

## **From Aesthetic to Ethical Cosmopolitanism in Scudéry's *Le Grand Cyrus***

by  
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The eponymous protagonist of Madeleine de Scudéry's *Artamène, ou Le Grand Cyrus* (1649–1653) is an unusual kind of hero. A fictionalized version of the sixth century BCE Persian emperor Cyrus the Great, Scudéry's Cyrus builds an empire not only through valiance in battle but also through his prodigious capacity for empathy and his ability to create fast friendships with individuals hailing from regions quite distant from his own. Indeed, the novel's narrator and characters repeatedly highlight the hero's cultural fluency as one of his distinguishing qualities. In the first volume, we learn that Cyrus was educated to converse freely with ambassadors visiting his father's kingdom.<sup>1</sup> As an adult, he speaks multiple languages and is familiar with the "coutumes" and "lois" of countries throughout Asia Minor.<sup>2</sup> One character sums up Cyrus's unique comfort in engaging with foreigners:

les Conquérants comme vous, ne sont étrangers en nulle part; et je pense pouvoir dire, qu'après avoir asujetti tant de Royaumes, vous n'êtes pas plus de Persépolis, que de Babilone, de Sardis.... et qu'ainsi je crois pouvoir assurer, que vous êtes du Pays de tout le monde (8: 339–40).

"Nowhere a stranger," inhabitant of "the country of the whole world," the Cyrus described in these passages appears, at least to modern readers, as a model cosmopolitan. Even though the term "cosmopolite" never appears in the novel,<sup>3</sup> the depiction of Cyrus echoes Enlightenment definitions of the cosmopolitan, most notably Diderot's characterization of

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<sup>1</sup> In the novel's first volume we learn that "Cambise avait voulu que le Prince son Fils sçeut les langues des Nations les plus célèbres qui soient au monde : lui semblant, disait-il, étrange, qu'un Prince n'entende pas le langage de ceux dont il doit un jour recevoir des Ambassadeurs" (1: 313). I have modernized the spelling of this and all subsequent quotations from the novel.

<sup>2</sup> During Cyrus's campaign, for example, an international group of "deputies" joining the conqueror before his attack on Cresus were surprised "qu'un Prince de l'âge de Cyrus, fût instruit de toutes leurs Coutumes, et de toutes leurs Lois" and that he "leur parla à tous chacun en leur langue" (6: 301).

<sup>3</sup> The term "cosmopolite" or "cosmopolitain" appears only rarely in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century French texts and is largely absent from the period's dictionaries. For an overview of the history of the word *cosmopolite*, see Hazard.

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the figure as “un homme qui n'est étranger nulle part.”<sup>4</sup> In addition, by characterizing Cyrus as an open-minded, polyglot ruler, Scudéry follows the example of ancient historians, particularly Xenophon, who underlined the importance of the emperor's tolerant attitude toward his diverse subjects.<sup>5</sup> But while ancient authors examined Cyrus's “cosmopolitanism” as a strategic key to his success as a builder and leader of empire, Scudéry largely sidesteps the troubling complicity between cultural fluency and conquest.<sup>6</sup> Instead, she analyzes Cyrus's cosmopolitanism as a key component of the hero's exemplarity: a moral trait worthy of imitation by all individuals, even those outside the political realm. By following Cyrus's example of studying languages and cultures, listening to strangers' stories with sympathy, and extending hospitality and even friendship to all comers, the reader too might build an affective “empire” as broad as the hero's Asian kingdom.<sup>7</sup>

Scudéry's treatment of tolerance, hospitality, and extensive knowledge of foreign cultures as a matter of morality and ethics makes her novel an especially interesting historical counterpoint to twenty-first-century discourses on cosmopolitanism in which ethical concerns also tend to take center stage. As today's thinkers look back to Antiquity or the Enlightenment for models on which to build new theories of cosmopolitanism, they are often disappointed by what they perceive as ethical failings or “blind-spots” on the part of these earlier “citizens of the world.”<sup>8</sup> Put in its philosophical and historical context, for example, the original cosmopolitanism – that of the third century Greek Cynics – appears as a negative “rejection of the *polis*” rather than a positive embrace of the cosmos (Moles 106).<sup>9</sup> Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century forms of political cosmopolitanism may omit slaves, women, or non-Christians from legal

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<sup>4</sup> This comes from the *Encyclopédie* entry for “Cosmopolitain ou Cosmopolite.”

