à suivre vostre resolution. Aussy à la verité eust-il bien fasché à tous nous autres qui vous suivions (vous tenants sy proche d'avancer vostre fortune, et par icelle la nostre) de veoir flestrir le verd de noz esperances par un despit precipité. (1970, II, 89)²⁸

The servant is here clearly constructed as someone concerned about his own professional future, but this concern comes only at the end of the passage. The narrator's initial, primary focus is on his master. In harmony with the principles of correction idealized early on by the child Sully, the servant employs kindness ('vous consolay', 'vous confortay'), and appeals to Sully's reason as he tries to steer him in the right direction. Moreover, the careful phrasing of his words absolves the servant completely of any suspicion of slavish obedience. The domestic is said to have praised Sully's speech to himself ('je le louay en moy-mesme') *before* advising his master to follow through on the ideas expressed in it; he is thus, if only fleetingly, granted a capacity for independent judgment and allowed an interior mental space of his own. It is through having independence attributed to them that the servants come to be imagined as seeing and understanding Sully in ways different from those in which he sees himself. They thus become consolatory figures in a fantasy fleshed out through writing, one in which Sully imagines that he is not alone, and that he enjoys supporters able to pull him back into *their* vision of his unfolding career.

Most astonishing in this vein is the memoirs' construction of another servant as quite literally clairvoyant. This man, La Brosse, is said to have 'le diable au corps' (the devil in his body) and is shown over the course of the memoirs to successfully predict Henri's coronation and Sully's rise to become 'un des plus estimez personages du royaulme' (1970, I, 16).²⁹ Nominally one of Sully's childhood tutors who goes on to serve him in later life, this 'sorcier de maistre' (1970, I, 128; sorcerer-master) exemplifies the memoirs' larger investment in servants as figures of independent vision. In coming to resemble a 'maistre', this servant and his predictions are shown as acting as a guiding force for both Sully and the king (1970, I, 92). Pushing the future *surintendant*

²⁸ Having attentively listened to this whole speech, I praised it within myself, [and] consoled you as much as the dexterity of mind allowed, and comforted you by all the means that I could think of to follow your resolution. Also, in truth, it would have upset all of us who were following you (considering you so close to advancing your fortune, and with it, ours) to see our green hopes wither from a sudden disappointment.

²⁹ 'one of the most esteemed personages in the realm'. Several factors link La Brosse with Sully's Protestant faith; the former is said to be raised at the court of Renée of Ferrara (notoriously a Protestant); the memoirs also specify that La Brosse studied theology 'pour estre ministre' (1970, I, 16; to become a minister).

to look ever forward, to take in the big picture and, even in moments of self-doubt, see himself as the foremost follower of the man who will be king, La Brosse is shown to shape Sully through affirmation of his merit.

This emphasis on forecasting and futurity may in part be attributed to Sully's Protestant faith, which emphasized predestination and predetermined inner worth. Of course, Sully also represents himself as bringing a great deal of hard work to the realization of his destiny. However we understand these patterns, the memoirs suggest that Sully wanted to implicate his servants in his success. He understood domestics' orientation toward the future as having real social value. The problematic vision of self-improvement as taking place in solitude, the vision which injects gloom into so many dramas of upward mobility, is here circumvented by imagining servants as sharing the work of correction and self-shaping.

Though early modern and present-day thinking on friendship has tended to see 'interested' advice as a grievous fault in amical ethics, Sully appears to be more than willing to accept his servants' ambitions when they run parallel to his own. 'Interested' servants who hope to advance along with and through Sully are cast as sources of support, whereas *ressemblant*, 'disinterested' peers who are in fact in competition for the same resources and prestige are clearly cast by Sully as unwelcome. While formal theories of Renaissance friendship often privilege sincerity, and typically ally this trait with status peers while condemning subordinates as the agents of base flattery and untruth, it is ironically servants who can sometimes turn out to be the more sincere. The subordinate who puts his ambitions up front and then offers whole-hearted support can perhaps more truly serve the master's best interests than can a peer whose interests *seem* independent, but which in fact pose a threat.³⁰

In developing these favorable connotations for Sully's retainers, the manuscript versions of the *Economies royales* reach out to these men as figures who might help their master reduce his class-determined shame about the need for self-improvement. Of course, as we shall later learn, Sully does not change at root, but it is by feeding himself this kind of cheering, non-schismatic advice, drawing on men whom he imagines as pledged to his side, that he is able as memorialist to contemplate scenes of past criticism, and to mull over the prospects they may still offer.

