Heritage, “Bricolage” and Free-play: Restructuring the Ana Genre

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A form of commemoration particular to early-modern France, the ana was a type of book that memorialized a deceased savant, that is to say a male member of the intellectual elite. Compilers and publishers formed each book’s title by adding the suffix “-ana” to the honoree’s last name while the contents of each publication were allegedly drawn from conversations with the savant in which a male student or a peer had participated or to which he was privy. The student or peer then compiled what he believed to be the most accurate and representative anecdotes, bits of knowledge, and stories told to him by the savant and published them as a series of unrelated articles, usually with no transitions between them. Indeed, the earliest ana read like the transcript of an unedited conversation (Stefanovska 113) although, on occasion, the unnamed compiler added a table of contents in order to apparently organize what was essentially an unrelated series of cogitations.1

The compiler’s immediate objective was to “caractériser une vie ou donner des informations encore inconnues” while the genre itself played a historical role as “une source de documentation culturelle souvent unique, originale...” (Montandon 104, 105). In anticipating the public’s wish to become familiar with certain savants and by addressing their own desire to commemorate them and represent their breadth of knowledge, compilers succeeded in drawing a wide readership. The ana circulated in the sixteenth century in manuscript form2 and was immediately and wildly popular when

2 Wild observes that none of the works currently characterized as ana carried the title ending in “-ana” in manuscript form. (14)
it appeared in print in the mid-seventeenth century; however, it is less well
known today, even among scholars of the period.

One of the most striking characteristics of the *ana* genre was its
progressive fetishization of the written word and, by association, the
published book as a means of preserving the spoken words of learned men.
Because the *ana* originated in *savant* circles, readers today immediately
associate the genre with the academies in which the intellectual elite
participated and which were only open to men. This is only a partially
correct assumption. It is true that women appear in the first *ana savants*
only incidentally, often as objects of curiosity or ridicule. However, in the
1690s, compilers began to publish *ana* intended for a more egalitarian,
*mondain* readership. Of course, by this point it had become increasingly
difficult to overlook women’s influence on social and literary matters; they
were arbiters of good taste but, more significantly, they had taken on the
role of literary critic with the power to make or break a writer’s career.
Writing about the *Menagiana*, one of the last *ana savants*, Wild notes that,
“la modestie et la courtoisie supplantèrent dans l’échelle des valeurs les
vertus baroques et l’ostentation qui les accompagnait” (237). The develop-
ment of the *ana* genre as a whole echoes this reprioritization of values from
those of the learned to those of the worldly. The first *ana mondain* to
address this latter audience was published in 1694 and is entitled *Arli-
quiniiana*. This work reflects the increase in women’s visibility and influence
not only through the topics broached within it, but also through the *mon-
dain* practices it references, both of which are absent from the more learned
*ana savants*.

The publication of *Arliquiniana* did not indicate in itself the end of the
*ana* genre but rather a variation on its original structure; it was a harbinger
of the establishment of a new structure of the genre that followed. Admit-
tedly, *Arliquiniana*’s compiler adapted its contents to the social realities of
the time. Yet, this thematic shift of the genre also brings us to ponder the
status of the discourse that comprises this and the *ana* that followed in
relation to their origin or, as Jacques Derrida designates it, their heritage
(252). While the *ana* published at the end of the century are dissociated
from their mid-century predecessors thematically, they also exemplify a
radical shift in the way knowledge was shared and power asserted.

In this article, I will explore what role individual works play leading up
to the eventual restructuring of the *ana* genre. I have chosen to compare the
portrayals of women in two of the earliest *ana savants*, *Perroniana* (1667)