<sup>5</sup> On Xenophon's characterizations of Cyrus the Great as a tolerant or cosmopolitan leader, see Gera (22) and Hirsch (15). For a detailed analysis of Scudéry's use of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* in her depiction of Cyrus, see Hepp.

<sup>6</sup> Van der Veer discusses cosmopolitanism's role in facilitating imperialism or colonialism. Other approaches to accounting for the “imperial pedigree of cosmopolitanism” are listed in Scott L. Malcolmson (234–7).

<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere, I analyze how the novel “confounds the language of geographical and affective conquest” in its narration of Cyrus's travels (46).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Timothy Chappell's criticism of characterization of Socrates as a cosmopolitan (17–33).

<sup>9</sup> On the “negativity” of Cynical cosmopolitanism, see also Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé's commentary on Diogenes Laertius (195–200).

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protections on the basis of “natural” rights.<sup>10</sup> A careful examination of the writings of the self-proclaimed *cosmopolites* of the Enlightenment reveals that, for them, the term often served as a sign of belonging in a rarefied philosophical community that transcended state borders but was definitely not coterminous with the mass of all humanity.<sup>11</sup> Other early modern intellectuals viewed cosmopolitanism as a type of armchair travel *par excellence*: the ability to “tout savoir, tout voir, et ne rien ignorer” without ever leaving the library or interacting with actual foreigners (Naudé 23). Far from outlining an ethical position on the correct way to relate with fellow inhabitants of the cosmos, this attitude might be better characterized as an intellectual or aesthetic cosmopolitanism focused on the breadth of learning of the cosmopolite himself.<sup>12</sup>

Against the backdrop of these “imperfect” pre-modern cosmopolitanisms, Scudéry’s characterization of Cyrus as a cosmopolitan hero contributes an original, unique reflection on the moral dimension of such a universal worldview. Throughout the novel, Cyrus’s prodigious knowledge of cultures beyond Persia as well as his compassionate acceptance of strangers into his circle of friends constitute key factors in his unique form of heroism. In addition, by framing Cyrus’s cosmopolitanism as a trait worthy of imitation by readers, the novel launches an examination of the individual’s ability or responsibility to know and accept the world’s diversity especially when face-to-face with foreigners. With its emphasis on the individual’s personal, ethical relation to foreigners, the novel echoes many tenets of Stoic cosmopolitanism, in particular the concept of *oikeiōsis* or the mental exercise through which alien persons or objects are assimilated into the realm of the familiar.<sup>13</sup> The notion that the novelist Scudéry imported Stoic wisdom into her fiction is not new. John Lyons has beautifully illustrated how she works with Stoic theories of imagination in

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<sup>10</sup> For discussions of the limits of early modern cosmopolitanisms see Cavallar (esp. 2–9) and Heater.

<sup>11</sup> See the characterization of Enlightenment cosmopolitans in Schlereth (1–24).

<sup>12</sup> Larry Norman proposed the distinction between aesthetic and ethical cosmopolitanism in his talk “Temporal Cosmopolitanism and the Critique of Cultural Narcissism under Louis XIV.” See also his *The Shock of the Ancient* (132–36). On more recent forms of “aesthetic cosmopolitanism,” see also Vertovec and Cohen (6–7).

<sup>13</sup> F. H. Sandbach helpfully summarizes: “oikeiōsis is the process of making a thing belong, and this is achieved by the recognition that the thing is oikeion, that it does belong to you, that it is yours” (32). Classicists credit the second-century CE Stoic thinker Hierocles with having first developed the concept of *oikeiōsis* as a form of perception of a person or object as contiguous with the self and as the basis for an ethics. See the translation of Hierocles’s fragments and commentary in Ramelli (xxx–xlvii). See also Obbink (178–95).

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*Clélie, histoire romaine*, adapting them to her own moral agenda of improving social interactions.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in *Le Grand Cyrus*, Scudéry updates the classical model of cosmopolitanism first by translating the Stoic theory of perception into a seventeenth-century aesthetic vocabulary and second by emphasizing the importance of sociability within the cosmopolitan community as a means to reinforce harmony and cohesion. By adapting Stoic thought to her own culture in these two ways, Scudéry developed a cosmopolitan ideal distinguished from those of her contemporaries for its emphasis on the social rather than the purely intellectual.