³⁰ See for example, the early narrators' statements about including negative information about Sully even though he may be displeased. In this sense, it seems to me that (early modern and more recent) theorists of friendship overlook certain possibilities when they construct peers as 'disinterested'. One peer may not seek a handout or payment from another, but he/she still has interests at stake. In early modern texts peers at court more often appear to be at cross-purposes, or cross-interests, rather than to lack interests altogether.

7. Collaborative Writing

If Sully's servants are thus shown to hold a vested interest in their master's future, and are represented at one remove from 'genealogical' modes of thinking, the memoirs also grant them an additional form of advisory appeal. This concerns the particular mode and material form through which they are shown to steer their master. Whereas detractors such as Catherine, the chancelier de Cheverny, and the marquis de Villars are all represented as upbraiding Sully aloud and in public, the servants are made to engage in forms of written exchange that are more endearing, bi-directional, and intimate. Placed at a crossroads in the history of domestic service, the servants are military retainers who follow Sully into battle, and in some cases hold 'traditional' household roles such as that of the *écuyer* (squire) Maignan (1970, I, 95). However, they also reflect nobles' growing need for secretarial and administrative service. Some, like 'Baltazar', are explicitly described as 'your secretary' (1970, I, 532), and Sully's tutor La Brosse is said to have training in 'theology', 'medecine', and 'mathematics' (1970, I, 16). Beyond this, all of the servant-narrators are accoutred with hallmark trappings of paper and pen. They are shown writing reports, copying letters, assembling the memoirs themselves. They embody writing as a task, but also as a form of social union.

Indeed, the servants are represented as reaching out to Sully with requests, recalling past cooperation, and imploring Sully's help in correcting and polishing off the memoirs. In this they revisit and prescribe collaboration, letting the memoirs entreat the superseded statesman to share in work which he matters once more. In staging himself as a figure solicited into writerly collaboration, Sully as author creates for himself a fantasy of being wanted, needed, and immersed in a pleasurable paper-chase, a friendly swirl of circulated texts. This imagined pleasure, I would argue, helps counter the pain of self-improvement, making the memoirs nudge Sully toward two distinct kinds of revision: worrisome self-correction, but also more the mundane correction of texts, an act which seems reassuring, familiar, laced with shop talk: in short, something deeply satisfying for the tender bureaucrat that Sully still was.

This said, it is not just anyone who could be plausibly posited as an eager co-participant in such labor. In this sense, the servants are crucial, offering a cast of characters tied to writing as a *craft*. Rightly or wrongly, they are shown to have a much better grasp of the affective materiality of writing than Sully's more lofty fellow statesman.³¹ Indeed, the servants represent their writerly work as both technically pleasurable and amicably savored. I would argue that these imagined scenes of collaborative writing constitute for Sully a major attraction to the memoir project and to the premise of non-first person narration. Though

³¹ Henri IV is presented as an exception to this pattern; despite the latter's status, Sully prefers to imagine and represent the monarch as someone who enjoys exchanging texts, even ones, and who amicably archives the two men's correspondence.

Sully may have in part felt threatened by the idea of correction, the narrators' simultaneous performing of the functions of secretaries conjures up more stable and endearing associations.

Idealized as companions of the pen, the servant-narrators allow Sully to both anticipate and revisit fondness as refracted through the act of writing. At their most basic level, the memoirs do this by staging themselves as a gift, and a monumental one at that. Positing decades of devotion on the part of their servant-compilers, the chronicles begin with Sully's childhood and are said, however implausibly, to have been handed down from domestic to domestic 'depuis votre premiere jeunesse jusques au mois de mars 1611 que vous quittastes tout a faict la court' (1970, I, 2).³² Long in the making, this gift then appears as one meant to charm the master who receives it.