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3 The use of Latin and the learned subject matter in the earliest *ana* attest to the
genre’s association with schools and other places of learning such as academies.
See Wild, pp. 24-31.
and *Scaligerana* (1667), with those in *Arliquiniana*\(^4\) (1694) and *Anonimiana* (1700), both *ana mondains*. In the first two works, women are often positioned in such a way as to underscore the opinion or command of knowledge of an author who often trivializes and silences them. In contrast, women play a more central role in the latter. The compilers of these *ana mondains* choose topics they consider of interest to them and often give them a voice or even a pen. My goal in looking at *Perroniana* and *Scaligerana* as representative of the *ana savants* as compared to *Arliquiniana* and *Anonimiana* as representative of the *ana mondains* is to show that the structural origin of the *ana* genre as a whole depended on a principle of women’s exclusion. Products of a Jesuit education system that prioritized combative rhetoric over polite discourse, compilers of the original *ana* positioned their works in opposition to the value system established in the salons.\(^5\) As Dena Goodman remarks, “Men of letters came into conflict – with each other and with *le monde* – because they based status on intelligence and discourse on truth telling. Identifying oneself as a man of letters was thus a challenge to a social order maintained by politeness and deference, whose principles the Republic of Letters opposed” (98). One strategy these men used in compiling the *ana savants* was the silencing of women who consequently do not actively participate in the heritage discourse of the *ana* genre. Yet, the publication of *Anonimiana* on the cusp of the eighteenth century marked a transformation of the structure of the *ana* genre and the eventual establishment of an alternate one precisely because its compiler adapted its contents to the changing social realities that rewarded the salon practices that helped foster sociability and maintain order. From this moment on, women’s voices were heard and their words read.

Classically speaking, the very structure of the *ana savants* is the perfect example of how a good power construct ought to function. Their contents are based on orality and are meant to reflect the ideas and thoughts of contemporary *savants* as well as to represent their knowledge of certain disciplines. Their structure also tells us something about the subsequent development of the genre itself. As Derrida writes in his essay “Structure,

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\(^4\) Actor Domenico Biancolelli (1640-88) is credited with creating the modern Harlequin character and bringing it to Paris in 1660. See Giacomo Oreglia, *The Commedia dell’Arte*. New York: Hill and Wang Publishing, 1968. chapter 4. Given his fame and the fact that *Arliquiniana* was published shortly after his death, it is probable that this *ana* was compiled in his honor.

Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” “it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which governs the structure, while escaping structurality” (248). I argue that the savants are at the center of the structure of the ana genre but are also outside of it, as is the case with any center. It follows that the production of these original ana savants reinforces the centrality or hegemony of their eponymous honorees who engage in what Derrida would call a “heritage” discourse. In other words, they are emblematic of a tradition particular to a moment in literary history and are at the origin of all subsequent ana.

The honoree of one of the first ana savants was the Cardinal du Perron who lived from 1556 to 1618, long before the heyday of the salons. Although there were of course women writers and social figures in his time, it would be a number of years after his death before France would strongly feel women’s presence and influence both socially and politically. Although Perroniana was not published until 1667, its content, apparently transcribed from conversations occurring during du Perron’s lifetime, reflected women’s lack of social prominence; they appear primarily as objects of his theological discussions on celibacy and spirituality. However, when something is personally at stake for du Perron, he focuses his attentions on them and makes them the target of his derision.

A philosophical dispute over the ideal literary style was at the origin of one such encounter. In 1605, the Cardinal recommended Malherbe to Henri IV who subsequently appointed him as official court poet that same year, a position he held until his death in 1628. As we know, Malherbe espoused the purity and sobriety that characterized the classical style that later came into vogue. In contrast, his contemporary Michel de Montaigne wrote his famous Essais in a vivid and often playful style, a style opposite of that which Malherbe himself valued and propagated. When Montaigne’s adopted daughter, Marie de Gournay, edited and published an edition of his Essais following his death, she met with disapproval by those who agreed with Malherbe’s teachings. In response, she strongly defended these works against their critics, thereby situating herself in the opposing camp from du Perron who was clearly one of Malherbe’s admirers.

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6 Not surprisingly, the savants commemorated in the ana generally represent male-dominated professions. Besides Cardinals, the honorees were, among others, grammarians (Gilles Ménage), philologists and historians, (Joseph Scaliger) and government officials (Adrien de Valois).

Without mentioning the philosophical origin of his ill-will toward her, the Cardinal nevertheless “defends” his position in *Perroniana* by personally attacking de Gournay. The compiler describes this attack in the following way:

**GOURNAI.** Comme Monsieur Pelletier lui [à du Perron] disoit un jour qu’il avoit rencontré Mademoiselle de Gournai, qui allait presenter requête au Lieutenant Criminel, pour faire défendre la *Défense des Beurrières*, parce que là dedans elle est appelée coureuse, & qui a servi le Public ; il dit, je crois que le Lieutenant n’ordonnera pas qu’on la prenne au corps, il s’en trouveroient fort peu qui voudroient prendre cette peine, & pour ce qui est dit qu’elle a servi le Public, ç’a été si particulièrement qu’on n’en parle que par conjecture, il faut seulement que pour faire croire le contraire, elle se fasse peindre devant son Livre. C’est ce que je dis une fois à Mademoiselle de Surgeres, qui prioit chez Monsieur de Retz que je fisse une Epitre devant les Œuvres de Ronsard, pour montrer qu’il ne l’aimoit pas d’amour impudique. Je lui dis, au lieu de cette Epitre, il y faut seulement mettre votre portrait. 8 (264-65)