This essay aims to illuminate Scudéry's original perspective on cosmopolitanism through an analysis of the passage that most clearly outlines the concept: a long section of the eighth volume of *Artamène* which we might call the "conversation on foreigners." At this point in the novel, Cyrus has been reunited with his beloved Mandane after many adventures that separated them and has resolved to end his imperial campaign in favor of enjoying a peaceful life with her. The hero is relaxing in a courtly setting with Mandane and a group of their noble friends when their tranquility is interrupted by the arrival of a group of envoys from Péranus, the Prince of Phocée, who has helped to found the city of Marseille. These strange visitors with their alien clothing, language, and manners intrigue and astound all the characters, including the well-traveled conqueror himself. Their astonishment leads to a lengthy discussion about the appropriate way to treat foreigners, a conversation that eventually leads to the conclusion that "il y avait beaucoup d'injustice, à n'avoir pas beaucoup d'indulgence pour les Etrangers" (8: 345). This statement in favor of tolerance may well strike modern readers as bland and facile. It is significant in the context of early modern discourses on cosmopolitanism, however, because it frames cultural tolerance not as an idealized attitude but rather in practical terms of "justice" and ethics. As I will show, the conversation not only debates the question of whether cultural tolerance is desirable but also examines exactly what that tolerance might entail. In this way, Scudéry shifts the parameters of the early modern understanding of cosmopolitanism away from a purely abstract, intellectual notion of open-

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<sup>14</sup> Lyons shows that *Clélie* reflects the Stoic idea, filtered through Montaigne, that the imagination may be used to overcome fears and other obstacles to the good life. Scudéry's unique perspective on this concept stems from her emphasis on its potential to foster a good life for the community and not just for the individual. As Lyons notes, Scudéry "was unusual in her day in proposing a secular education of the mind to improve social interaction" and to "forg[e] a common vision in a variety of organized groups" (163).

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mindedness and toward a more practical, moral stance on the correct way to treat strangers both personally and politically.

In recent years, critics have given increasing recognition to Scudéry's status as a moralist, philosopher, and even political theorist of seventeenth-century France.<sup>15</sup> Typically, though, it is not her novels but her later works, *Conversations morales* and *Conversations sur divers sujets*, that are considered in this light. The conversations on abstract topics such as "De l'air galant" or "Du mensonge" update the classic genre of philosophical dialogue through allusion to salon culture: They incorporate multiple voices, rather than the dialogue's stark pair of interlocutors, to elaborate many facets of a topic before reaching a conclusion.<sup>16</sup> They also privilege wit and a refined style in their language, bringing the rhetorical arts to bear on the pursuit of moral or philosophical truth. Although the volumes of *Conversations* may be the most obvious place to seek Scudéry's moral and ethical meditations, the novels should not be overlooked as an equally rich source. Nathalie Grande notes the "grande continuité entre les romans et les œuvres morales scudériennes" (40). Indeed, several of the "conversations morales" had originally appeared in her novels.<sup>17</sup> The "conversation on foreigners" was never extracted from *Le Grand Cyrus* for publication as a moral conversation. Yet, it shares many of the characteristics of those novelistic passages that later made their way into Scudéry's volumes of moral writing.<sup>18</sup> A "set piece" discussion among characters (Goldsmith 48–9), it is digressive from the primary narrative and relatively self-contained. Like many of Scudéry's other moral conversations, it is led by a wise female character, Mandane, who seeks to correct a flawed belief held by another character. Through discussion, Mandane persuades not only the character in error but also the rest of their assembled friends to adopt her view. The conversation concludes on

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<sup>15</sup> Some examples of scholarship that explicitly approaches Scudéry as a philosopher as well as a novelist include Burch (115–71) and Hogg.

<sup>16</sup> On the influence of salon culture on the form of the conversation, see Goldsmith (44–6).

<sup>17</sup> Delphine Denis notes that conversations play an increasingly important role in Scudéry's novels over the course of the 1650s, with a significant jump in the number of intercalated conversations occurring in volumes 9 and 10 of *Le Grand Cyrus* (*La muse galante* 41).

<sup>18</sup> Further support for the "continuity" of Scudérian conversations may be found in Delphine Denis's recent collection of those on topics related to *galanterie* which includes both conversations published in the late seventeenth-century *recueils* and conversations never before excerpted from the novels. Denis notes the "unité de l'ensemble" ("*De l'air galant*" 15).

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a note of consensus and harmony as the narrator articulates the moral “finding” of the participants.