Moreover, the text declares that it aims to please through its style. The servants apologize for accounts that prove 'un peu long' (1988, II, 126; a bit long), excising 'de trop longue deduction' (1970, I, 58; too long passages) and hoping that he will find agreeable their final choices of content and scale: 'nous prions vous ... de l'avoir agreable' (1837, I, 373). Even more amical are those anecdotes and stories which seem designed to entertain, with one of the servants regaling Sully with the tale of a disguised pig and a funeral procession, 'affin d'entremesler tousjours mes memoires de quelque conte pour vous aprester a rire' (1970, I, 166).³³ Another recollects 'un conte pour rire que le Roy vous fist [où je me trouvay present]' (1970, II, 337-338).³⁴

These prompts to laughter play an important role in the tone of the memoirs, and participate in an imagined system of exchange. Sully presents himself in the text as showing favor to the servants by letting them in on information, sharing the details of his life that comprise the memoirs' narrative thread. Presenting the servants as privileged recipients of physical closeness, Sully also shows himself as disclosing information, passing on confidential news, or even letting some servants read and handle his mail: 'vous me faisies cest honneur que de me celer fort peu de tels secrets' (Ms. Fr. 10311, 160).³⁵ Having received this 'honneur', this servant-narrator goes on to mark how he repaid Sully's confidence, detailing the scrupulous way in which he handled

³² from your earliest childhood until the month of March 1611 when you left the court altogether.

³³ to always intersperse my reports with some story to make you laugh.

³⁴ ... a story to make you laugh that the king told you [where I was present]. See also 1970, I, 278, where the narrator recounts 'Il vous arriva lors aussy une petite fortune, que vous me permettez de vous ramentevoir, pource qu'il y eut de quoy rire et de quoy profiter tout ensemble ...' (A good thing happened to you then, which you'll allow me to recall because in it there was matter both for laughter and for gain ...).

³⁵ ... you did me the honor of concealing very few such secrets, one narrator is made to exclaim, clearly constructing his relationship with Sully as one of confidence and favor, something more than perfunctory service. See also 1970, II, 171.

the secrets and letters entrusted to him, 'que vous me commettiés seul pour reduire en ordre et en liasses avec leurs cottes et dattes dessus' (*ibid.*).³⁶

Call numbers and dates allude to an intricate grammar of grouping and filing, an emerging science of text-management which here takes on new meaning as an expressive language of devotion. Ever self-referential, the memoirs highlight their own materiality and their (staged) process of formation, inviting the reader to understand the narrators' continual allusions to copying, filing, and wading through source documents not just as the trappings of historico-textual authenticity, but as 'proof' of the servants' commitment to their master. The work of ordering, dating, re-copying, and compiling is represented as a labor of love, or more properly, service friendship, one which makes use of the emerging specialties of humanist information-management to enact a keen and respectful regard.³⁷

This investment in writing affirms, but also nuances, arguments made by Lorna Hutson, who has identified the textualization of friendship as a critical moment in amity's Western history (1994). Examining male-male relations in the wake of the humanist cultural turn, Hutson posits a transition. She suggests that vaguely medieval bonds dependent upon a system of material pledges between a master and his 'fee'd man' later give way toward a system in which relational credit and trust are understood as being conveyed through more textual means. For Hutson, these later bonds come to be both defined and de-stabilized through the exchange of persuasive texts, and through the performance of service tasks which were 'no longer exclusively signified by the activities of hunting, hawking, fighting and waiting at table ... [but were now] more likely to consist of some activity connected with the organization of knowledge into texts: intelligence-gathering, secretaryship, scholarly reading, tuition, diplomacy, stewardship, surveying' (1994, 88). In a sense, the *Economies royales* affirms this turn toward writing. However, rather than defining themselves through either group or mode (hawking and fighting *versus* secretarial pursuits), Sully's servants appear richly engaged in both.