The Cardinal lashes out at Gournay, first by publicizing an accusation of prostitution and then by citing her appearance as sufficient proof that she was not even worthy of any related activities. Behind this apparently superficial comment wages a battle of high intellectual stakes; yet, du Perron refuses to engage de Gournay in a direct dispute. He does not consider her a worthy adversary and limits her presence in this *ana* to a remark about her lack of beauty.

We can read du Perron’s misogyny as illustrative of Goodman’s observation that, “Human relations in the Old Regime were personal relations, and attacks were personal attacks. Disinterestedness was difficult to achieve in a society in which each person was defined by his or her membership in a group, from the family to privileged corps” (94). In other words, this personal attack is indicative of a value system espoused by men of letters that rewarded combative ness and that had not yet adapted to the need for polite discourse in maintaining social order. 9 *Perroniana* documents an eloquent moment of French intellectual life in the late sixteenth century,

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8 I have maintained the original spelling and syntax of all quotations drawn from the *ana* throughout the present article.

9 Goodman identifies this combativeness as fundamental to the relationship between the *savants* and the *mondains*: “Men of letters came into conflict – with each other and with *le monde* – because they based status on intelligence and discourse on truth telling. Identifying oneself as a man of letters was thus a challenge to a social order maintained by politeness and deference, whose principles the Republic of Letters opposed” (98).
illustrating Linda Timmerman’s comment that, “La ‘rudesse’ – pour ne pas dire la grossièreté – et l’impolitesse guettent les ‘philosophes’: le savoir et l’étude étaient réputés entraîner ces défauts qui caractérisent le pédant” (142). Du Perron’s cutting remarks plainly reflect a pre-ana mondains moment in French literary history which gave rise to a structure oriented around a center occupied by the intellectual elite.

Compilers of the ana savants sought to document the wide-ranging knowledge of the honoree whose status derived more from his intellectual breadth than from his prowess in argumentation, and they filtered out the “politics” of the intellectual community in favor of an officious pedantry. Some, such as the compiler of Scaligerana, imagined their ana as useful reference works and edited them as such.10 This compiler documented his subject’s broad and varied knowledge by transcribing his words and alphabetizing all resulting entries by the first letter of the primary topic treated within. The honoree of the resultant Scaligerana11 was Joseph Scaliger who lived from 1540 to 1609 and was learned in variety of disciplines, particularly philology, history and chronology. Published for a savant audience as were almost all ana of the seventeenth century, Scaligerana reads as a chronicle of information, one that is even indexed for easy access. Any mention of women fits precisely into this schema.

Women in Scaligerana are abstractions, cited to focus the reader’s attention on Scaliger’s powers of observation and reason, essentialized but not specified. Although there is no entry under “Femme” or “Fille,” there are several others that focus in part on women despite somewhat misleading category names. Under “Alemands,” for instance, we read that “Les femmes quoy qu’elles soient enfermées, ne laissent pas d’estre meschantes” (186).

10 This attitude is especially apparent among compilers themselves: “[T]ous les ana issus du milieu savant en citent d’autres et jouent leur rôle d’information et de critique par le biais des « remarques ». ... Jusque vers 1696, les préfaces ou avertissements des ana invoquent ceux qui ont déjà paru comme référence générique...” (Wild 552).