In fact, the initial presentation of the conversation immediately signals to the reader that this section of the novel constitutes a moralizing digression from the main narrative. The arrival of Périanus’s envoys at Cyrus’s court establishes what Delphine Denis calls the “fonction intra-fictionnelle” of the discussion—that is, it is motivated by and enables the continuation of the plot (*La muse galante* 48). Yet, these foreigners appear not so much as characters in their own right as figures of absolute alterity. The novel’s presentation of the emissaries highlights their radical foreignness, describing their strange clothing in some detail. While the leader of the embassy, Thrytème, can communicate with Cyrus and Mandane in Greek, the lingua franca of Cyrus’s territory, his two companions do not speak any of Cyrus’s languages and therefore remain uncannily silent throughout their visit. Finally, Cyrus admits he is completely unfamiliar with the kingdom the envoys represent, placing them literally off the map of the known world. As Cyrus’s friend Artamas marvels, “à ce que je vois, il y a encore des Peuples que le vainqueur de l’Asie ne connaît pas” (8: 336). Inspired by these representatives of the unknown and utterly foreign, Cyrus, Mandane, and their friends embark on a discussion of the proper response to such radical otherness.

Doralise, a female companion of Mandane, launches the conversation with a provocative response of disgust for the visitors. According to the narrator, she “trouvait je ne sais quoi de Barbare, à l’air de ces Etrangers” (8: 337). She then congratulates Cyrus on his decision to limit the extent of his empire to the eastern part of the Mediterranean. Mocking the strangers’ dress and manners, she affirms that Cyrus and Mandane are right “de ne vouloir pas de pareils Sujets” (8: 337). Doralise’s “agréable raillerie” at the expense of the envoys prompts Mandane to come to their defense. She takes charge of the conversation in order to “corriger” Doralise’s xenophobia and their friends’ complicity with her ridiculing of them. Presenting two opposite views with only occasional interjections by other voices, this conversation may be classified as an example of the “agonal” type of conversation, strongly influenced, according to Delphine Denis, by the Aristotelian version of dialectic and aimed at convincing the incorrect party to adopt the correct perspective (*La muse galante* 66–7). The goal of the conversation is essentially persuasive and pedagogical, leading the reader as well as the fictional interlocutors to accept the community’s moral and aesthetic code.

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Foreshadowed in this way by the form and structure of the conversation, Mandane's triumph at the conclusion of the discussion comes as no surprise. The richness of the conversation lies instead in its exposé of the terms used to address foreignness and tolerance in seventeenth-century France, gradually shifting the debate from a matter of individual judgment toward one of positive action. Throughout much of the conversation, the interlocutors reflect the kind of intellectual or aesthetic cosmopolitanism seen in contemporary discourses, relying on a vocabulary of vision, appreciation, and judgment to address the place of difference and diversity in the world. Doralise, for example, explains that her aversion to the foreign visitors derives from the injury their appearance and manners cause to her aesthetic sensibilities.

Ce que je veux...est qu'un Etranger se conforme en effet autant qu'il peut, aux coutumes des Pays où il est: et qu'il ne surprenne pas les yeux par ces habillements bizarres, où l'on n'est point accoutumé, si ce n'est en quelque magnifique Entrée, où il soit mêlé dans une grande Troupe. Je veux encore qu'il parle peu, s'il n'est assuré de parler bien: je veux de plus qu'il se contente de paraître libéral, et magnifique, sans prétendre de passer pour poli, ni pour Galant: puis qu'il est vrai que la politesse, et la galanterie, sont des choses de mode et d'usage, et qui ont leur bienséance particulière en chaque Nation, dont un Etranger n'est guère souvent capable hors de son Pays. (8: 343)

For Doralise, foreignness consists of “habillements bizarres,” “la politesse, et la galanterie ... des choses de mode et d'usage,” surface appearance and behavior. Foreign clothes are disruptive because they “surprise the eyes.” Silence is preferable to foreign accents. A foreigner should do his best to “appear” virtuous and noble – worthy of his hosts' company – but should not attempt a poor imitation of local manners which might only result in an uncanny or grotesque spectacle. Doralise's objection to foreigners, in other words, is an aesthetic response to their incongruous appearance in her social landscape.

