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Christophe Schuwey, *Un entrepreneur des lettres au XVIIe siècle. Donneau de Visé, de Molière au Mercure galant*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2020. 552 pp. Figures, notes and index. 58 €. ISBN 978-2-406-09570-5.

Review Essay by Deborah Steinberger, University of Delaware

Donneau de Visé matters, and in *Un entrepreneur des lettres au XVIIe siècle*, Christophe Schuwey convincingly demonstrates why. Schuwey draws this prolific, groundbreaking author out from the margins of literary history, away from *le coin du spécialiste*, and brings him center stage, to prove that Donneau de Visé's influence was wide-ranging and durable, and that his works unsettle many *idées reçues* about seventeenth-century French literature. Encyclopedic in scope, Schuwey's book provides a sweeping view of Donneau de Visé's career and his numerous and varied publications. Despite its title, however, the book is about much more than just Donneau de Visé: organized as a series of interrelated studies, the volume displays Schuwey's impressive command of the literary landscape of the second half of the seventeenth century.

Schuwey's central thesis is that Donneau de Visé's creative career was determined not just by esthetic choices but also, and perhaps above all, by commercial considerations. Schuwey makes an irrefutable and amply documented case for the significant role of advertising and marketing in seventeenth-century literary culture, and he paints Donneau de Visé as an entrepreneur *par excellence*. Schuwey delineates and explores in depth the promotional practices invented or espoused by Donneau de Visé. To highlight Donneau de Visé's innovations, Schuwey makes judicious and effective use of allusions to present-day marketing and advertising techniques: he cites instances of product placement (p. 258), spin-offs (p. 310), and "recycled" items (pp. 294-295), such as the story of Prince Tyanès in *Les Nouvelles nouvelles* (1663). His intimate knowledge of Donneau de Visé's early period (along with his many publications, Schuwey is the co-editor, with Claude Bourqui, of an expansive digital humanities project dedicated to *Les Nouvelles Nouvelles*) makes it possible for him to detect patterns, trace recycled material, and decipher obscure allusions. One particularly illuminating example of Donneau de Visé's commercial virtuosity is his 1660 edition of Molière's comedy *Le Cocu imaginaire*, annotated with arguments describing the action onstage for the reader's benefit. Taken on its own, this work is an entertaining *curiosité*, but Schuwey presents the publication as a means for the newly minted literary critic to capitalize on Molière's success, promote theater in general, and make a reputation for himself as an impresario.

Donneau de Visé's embrace of diverse genres, forms, and subjects—the principle of *la diversité*—was calculated to appeal to multiple markets; the modular structure of his works, composed of *pièces*, engendered tentacular, ever-growing, and often very profitable literary products. *La Devineresse, ou les faux enchantements* (1679), the hugely successful comedy that Donneau de Visé composed with his longtime collaborator Thomas Corneille, is a case in point. Based loosely on the contemporary *Affaire des poisons*, the play consists of a series of entertaining episodes, a

succession of consultations with the eponymous protagonist. Schuwey also points to the proliferation of poetry, portrait, and *nouvelle* collections during the period in question as evidence of *la mode des pièces*; citations and examples from contemporary authors like Charles Sorel, Cyrano de Bergerac, Edme Boursault, Marie-Catherine Desjardins, Antoine Furetière, Gabriel Guéret and Valentin Conrart help document the trend and illustrate its social and commercial value. Among the key contributions of this study is Schuwey's reexamination of the notion of the book as a fixed entity during this period: "Les ouvrages n'étaient...ni conçus dans un geste créateur unique, ni abordés comme un tout parfait et définitif" (p. 165). Schuwey's study, enriched with illustrations of typography and frontispieces, pays careful attention to the materiality of the book.

More than one quarter of Schuwey's study is dedicated to *Le Mercure galant*, perhaps Donneau de Visé's best-known work, a monthly periodical in the form of a small, roughly three hundred-page book that fit in the palm of the reader's hand or into a pocket. Schuwey avoids a teleological approach to Donneau de Visé's magnum opus: speaking of the seventeen years of uninterrupted literary output that preceded Donneau de Visé's founding of the periodical in 1672, Schuwey claims, "Ce n'est évidemment pas cette production qui tend vers le périodique, mais bien ce dernier qui émane d'elle" (p. 12). He contends that the *Mercur*e profoundly transformed the "paysage médiatique et politique, l'historiographie du règne, et le champ littéraire" (p. 321).