11 It is almost certain that, despite the title, this is in fact Jean Daillé’s 1667 edition of Second Scaligerana, originally compiled by Jean and Nicolas de Vassan (“Histoire des Scaligerana” iv). Bound with the 1695 Valesiana, it contains no publication information of its own nor does the compiler of Valesiana acknowledge the joint publication in any way. From the “Histoire des Scaligerana,” we understand that Prima Scaligerana was entirely in Latin (this one is in both Latin and French), and that the articles of the first edition of Second Scaligerana (1666) were not alphabetized. Scandalized by the state of this same edition, Daillé re-edited it and alphabetized the articles. It appeared in 1667 as the second edition of the Second Scaligerana. The edition I cite here is likely a counterfeit reproduction of Daillé’s (“Histoire des Scaligerana” viii-ix).
Later we learn that “A Basle il y a de belles filles; j’ay remarqué qu’elles se chargent beaucoup la ceinture de couteaux & de grosses bourses” (218). Finally, we discover under the heading “La langue Polonoise” that “En Pologne les hommes ne couchent point avec leurs femmes ; ils les appellent, quand ils en ont affaire” (500). In these examples, women are curiosities, representative of their regions and noted for their differences. They are there merely to mark cultural specificity as would cuisine, architecture or local custom. Malina Stefanovska likens the *ana* to a series of *cabinets de curiosités* for their varied and comprehensive content (114-16), and I maintain that women themselves are often portrayed as curiosities who comprise part of these collections.¹² Their role in the *ana savants* is incidental, and the comments above merely serve to showcase Scaliger’s breadth of experience and esoteric findings. Given what we know about the Gournay affair, however, this arid pedantry takes on a new significance as a strategy of derision that reinforces the coherence of the structure of the *ana savants* by deflecting any challenges to its center. Peculiarly – or perhaps cleverly – the compiler creates misleading headings in the guise of new centers, but the reality is that, at this moment, the *savants* remain at their original position in relation to the structure.

In this same work, the compiler includes two similar anecdotes, neither of which is as neutral in tone as the ones in which women appear incidentally. To elicit a laugh from his audience, Scaliger allegedly tells the compiler the following story at his own mother’s expense:

Testes tranchees : Feuë ma Mere voyant le bourreau porter un sac, demanda ce que c’estoit; il respondit que c’estoit des prunes; elles les voulut voir, il tira des testes qu’il portoit de Tholose, chacune en son lieu, où le mal fait avoit esté commis; quoy veu, elle evanouït, grosse de moy. (590)

In this story Scaliger presents his mother as an anecdotal character at best, or an object of ridicule at worst, just as he might any other woman, and furthers his reputation by making light of her reaction to the severed heads. We can infer that his interest in the story has not to do with her but with himself since the incident had caused his very life, just burgeoning, to be put at risk. Women also serve as vehicles for the communication of Scaliger’s opinion, not always convincingly defended, on a given matter. With remarkably fallacious reasoning, he opines in the article entitled “France” that

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In France les femmes maîtrisent leurs maris, mais en Gascogne les maris les batoient bien. Ils sont compagnons, mais le mari est maître. Les Français se sont mal comportés en Hierusalem. Les femmes sont cause que ce pays a esté perdu, les femmes Françaises. (86)

Scaliger indicates his personal bias in these two anecdotes, devaluing one of his most personal relationships in the process. A desire for a laugh, even at his mother’s expense, or for vengeance on French women in general motivated these inclusions. The compiler merely included anecdotes that not only furthered Scaliger’s reputation by showcasing his knowledge, but also those he imagined would amuse his savant readership for whom disinterestedness was not an option.

Only two of approximately twenty ana savants to be published between 1666 and the early 1690s, Perroniana and Scaligerana represent a general trend in the genre. Compilers of these works concerned themselves primarily with showcasing the knowledge of the man they chose to honor and preserving his reputation, and they refrained from including any articles that would compromise their goals either through their content or their authorship. Nevertheless, as we know, the increased participation of women in social, political and literary activity through the salons caused them to be heard and seen in a way they had never been before.13 This commercialization and feminization of the literary public sphere threatened the long-established male intellectual elite who nevertheless found themselves increasingly dependent on it to maintain order.14 With the salon functioning as a great social equalizer, savants were suddenly faced with simulacra of noble behavior, social impostors and the real thing. Newly faced with this uncertainty about the nature of a “legitimate” or authentic aristocrat and keen to reinforce their own privileged status, savants responded by relegating women to trivial roles or by excluding them altogether in the ana. They thereby positioned themselves as the center around which the very structure of the ana genre was oriented and organized, and went from objects (these books are about them) to subjects (only they speak) in the historical grammar of the ana.