In fact, the language Doralise employs to articulate her distaste for foreigners echoes the terms used in seventeenth-century aesthetic discourses to discuss the appropriate representation of foreign peoples and places in works of visual art and literature. Many of the period's prescriptive texts on fiction or painting frame the depiction of foreigners in terms of *bienséance* and *vraisemblance*. Seventeenth-century thinkers accepted the notion, articulated by Doralise, that each “Nation” had its own laws, cus-

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toms, and manners, its own “*bienséance particulière*.” To create a representation of these peoples that respected the imperative of verisimilitude, therefore, it was necessary and appropriate to depict their “*coutumes*” as accurately as possible. To cite one pertinent example, in her preface to *Ibrahim ou l’Illustre Bassa* (1641), Scudéry explains the importance of realistically describing foreign settings and people: “entre toutes les règles qu’il faut observer, en la composition de ces Ouvrages, celle de la vraisemblance, est sans doute la plus nécessaire.... J’ai donc essayer de ne m’en éloigner jamais: j’ai observé pour cela, les mœurs, les coutumes, les loix, les religions, et les inclinations des peuples” (n. pag.). She goes on to suggest that to adapt representations of foreigners to the sensibilities of the target readers—to name a Turkish character “Antoine,” for example—would be ridiculous. A plausible, and thus aesthetically pleasing, depiction of Turks required that those Turks behaved “like Turks.”<sup>19</sup>

In seventeenth-century aesthetics, then, it is appropriate (*bienséant*) that foreigners should conform to their own country’s standards of propriety (*bienséances*). This is precisely the argument that Mandane first employs to counter Doralise’s criticism of foreigners. Like Doralise, Mandane subscribes to the notion that *bienséances* are regionally specific. She asks: “N’est-il pas vrai encore, que non seulement chaque Nation, et chaque Royaume, a ses coutumes particulières, mais que même chaque Province, et chaque Ville, a ses bienséances différentes?” (8: 341–2). Mandane argues that these differences are correct, even positive: “Celui qui est né à Athènes,” she states, “ne peut pas être né à Babilone” (8: 341). Because it is natural and proper for an individual to practice the customs of his birthplace, Mandane concludes that expecting foreigners to assimilate to the customs of the countries they visit is grotesquely inappropriate:

N’est-ce pas être déraisonnable de vouloir qu’un Egyptien soit Persan, lors qu’il sera à Persépolis ; qu’un Persan soit Egyptien quand il sera à Memphis ; et que se changeant de Ville en Ville, il fasse ce qu’on dit que fait cet Animal qui prend toutes les couleurs sur quoi il passe ? (8: 342)

By comparing an Egyptian who attempts to conform to Persian manners in Persian company to a kind of “animal” like a chameleon, Mandane depicts assimilation as monstrous, inappropriate, an affront to *bienséance* in the broadest sense of that term. Mandane’s argument for tolerance here echoes the reasoning contained in the preface to *Ibrahim*: an Egyptian should be-

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<sup>19</sup> A more in-depth analysis of how Scudéry uses allusions to foreignness to articulate her theory of *vraisemblance* may be found in Welch (22–4).



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have like an Egyptian, a Turk like a Turk. The key difference is that Mandane uses the idea of cultural appropriateness not to prescribe a way of representing fictional foreigners but rather to justify an ethical stance toward real ones, even when they travel outside of their proper landscapes.

This subtle shift from a purely “aesthetic cosmopolitanism” to something approaching an “ethical cosmopolitanism” becomes a theme of the conversation, coming under closer scrutiny as the discussion unfolds. Doralise responds to Mandane’s reproaches by insisting on the utterly aesthetic nature of her reaction to the foreign guests. “C’est cette différence, qui par sa nouveauté, et par sa bizarrerie, me surprend, et me divertit, sans que pour cela je fasse injustice à cet Etranger qui sert à mon divertissement” (8: 342). She contends that she only mocked the strangers for exterior, superficial traits. Foreignness, for Doralise, resides in these “petites choses extérieures” which are quite separate from the essential nature, the “spirit and soul” of the alien guest. Moreover, her “mistreatment” of foreigners is expressed in a gallant vocabulary of ridicule rather than in terms of real injury: The foreigners are “plaisants à voir” and provoke an “envie de rire” (8: 338). Furthermore, she contends:

Si on examine bien, de quelle nature est le rire qui me surprend en ces occasions, on trouvera qu’il n’est pas si malicieux que celui dont presque tout le monde se trouve capable, lors qu’à quelque Course de chevaux, on voit quelques fois le cheval du meilleur de ses Amis, broncher lourdement, et renverser par terre: car enfin, il y a bien plus de malignité à rire de ces sortes de choses, qui font très souvent un grand mal...que de se divertir comme je fais, d’un Habilleme[n]t bizarre. (8:344)

Diminishing the “malignité” of her reaction to the foreign visitors, Doralise characterizes her “anti-cosmopolitanism,” if we can call it that, as a matter of aesthetic judgment. Her laughter is not mean-spirited ridicule but an appropriate response to a ridiculous tableau—one that may even demonstrate her good taste. Consequently, she denies that her prejudice has any ethical or moral ramifications.