Moreover, in contrast to Hutson's findings, the amical appeal of writing in the *Economies* has little to do with persuasion. For Hutson, persuasion takes shape (or attempts to take shape) as a tonic which helps 'restore' between friends some kind of solidity and assurance, markers of value such as were formerly enjoyed through friends' exchanges of money and other material tokens (3-7). In the work of Sully, on the other hand, exchanges of texts are themselves material as much as rhetorical. Here amical meanings are made

³⁶ ... that you conferred to me alone to get them in order and in bundles with their call numbers and dates on them.

³⁷ See for example Blair 2003 and 2004. Warren Boutcher's (2006) use of the term 'knowledge services' is also relevant here.

available through simple acts of sharing and recounting, editing, pruning and manipulating of texts as oral and physical objects. The servants are made to suggest that by neatly ordering and compiling the memoirs, they express closeness to and coordination among themselves and with their master. In this way, the existence of a well-ordered text enacts 'credit' and devotion in a manner quite distinct from that offered by rhetoric and flowery professions of friendship.

8. *Conclusion*

However much the post-career, semi-isolated Sully enjoyed imagining himself back in the company of his servants, however much he relished the thought of receiving their writing and counsel, this thought-experiment appears to have failed in its purpose of bringing about his desired jumpstart in civility. Sully's attestable *lack* of a courtly comeback prevents us from ending our tale with news of a snappy reversal. The duke pursued various projects in his retirement, but he never resumed the *surintendance* or regained any meaningful power at court (Barbiche and Dainville-Barbiche 1997, 337-401). As mentioned earlier, the much-revised print edition of his memoirs he eventually brought out moved substantially away from the theme of self-improvement. This is, of course, unsurprising, given his age at the time: he was nearly eighty when the text hit the presses, well beyond the age for a 'comeback'. Perhaps the former statesman had always been wrong in supposing that his behavior could be changed by words which were not in fact new insights generated by 'l'imagination d'autrui' (the minds of others, but simply a schizophrenic refraction of his own divided voice).

This said, however badly the memoirs failed as an attempt at self-coaching, they remain a compelling, detailed witness to early modern servants' importance to their masters. In both their recollection and their regret, Sully's memoirs speak of his desire for his servants' company and advice, his choosing to imagine himself still having them as a team working alongside him in a forward-looking perspective in which his manners still mattered. Surrounded by cultivated women and polished court rivals, Sully does not appear to have connected well with either of these existing – some would say more 'typical' – channels of civility. Instead, gentleman-servants appear to have offered an alternative social ambience within which Sully could think through matters of conduct without feeling either threatened or dishonored.

We may conclude with a pertinent little tale on the topic of civility: the title episode of Giovanni Della Casa's *Galateo*, a seminal courtesy manual that was translated into French as early as 1562. In the story, a bishop receives a visit from a count whose manners are perfect save for one damning flaw: the latter smacks his mouth when he eats. When the bishop feels moved to point this out to the count, he realizes he cannot do so directly, and instead

dispatches one of his gentleman-servants, Galateo, to proffer the embarrassing critique (1609, 54; 1988, 11). Perhaps, like the characters in this episode, Sully may have sensed criticism from a peer to have been off-putting, and that the proper transmitter of such observations was in fact an underling male.

While the memoirs ultimately tell us little about how Sully actually *treated* his retainers, they nonetheless show that he was willing to construct and acknowledge them as savvy, perceptive figures who could be usefully tapped for their knowledge of the behavioral codes he needed at court. These constructs urge us to continue looking for further sources that detail servants' behavioral coaching and the kinds of bridge-building roles they may have played as purveyors of cross-class knowledge. It may be easier to imagine masters as polished and self-sufficient, but Sully's memoirs present a more vulnerable picture, suggesting that underlings may have played crucial roles in supplementing masters' knowledge and in generating self-awareness.

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