Ironically, these savants depended increasingly on the salons and the women who hosted them for their reputation and status that hinged in great

13 Citing 1661 as a turning point, Timmermans remarks that “le déclin des valeurs héroïques permet à un nombre croissant de femmes d’asseoir leur royauté mondaine” (97).
14 Goodman explains how this development carried over into the eighteenth century: “The philosophes adopted the salons as a center for their Republic of Letters and respected the women who led them as governors because they provided the republic with a basis of order” (91).
part on their adoption of the value system the latter espoused. Although they did not begin to regularly attend the salons until the 1660s,\(^{15}\) the intellectual elite could no longer ignore the importance of adopting *mondain* behaviors. As Linda Timmermans writes, “Vrai ‘barbare’, le savant qui refuse ‘l’entretien’ des dames ne captera jamais les suffrages du public poli et élégant qui, désormais dispense la gloire littéraire” (144). Not surprisingly, some compilers later chose to cater to these readers by publishing *ana* that were markedly different from the original *ana savants*. They borrowed elements of the heritage discourse established in the *ana savants*, putting them together in such a way as to form a new discourse reflective of the *mondain* readership. In other words, they engaged in what Derrida calls *bricolage* (255) which allows for a free-play of these elements within the established structure. Only later was there a rupture causing the original structure of the *ana* genre to become decentered and the *savants* to lose their privileged status in relation to it. At this point, their discourse no longer dominated, yet it retained its heritage status in the immediate aftermath. However, as feminist Elizabeth Grosz notes, there is “no definitive break with the past” (117) under such circumstances. Instead, there is “a series of substitutions of center for center. Successively, and in a regulated fashion, the center receives different forms or names” (Derrida 249), a generic development which is reflected in the content of the *ana mondains*. The second part of this article will follow the path from the heritage discourse discussed above in relation to the *ana savants* to the *bricolage* and free-play characteristic of the *ana mondains* and, finally, to a restructured *ana* genre.

Shunning the pedantry that characterized most *ana savants*, compilers of *ana mondains* instead turned toward topics they believed would appeal to their female readers. Timmermans explains that women in the seventeenth century were not very familiar with classical ancient cultures and that they were antagonistic toward *savant* culture which they often associated with them (139). Religion, etymology and philosophy did not generally interest these readers who identified such erudition with pedantry and coarseness. They instead preferred topics associated with gallantry such as love and marriage, the only two topics open to radical reassessment by women in the salons as noted by scholars Joan DeJean and Erica Harth,\(^{16}\) among others.

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\(^{15}\) See Timmermans, chapitre 2.

As we know, it was the *querelle des femmes* that lay the groundwork for such discussions. Dating approximately from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries, this philosophical, social and literary debate questioned Salic law\(^{17}\) and its consequent societal practices that limited the freedoms of women. Originally conceived to ensure that women would not inherit France’s throne or lands, the law established restrictions related more generally to inheritance, marriage rights and women’s rights and abilities to govern within and outside the home. While I would not posit that compilers of *ana* deliberately insert their works into this debate, they are clearly responding to women’s reappropriation of these issues. In doing so, they are engaging in what Derrida calls “free-play” (248) within the original structure of the *ana* genre. The *savants* remain at its center, but their heritage discourse is no longer one-sided, informed by values that are increasingly outdated.

*Arliquiniana* (1694) was the first *ana mondain* published and, in an exchange between its narrator and Harlequin, its compiler indirectly references the priorities of this new female readership:

> Connoissez-vous bien cet homme là, me demanda Arlequin ? Oüy, oüy, je le connois bien, luy répondis-je, c’est l’homme du monde qui sçait mieux sa généalogie, & qui tire le plus de vanité de sa naissance : *Il faut avoir bien peu de vertu*, reprit Arlequin, *quand on ne peut se faire estimer que par celle de ces ancestres*. (254)

Here, Harlequin passes judgment on those who derive their self-worth from their illustrious lineage, men of noble heritage who deem themselves worthy by virtue of the family they are born into rather than by their personal merit. We can read this criticism as support for those who attach value not to illustrious birth, but to personal accomplishments. As the salons were considered great social equalizers\(^ {18}\) in which those who excelled in conversational displays of *esprit* enjoyed an enviable reputation, we can interpret this as indirect praise for the women who orchestrated them and who established the code by which merit rather than birth was rewarded. In just a few lines, the compiler of *Arliquiniana* undermines the *savants*’ hegemony by calling into question their values and thus opens up the possibility of a new structure of the *ana* oriented in relationship to a different center.

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\(^{17}\) Established by the Franks in the early Middle Ages, Salic law was in effect in France until the Revolution.