Mandane, too, seems to subscribe to the notion that cultural difference consists for the most part of exterior practices and visual signs such as dress, manners, and comportment. She affirms that difference consists of “les habillemens pour les cérémonies ; pour les civilités ; pour la grâce du corps ; et pour toutes ces petites choses extérieures qui frappent les yeux, et qui ne tiennent point du tout, ni à l’âme, ni à l’esprit” (8: 342). Early in the dialogue, Mandane chides Doralise: “vous ne leur pouvez reprocher

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que la forme de leur Habillement, et je ne sais quel air qui est différent de celui des Gens que vous voyez tous les jours” (8: 339). Her language, like Doralise’s, privileges the visual, focusing not merely on foreigners’ clothes but on the “form” of their dress.<sup>20</sup> Yet, Mandane shows how the perception and appreciation of foreignness must lead to thoughtfulness rather than laughter. She describes a mental process through which the surprising sight of foreignness allows for an adjustment or expansion of vision. First, she asks Doralise to try to see the world through the eyes of the guests she ridicules: “Comme ils vous trouvent sans doute aussi différente des Dames qu’ils ont accoutumé de voir, que vous le trouvez différents des hommes que vous voyez, il peut être que toute aimable que vous êtes, ils pensent de vous ce que vous pensez d’eux” (8: 339). This relativist stance follows logically from Mandane’s earlier affirmations of the appropriateness of cultural difference. Just as individuals naturally practice the customs of their own country, it is to be expected that people distinguish between what seems normal and what seems strange based what they are “accustomed” to seeing.

The expectation and acceptance that such judgments are culturally specific allows Mandane to ask her interlocutor to project herself imaginatively into the others’ shoes, to see herself as a stranger through their eyes. This recommendation is familiar enough from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century skeptics and relativists who concluded that “il n’y a vertu qui ne soit prise pour un vice, ni vice qui ne tienne lieu de vertu ailleurs” (*La Mothe Le Vayer* 52). In this conversation, however, acknowledging the culturally-bound nature of aesthetic and moral judgments is neither an end in itself nor a means of criticizing one’s own society. Rather, Scudéry demonstrates how a relativist perspective might serve as the basis for a practical ethics. Building on Mandane’s statement, Cyrus advises Doralise that she could change her perspective in more concrete ways. Familiarity with foreigners, he suggests, will eventually overcome her distaste for their alterity. Offering their own friendship as an example, he notes:

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<sup>20</sup> Her evocation of a “je ne sais quel air” of strangeness slightly complicates the view of difference as exterior and superficial. The phrase echoes both the novel’s earlier description of the envoys’ “je ne sais quoi de Barbare” and the expression “je ne sais quoi,” which typically designates those intangible, indefinable qualities that, despite our inability to locate or articulate them, play a significant role in the formation of taste and attraction. The two “je ne sais” in the conversation add ambiguity and complexity to the passages’ construction of difference as a set of conventional habits proper to a particular country, pointing toward the possibility of a more essentialist view of culture even as they continue to draw from an aesthetic vocabulary normally associated with questions of taste.

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Comme je suis né en Perse, et que vous êtes née à Sardis, je puis dire que ces Etrangers ne vous ont pas dû paraître plus Etrangers que moi, la première fois que vous m'avez vu : c'est pourquoi je vous conjure de me dire sérieusement, combien il y a que vos yeux sont accoutumés à me voir. (8: 339)

In this way, Scudéry begins to suggest how an aesthetic approach to cosmopolitanism—adjusting one's vision to see and appreciate difference in its appropriate context—might serve as the basis for an ethics of tolerance and hospitality toward actual foreign people.

The argument that an intellectual tolerance or appreciation for foreigners might lead to deeper “mental, psychological, and ethical dispositions to bear and accept other persons” in the flesh mirrors an element of Stoic cosmopolitanism that Cheikh Mbacké Gueye calls “integration” (5–6). Scudéry comments and builds on this theory by having her characters debate the ability of ordinary mortals to perform this exacting mental task. The characters note that Cyrus's optimistic contention that the eyes can grow “accustomed” to sights foreign to their native culture reflects the hero's own journeys, experiences, and “cosmopolitan” nature. Indeed, as he has repeatedly demonstrated throughout the novel, Cyrus embodies the Stoic ideal of world citizenship, practicing a form of the “concentric circles” model of ever expanding relations, by forging friendships with strangers from increasingly distant realms of his expanding empire. The question for the conversation then becomes: Is Cyrus singular in his capacity to relate to foreigners—i.e., does this quality constitute part of his unique heroism—or, rather, should Cyrus be considered an exemplar of cosmopolitanism, a model to be imitated? Doralise subscribes to the former view. In response to Cyrus's suggestion that she can grow used to foreigners as he himself has done, she praises Cyrus's admirable tolerance but resists the notion that others might be able to follow suit: “vous êtes du Pays de tout le monde,” she acknowledges, “mais ... tout le monde n'est pas du vôtre” (8: 339–40). Mandane, on the other hand, figures Cyrus as an imitable model of tolerance toward strangers. At last she declares:

Pour ces Etrangers qui vous ont tant fait rire, je les prends en ma protection: et je vous déclare de plus, que s'il vient des Ethiopiens, des Indiens, ou des Scithes à Ecbatane, quand nous y serons, je les défendrai contre vous, avec une fermeté étrange: car je vous avoue que je ne puis souffrir cette espèce d'injustice, quoiqu'elle soit presque universelle. (8: 340)

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Depicting herself as defender and protector of foreigners, Mandane rhetorically occupies Cyrus's role as the imperial guardian of his diverse subjects. While Cyrus has demonstrated a preternatural ability to relate to strangers throughout the novel, here Mandane shows her interlocutors that any human can and should follow the conqueror's example, a conclusion which has perhaps already been suggested by the novel's intertextual relation to the mirror for Princes genre. Indeed, Mandane goes on to state that it constitutes "quelque inhumanité à railler d'un Etranger, seulement parce qu'il est étranger" (8: 340), extending the obligation to defend foreigners to "humanity" itself.

In its evocations of "protection" and "defense" against "injustice," a human requirement to prevent the suffering caused by intolerance and mockery, the rhetoric of this passage exhibits what Denis has termed the "vocabulary of the Tribunal" (*La muse galante* 70–1). It also echoes or prefigures the "legalistic" discourse of human rights that emerged in the Enlightenment (Schlereth 119–20). Yet, the kind of "justice" toward foreigners articulated in the conversation is situated outside the realm of the strictly legal or political. Indeed, the novel makes a point of the fact that the envoys who prompt the discussion hail from a place beyond Cyrus's current or projected empire. The purpose of the envoys' visit—to elicit Cyrus's help as a "character witness" for their Prince, to confirm his nobility in advance of his marriage – has a distinctly personal rather than traditionally diplomatic quality. The requirement to treat foreigners with respect and magnanimity is a moral imperative for the individual and for the community defined not according to political structures but rather according to affective bonds.

The form of the conversation both performs and reinforces this ideal of a moral community that exists beyond superficial regional differences as well as beyond politics. Agreement is achieved through affectionate discussion rather than through force. Mandane frequently uses rhetorical questions or *interrogatio*, a style of speech that implicates the audience in order to demonstrate that her view is or should be self-evident and widely shared. Secondary characters chime in to show that her persuasive tactics are having their desired effects. One character concedes, for example, "cette opinion est si équitable ... qu'il ne semble pas qu'on en puisse avoir d'autre" (8: 340–1).<sup>21</sup> Eventually, these rhetorical and narrative gestures of agreement culminate in true consensus, and the narrator informs the reader

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<sup>21</sup> Goldsmith discusses the importance of "social sameness" and harmony in Scudéry's conversations (43).

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that “toute la Compagnie tomba pourtant d'accord” (8: 345). By reaching this “accord,” moreover, the conversation’s participants come closer to the ideal represented by the novel’s hero. At the end of the conversation, the characters represent a “utopian” community in which every voice counts and yet everyone (eventually) agrees.<sup>22</sup>

In this sense, in the conversation on foreigners, the subject of “difference” thus becomes an opportunity for the reinforcement of “sameness”—both within Cyrus’s group of friends and beyond it, through Mandane’s proposal that every human being is capable of respecting the humanity of strangers.<sup>23</sup> In the final reiteration of the conversation’s moral, this ideal of sameness appears in a new light in the narrator’s re-articulation of the connection between the initial “aesthetic” approach to foreigners and “ethical” conclusions. At the end of the discussion, the narrator reports that all the characters agree with Mandane that:

[I]l y avait beaucoup d'injustice, à n'avoir pas beaucoup d'indulgence pour les Etrangers; et à faire passer quelquefois les bienséances de leurs Pays pour des incivilités, ou pour des marques de défaut d'esprit: concluant tout d'une voix, que puisqu'on pouvait être fort peu honnête homme, quoiqu'on fût admirablement habillé; qu'on fit bien la révérence à la mode de son Pays; et qu'on eût l'accent de la Cour extrêmement pur; il pourrait être aussi qu'un Etranger qui n'aurait rien de toutes ces petites choses, qui ne changent ni le cœur, ni l'esprit, ne laisserait pas de pouvoir mériter beaucoup d'estime, et beaucoup de louange, quoique son habillement parût bizarre; que sa révérence fût contrainte; et que son accent fût mauvais et qu'ainsi il fallait toujours faire grâce aux Etrangers, de tout ce qu'ils ne pouvaient pas acquérir facilement: et se donner la peine de chercher dans leur esprit, et dans leur âme, leurs

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<sup>22</sup> Grimm argues that the novel reflects a “utopian” polity that invites the participation of all its noble subjects (447). The importance of participation and consensus in the societies depicted by Scudéry is also highlighted by Bannister who notes that Cyrus’s heroism stems from his “socialized” status. As Bannister remarks, Cyrus is “admirable because he reinforces the social norms, not because he transcends them” (181). DeJean analyzes the harmonious form of the conversation in Scudéry’s novels as a reflection of the collaborative practices used to write them and as a model for a new form of “civic virtue” (82–93).

<sup>23</sup> Once again, the conversation parallels Stoic ideals such as an “overriding concern for concord” (Schofield 26) and the preference for a voluntary “community founded on common acceptance of social norms” over formal polities governed by oppressive laws (Schofield 73).

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bonnes qualités, ou leurs défauts, pour en pouvoir juger avec équité. (8: 345–46)

The passage, like the conversation as a whole, acknowledges real, material, and meaningful differences between individuals hailing from different parts of the world. It constructs these differences, however, as largely superficial traits: habits and customs unrelated to the “spirit” or “soul” of the individual. Cultural difference again takes the form of an aesthetic category, consisting of surface trappings, inviting judgments on the basis of taste. Most important, according to the logic of the passage, the alienating appearance of foreigners should not pose an obstacle to perfect understanding, as long as individuals possess the patience and acuity to “penetrate” the surface to perceive the universal good and bad qualities within each other in order to make a moral rather than aesthetic judgment.

Although the conversation finally makes the universalist assumption that “spirit” and “soul” translate legibly across the outer shell of cultural differences, at the same time it destabilizes the perceived universality of courtly traits. Scudéry’s characters come to realize that an individual who has mastered the “accent” and manners of the best society may not in fact be inherently worthy of esteem, and that the same perspicacity required to judge a foreigner must also be employed to assess a fellow countryman. The conversation thus displaces a notion of community based on language, etiquette, and other external signs in favor of an ideal, cosmopolitan society born out of shared moral and spiritual qualities—the kind of community forged by the conversation itself.

In the “conversation on foreigners,” the form of the Scudérian moral conversation thus serves as a template for the cosmopolitan attitude it valorizes. Individual participants confront different perspectives and work to achieve the best synthesis capable of convincing all interlocutors. Disagreements are aired in a context of mutual respect and even affection. The diversity of voices—diverse both in the views they express and in their subtleties of style—are gradually, pleasantly socialized and brought into greater harmony. The aesthetic of the conversation ultimately brings about and reinforces a particular ethics of relation founded on friendship, spiritual as well as intellectual insight, and the desire to create a harmonious community that transcends the bounds of any state. In this way, Scudéry’s work reveals how the art of rhetoric – particularly when employed in the sociable setting of the conversation – might serve as an effective supplement to pure thought in the development of a cohesive

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ethical framework.<sup>24</sup> Philosophy, Scudéry implies, must be social, especially when addressing topics of tolerance, friendship, and community. Ironically, the social character of Scudéry's work may be responsible in large part for its exclusion from the canon of early modern philosophical writing. At the same time, this quality makes it a particularly rich potential model for today's cosmopolitan thinkers who are themselves turning to "conversation" as the most appropriate form for ethical discourse.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Michel Meyer emphasizes the ethical character of rhetoric in defining the art as the "négotiation de la distance entre individus" (293).

<sup>25</sup> I am thinking particularly of Kwame Antony Appiah who writes that conversation provides a way of establishing "harmony" (71) even in the absence of agreement, showing that "we can live together without agreeing on what the values are that make it good to live together; we can agree about what to do in most cases, without agreeing about why it is right" (78).

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