Even as he compares the collaborative periodical to a social network, drawing parallels to Twitter and Facebook, Schuwey warns against the optical "illusions" that can arise when we view the seventeenth century through twenty-first century eyes (p. 323). It is indeed challenging to define such a multifarious, complex work. In the chapter "Qu'est-ce que *Le Mercure galant* ?", Schuwey declares his intention to wipe the slate clean, "reprenre le dossier à zero" (p. 322). He rejects his predecessors' characterization of the *Mercur*e as a journal, revue, or magazine: its periodicity and its focus on current events, he claims, are not sufficient to justify its classification as a press periodical. Instead, Schuwey argues that current events appear in most of the literature of the period, and he emphasizes how the *Mercur*e resembles other contemporary non-journalistic publications, such as literary sequels or works like La Bruyère's *Caractères*, which were periodically revised and expanded. To dispel "l'illusion de la presse," Schuwey favors the terms "livre" and "recueil" to describe *Le Mercure*, finally settling on the term "recueil périodique": "Par sa matérialité, sa forme et ses contenus, le *Mercur*e galant est un livre, périodique certes, ...le *Mercur*e tint beaucoup plus du recueil collectif en plusieurs parties que du périodique" (p. 328).

I would not go as far as Schuwey in arguing against the depiction of the *Mercur*e galant as early modern journalism (even if, as he points out, the word is an anachronism in this context). It is true that not all of the material in the *Mercur*e is current, or strictly time-dependent: many of its *nouvelles*, fables, poems, enigmas, essays and treatises could have been published in a different month, year, or even decade. It is also true, as Schuwey writes, that to call the *Mercur*e galant a newspaper is to obscure both its significant non-news content and the *révolution médiatique* that it represents. Still, much of the publication's content is composed of current events—battle accounts, appointments, births, deaths, marriages—and its primary mission is arguably to bring news from Paris and the court to the provinces. (Although Schuwey dismisses it, the comparison to *People* magazine seems apt). The *Mercur*e's emphasis on newness (it features "scoops," and the seventeenth-century equivalent of "breaking news" alerts), along with its continuity and seriality—two characteristics Lennard J. Davis associates with journalistic publication[1]—

indicate that even if we call it by another name, the *Mercure galant* is a news publication, and its editor in chief was always at heart an eager and enterprising *nouvelliste*.

However, while Schuwey provides detailed analysis of the genesis and development of the *Mercure*'s historiography, and he devotes a section of his final chapter to the periodical's *énigmes*, his discussion of the *Mercure*'s novellas, or *nouvelles*, is surprisingly limited. Between 1672 and 1710, the *Mercure* published nearly four hundred novellas, presented as *histoires véritables*; in most cases, the author is not identified. Given Donneau de Visé's affinity for *nouvelles* (as a writer, consumer, and recycler of these texts), and Schuwey's expertise in this genre, demonstrated in the sections of his book dealing with Donneau de Visé's early novella collections, one would like to hear more about how the short fiction relates to the *Mercure*'s other content (for instance, current events and *galanterie*). Another area for future research concerns the *Mercure*'s inner workings: is it possible to learn more about co-editor Thomas Corneille's role in the *Mercure*'s production? Thomas Corneille was best known for his dramatic works; did he join Donneau de Visé and Bernard de Fontenelle in composing short fiction and other original content for the periodical?

In his chapter on the *Mercure Galant*'s historiography, "Une entreprise historiographique," Schuwey quotes the seventeenth-century historian Eudes de Mézeray, along with his contemporaries Jean Chapelain and Charles de Saint-Évremond, on the impossibility of writing history. They describe it as too vast a project for a single writer; Mézeray explains that to write a proper history of France, one would have to engage in painstaking archival research and hunt down "titres, fondations, épitaphes et contrats, tant de maisons publiques que des particulières, tant de France que des royaumes voisins" (p. 415). In one of the most striking passages of his book, Schuwey responds to this lament, suggesting that Donneau de Visé was in fact able to accomplish the historian's daunting task: "Les historiens du siècle de Louis XIV répétaient à l'envi cette aporie pendant que, sous leurs yeux, le *Mercure galant* réalisait précisément ce qu'ils prétendaient impossible" (p. 415).

The reader cannot help but remark that, in this respect, Christophe Schuwey has emulated the subject of his research. I conclude by suggesting that just as Donneau de Visé became the indefatigable historian of the reign of Louis XIV, with *Un entrepreneur des lettres* Schuwey proves himself the expert historian of the life and works of Donneau de Visé. He has combed through thousands of pages, and innumerable sources; he has *feuilleté toutes les archives* to gather, as did Donneau de Visé, *mille choses curieuses* for his readers. Using a systematic approach that helps to tame the wealth of information he presents, Schuwey has created a vivid portrait of his subject, a monumental history that unites all of Donneau de Visé's œuvre and ties it to trends in the literary world of seventeenth-century France and beyond.

NOTES

[1] Lennard J. Davis, *Factual Fictions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 71.

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