\(^{18}\) Referring to the salon, Faith E. Beasley observes that, “This institution was responsible for an unprecedented intermingling of classes” (67).
In keeping with these *mondain* priorities, the conversations between Harlequin and the narrator that comprise a great part of *Arliquiniana* focus on the love intrigues of their female acquaintances. Harlequin recounts one such story to the narrator when they see an unnamed young woman pass by. He comments, “Elle est toujours de la même vivacité, me dit Arlequin, & elle continue d’avoir un grand dédain pour tous les Amans” (197). He then explains how Mademoiselle had hoped to make her unenthusiastic lover jealous by flirting with another suitor. She succeeded, but once she took him back, he again became disinterested and complacent. Mademoiselle subsequently arranged to meet her lover, but deliberately stood him up, taking a walk with her suitor and a female friend instead. When the lover returned the following day to pay her a visit, he did not show any signs of jealousy or despair. Angered by this reaction, the woman locked herself in her room and never again saw her lover. A light, gossipy story, this tale serves as a pretext for Harlequin and the narrator to provide their views on love and courtship and thereby address the non-scholarly interests of their anticipated readership.

In addition to its decidedly *mondain* themes, *Arliquiniana* also contains references to salon practices that are absent from the *ana savants*. In the following anecdote, the compiler draws our attention to how a broad circle of people heard one particular private story. After listening to the narrator tell another gallant tale, Harlequin indicates that it sounds familiar to him and suggests that it was the lover who must have not been discreet. The narrator, instead, suggests the following scenario:

> il l’a esté autant qu’un François le peut estre: à la verité il a confié l’histoire à ses amis les plus secrets, qui l’ont racontée à d’autres amis très-fideles, lesquels l’ont dite à l’oreille à des amis qu’ils avoient, mais tout cela très-secretement dans un lieu particulier; & il n’y a jamais eu plus de trois personnes ensemble qui en ayent parlé. (210-11)

The manner in which the lover’s personal story became public knowledge recalls the importance and particularity of how information circulated within *mondain* circles. In speculating as to how this story spread, the narrator invokes the conversational practices of the *mondains*. Just as they would recognize the themes of *Arliquiniana* as their own, so to would they recognize their practices of circulation. Such conversational practices and the subjects discussed hold a place of value in this *ana*, and we can deduce that the women who promoted them do as well.

*Arliquiniana* is a strikingly woman-oriented *ana* in which women are important figures and not incidental ones. They are not essentialized as they are in *Perroniana* and *Scaligerana*, but rather specified, at least to the extent that the compiler felt appropriate. Its compiler foregrounds gallant in-
trigues, the subject of many mondain conversations, as well as conversational practices themselves, which sets Arliquiniana apart from the ana savants. All the while, he borrows elements from the original heritage discourse: the orality basic to the genre as well as women’s silence. This approach brings to mind Lévi-Strauss’s concept of bricolage as appropriated by Derrida who defines it as “the necessity of borrowing one’s concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined...” (255). In this case, the structure of the ana genre remains sound, and Arliquiniana does not, in fact, represent a restructuring of the ana. Instead, it maintains the savants as its center, and any reference to women is filtered through the commentary of the narrator or Harlequin. This allows the compiler a certain amount of freedom. As Derrida asserts, “No doubt that by organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the free-play of its elements inside its total form” (248). In other words, the heritage discourse retains its hegemony despite this free-play to which the continued silencing of women attests. While Arliquiniana itself remains within the original configuration, it nevertheless serves as a harbinger of the rupture of the original structure and an eventual recentering of the genre introduced by the later Anonimiana.

Published on the cusp of the eighteenth century, Anonimiana features a fictitious salon gathering that serves as a framework for the presentation of diverse written works. Individuals “attending” the gathering present these works aloud then discuss them, much in the spirit of Giovanni Boccaccio’s fourteenth-century work, The Decameron, and Marguerite de Navarre’s sixteenth-century book, Heptaméron. The unnamed compiler who orchestrated this fictitious conversation retained the oral quality that defines the ana genre while, at the same time, was responsible at the most obvious level for the circulation and publication of the written literature presented within this frame. While initially maintaining the savants as the center of the ana’s structure, the compiler of Anonimiana, like that of Arliquiniana, borrows from its heritage discourse, the ana savant, in maintaining its apparent orality. He (or is it here a she?) also engages in free-play within the genre’s structure, both by incorporating women’s direct discourse and by privileging the written word, neither of which had a place in the original structure.

At first, this free-play does not threaten to rupture the system, but there are indications of this event that is to come. One such indication is the manner in which women are portrayed participating in social life in Anonimiana which surpasses the traditional portrayal of mondaines as simply engaged in conversation. One woman from the provinces cited in this work writes poetry modeled on the rhyme scheme of that of her lover to whom
she is replying. The woman’s suitor responds with astonishment, “A qui me jouois-je, Madame, & quelle fut ma surprise? J’avois à faire à un des plus jolis esprits de la Province. Dés que cette belle eut lu mon Madrigal, elle prit la plume & m’y répondit de cette maniere sur les mêmes rimes” (139) and proceeds to engage in a lengthy written dialogue with her that occupies several pages of this *ana*. The woman’s poetry that incites this reaction derives from her lover’s, but she does showcase her own particular talents that astonish this lovelorn soul. She thereby evokes a fruitful epistolary exchange. Nevertheless, she does not possess the potential for power, literary or otherwise, for she does not hail from the capital. She is an unidentified woman of talent from the provinces who probably has neither a high-powered salon nor another means of publicizing her esprit. It is no surprise that she is only portrayed as exercising her talents in epistolary form, a form that is modeled on conversation. The compiler of *Anonimiana* was evidently comfortable representing women writing about a “woman’s issue,” love, and within “women’s realms,” the salon and the letter. In reinforcing the dominance of the Parisian intellectuals over the worldly provincial, it is clear that he or she maintains the original structure of the *ana* genre itself.

*Anonimiana* does include written works, but up until this point has privileged orality, a fundamental feature of the genre. It retains the structure of its heritage discourse, the *ana savant*, by maintaining the savants as the center and, yet, it engages in free-play within the structure by granting a voice to women and publishing texts that originated in writing. The narrator of *Anonimiana* hints at his or her own approach to the genre in remarking,

> Il faut donc aimer la regle pour éviter la confusion; mais il faut ôter à la regle toute contrainte qui gene, & banir une raison scrupuleuse qui par trop d’attachement à la justesse ne laisse rien de libre & de naturel. Il faut aimer la regle pour aider le naturel à n’en point sortir, & il faut suivre le naturel pour donner à la regle cet air libre & enjoué.... (93)

in which we can understand the rule (“la regle”) to be the structure and the natural (“le naturel”) to be free-play. At what point, though, does free-play cease to be free-play and instead instigate the formation of a new structure?

I contend that this occurs when the compiler establishes a new center since a structure is unique only insofar as its one center defines it. If the compiler engages in free-play beyond the limits imposed by the presence of the center, he or she is no longer working within the structure of the heritage discourse but instead establishing an independent structure with its own center. This new structure can contain elements of the preexisting one, but it cannot, by definition, orient itself in relation to the same center. As
Derrida writes, “The function of [the] center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure... but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the free-play of the structure” (247-48). I would argue that in the case of the development of the *ana mondains*, a second structure of the *ana* genre is established within *Anonimiana* itself.

Forty pages prior to the close of *Anonimiana*, its compiler dissolves the salon framework. The gathering has supposedly ended and so too the appropriate forum for the presentation of women’s love missives. This would provide a logical conclusion to this *ana*, but the compiler does not end it here. Instead, he or she chooses to showcase a lengthy poem the topic and length of which would make it an inconvenient focus of a salon discussion. Entitled “Réponse à La Gloire du Val de Grâce de M. de Molière,” this poem is notable for its forty-page length, its sheer boldness and for its female authorship. It is a critical response to Molière’s “La Gloire du Val-de-Grâce,” published in 1669 which itself was a rebuttal to the writer Charles Perrault’s praise of the painter Charles Le Brun, in which Molière instead praised Pierre Mignard’s artistic talents in designing the cupola of this church. Literary scholar Marie-France Hilgar surmises that “Molière never [even] saw the frescoes of the Cupola” (174) for he cites no detail of its design. Instead, he praises Mignard himself with whom he was friends long before the latter painted the cupola. In response, Elisabeth Sophie Chéron, who is widely accepted as the author of the poem, issues a scathing, detailed critique of Mignard’s work.

She challenges Molière to a writing duel, inciting him to defend his initial judgment of the cupola’s artistry in response. Writing from the perspective of the cupola itself, she allows herself the liberty of using the informal “tu” in addressing Molière. This is a bold gesture, but probably more acceptable because she masks her voice, albeit thinly, behind that of an inanimate object:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{C'est pourquoi, sçavant Ecrivain,} &= \\
\text{Remets donc la plume à la main;} &= \\
\text{Non pour louer, mais pour defendre;} &= \\
\text{Car si je puis faire entendre} &= \\
\text{Tous les defauts qu'on trouve en moi,} &= \\
\text{Ce que l'on dit lorsqu'on me voit,} &= \\
\text{Tu ne seras pas sans affaire} &= \\
\text{Si tu pretends y satisfaire.} & (241-4)
\end{align*}
\]

The author refers to Molière as a “sçavant Ecrivain,” positioning her opponent in the same category as herself, that of a writer. She then baits him, hoping to engage him in an intellectual debate worthy of both their
talents. Chéron proceeds to methodically dissect the cupola’s flaws and, in doing so, ridicules the superficiality praised by Molière and the savants to whom he caters. This, of course, is ironic in that Molière frequently populates his plays with characters whose superficial manners and standards he ridicules. The poem’s author and her representative, Anonimiana’s unknown compiler, thereby situate themselves outside the intellectual elite and also in direct confrontation with it.

The compiler’s decision to include this work in Anonimiana plainly displays loyalties that lie elsewhere than those of the compilers of the ana savants. Had a male savant written against Mignard instead of Chéron, the exposure of Molière’s hypocrisy or the threat of intellectual and social equality between the genders would not be as menacing. The fact that the “Réponse à La Gloire du Val de Grâce de M. de Molière” originated in writing and that a woman authored it, imparted a weightiness to the opinions within, and its inclusion in Anonimiana preserved it for posterity.

I argue that the compiler establishes here a new structure for the ana genre by destroying its center through the inclusion of this critique. In foregrounding Chéron’s own intellectualism and dismissing Molière’s, he or she no longer positions the savants as central to it. Instead, he or she borrows elements from this heritage discourse and uses them to establish a new structure of the genre. Derrida states that

[i]t is a question of putting expressly and systematically the problem of the status of a discourse which borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the destruction of that heritage itself. A problem of economy and strategy. (252)

In other words, the heritage discourse furnishes what is necessary to rupture the structure that engendered it. In the case of the ana, one could argue that the original presence of silenced women in the ana savants was a key element in this development. As women gained status, the heritage discourse lost relevance and the genre its center.

In sum, we have gone from heritage (an amalgam of history-laden values and themes as evidenced in the ana savants) to bricolage and free-play (the open use of these values and themes to serve a specific purpose as in the ana mondains) and, finally, to the destruction of the center of the structure of the ana savants and the establishment of a new center which ultimately defines that of the ana mondains. As Goodman notes, the ordering of the subsequent Republic of Letters depended on the “voluntary submission [of the intellectual elite] to the rules of polite discourse and the female governors who enforced them” (91). Nonetheless, the resultant destruction of the center was also inevitable for, as Grosz notes, “no system, method, or discourse can be as all-encompassing, singular, and monolithic
as it represents itself. It is inherently open to its own undoing, its own deconstruction (deconstruction is not imposed from outside a discourse or tradition but emerges from its own inner dynamics)” (116).

Yet, from this deconstruction remains the suffix “-ana” which the new structure reappropriates. This remnant is the immutable witness to and the linguistic heritage of the rupture of a structure and the carrier of new meanings. Indeed, in 1763, *Sevigniana* appeared and was the first work published with the suffix “-ana” added to a woman’s name. The honoree was Madame de Sévigné, and her granddaughter compiled its contents which were well-known excerpts from Sévigné’s letters to her daughter which had already been made public. Since the contents derived exclusively from writing without even a gesture toward the oral quality that defined its predecessors, *Sevigniana* marks a clear departure in its portrayal of women. Can we call this work an *ana* at all? It is no coincidence that the book that paved the way for this portrayal was entitled *Anonimiana*. Because no man’s reputation was at stake in this work—it is, after all, in honor of “Anonymous”—women enjoyed a more direct representation than in previous *ana*. It was not until the publication of this decidedly *mondain* work in 1700 that women are portrayed as both speaking and writing. Within the space of a generation, between the publication of *Scaligerana* in 1667 and that of *Anonimiana*, French elite culture transcended one of the most important boundaries that had restricted women from authorship. They were no longer merely pawns in the elite male struggle for reputation, spoken for but rarely speaking. They found their own voice in the written word and, from *Sevigniana* on, the playing field was almost level.

**Works Cited**


