

SIMON GABAY - NOVEMBER 10, 2016

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**DUBIOUS LETTERS OF MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ  
ON THE AUTOGRAPH MARKET IN THE 19TH C.**

# INTRO

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- ▶ Change the topic of the presentation
- ▶ I thought I had found counterfeits...

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- ▶ Change the topic of the presentation
- ▶ I thought I had found counterfeits...
- ▶ ... but it turned out to be more complicated

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- ▶ “Dubious” document

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  - ▶ Other problems: facsimiles, copies, *etc.*

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- ▶ *Dubious* documents as a source for reader-response criticism.
- ▶ Material history of the *Correspondance* (cf. Nies)

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- ▶ Identifying autograph documents is our primary objective

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  - ▶ Occasion to get a glimpse of the world of collectors in the 19th c.
- ▶ From which we will try to draw some conclusions

# THE “SÉVIGNÉ MONSTRE”



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- ▶ Charlemagne-Ferdinand Fossé-Darcosse (1780-1864)  
collection sold in 1861

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- ▶ One of the finest French collection (1298 lots)

## THE SALE

Author	Description	Price
Bourdaluoué	Lot n°164: A.L.S. to M. le Pelletier (July 5, 1683), 1 p. in-12°.	
Chapelain	Lot n°252: A.L.S. to the duc de Longueville (July 3, 1641), 3 p. in-4°.	48 Fr. (bought 29 Fr. 50 c.)
Dacier	Lot n°350: 1 A.L.S. of Mme Dacier to M. Huet, abbé d'Aunay (July 6, 1680), 2 p. in-4°. 1 A.L.S. of M. Dacier to M. Huet, abbé d'Aunay (August 12, 1681), 3 p. in-8°.	105 Fr. (bought 20 Fr. in 1846)
Diane de Poitiers	Lot n°371: notebook of 35 p., small in-f°, about the extraordinary expenditures. Signed	89 Fr.
Diderot	Lot n°372: A.L.S. to M. de la Condamine (December 16, 1752), 1 p. in-8°.	33 Fr.

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Author	Description	Price
Du Cange	Lot n°386: A.L.S. to M. Guichenon (January 1st, 1659), 2 p. in-4°.	20 Fr. (bought 8 Fr. in 1846)
François de Sales	Lot n°450: A.L.S. to Mlle de Picarsin (February 18, 1722), 1 p. in-4°.	71 Fr. (bought 18 Fr. in 1847)
Henry II	Lot n°503: L.S. to Odet de Selve (July 25, 1548) about Marie Stuart.	75 Fr.
Marie-Antoinette	Lot n°1255: A.L.S. to Mme de Lamballe (April 4, 179...), 1 p. 1/2 in-8° ; and D.S.	215 Fr.
Marat	Lot n°662: A.L.S. to Anisson Duperron (April 31, 17...), 1/2 .p. in-4°; 2 ot. fragm.	61 Fr. (bought 27 Fr.)
Massillon	Lot n°708: A.L.S. (June 13, 1705), 4 p. in-8°.	79 Fr. (bought 73 Fr. in 1846)

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Sale	Description	Price
Leo X	Lot n°1257: A.L.S. (in latin) to king Charles VIII (April 2, 1493), 1 p. 1/2 in-4°.	84 Fr.
Molière	Lot n°771: D.S. (minute of a notarial obligation)	500 Fr.
Montesquieu	Lot n°776: A.L.S. to M. Grosley (July 3, 1752), 1 p. in-4°.	120 Fr. (bought 42 Fr.)
Newton	Lot n°811: D.S. (memorandum, June 28, 1707)	55 Fr.
Racine	Lot n°933: A.L.S., prose and verses, 2 p. 1/2 in-4°.	218 Fr.
Sévigné	Lot n°1060: Fragment of A.L., 2 p. 1/2 in-4°, with 8 ll. of l'abbé de Coulanges.	151 Fr.

## THE "SÉVIGNÉ MONSTRE"

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### PRICE OF SÉVIGNÉ'S MANUSCRIPT IN THE 1850S

Author	Description	Price
Duplessis collection, December 1855	Lot n°922: A.L.S. (1653?), 2 p. in-4°.	153 Fr.
Charavay fixed price catalogue, November	Lot n°9426: A.L., 3 p. 1/4 in-8°	165 Fr.
René collection, February 1860	Lot n°460 : A.L. (June 4, 1690), 3 p. in-4°.	340 Fr.
Lajarriette, November 1860	Lot n°2694: Fragment of A.L. (September 27, 1687), 2 p. in-4°.	100 Fr.
Fossé-Darcosse, November 1861	Lot n°1060: Fragment of A.L., 2 p. 1/2 in-4°, with 8 ll. of l'abbé de Coulanges.	151 Fr.
Count M... collection, April 1864	Lot n°668 : A.L. (June 4, 1690), 3 p. in-4°.	199 Fr.

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Sale	Description	Price
Gilbert collection, December 1865	Lot n°1120: A.L.S. (1653 ?), 2 p. in-4°.	299 Fr.
Marquis C... T. collection, June 1866	Lot n°190: A.L. (January 8, 1674), 1 p. small in-4°.	148 Fr.
Ibid.	Lot n°191: A.L. (November 4, 1671), 1 p. in-4°.	160 Fr.
	Average	191 Fr.



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- ▶ Not autograph, but not a counterfeit

# THE LONDON FACSIMILE



## DESCRIPTION

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- ▶ British Museum,  
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## DESCRIPTION

- ▶ British Museum, n°1859,0514.306 to 343
- ▶ work of Ellis Ellis (1769-1859), esquire of Bath and important book, object and autograph collector
- ▶ A grangerised book
- ▶ In 1847, Ellis Ellis decided to rebound the 12 volumes of the 1823 edition in 38 quarto volumes, adding while doing so 9316 prints of various kinds (etchings, engravings, lithographs, facsimiles of autograph)

# A "GRANGERISED" BOOK - I



LETTRES  
DE  
MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ.

LETTRE I.

DE MADEMOISELLE DE RABUTIN-CHANTAL<sup>1</sup>  
A MÉNAGE.

Paris . . . .

Je vous dis encore une fois que nous ne nous entendons point, et vous êtes bien heureux d'être éloquent, car sans cela tout ce que vous m'avez mandé ne vaudroit guère, quoique cela soit mer-

<sup>1</sup> Mademoiselle de Rabutin-Chantal, sous la tutelle de son oncle, l'abbé de Coulanges, apprenoit le latin, l'italien, l'espagnol. Ayant atteint l'âge où toutes les facultés de l'esprit et de l'imagination se développent, elle voyoit souvent Ménage et Chapelain; Ménage surtout, plus assidu, doté d'une mémoire prodigieuse, très-versé dans les poésies latines, grecques, italiennes, fortifioit son goût pour la littérature, et se plaisoit à lui dévoiler toutes les beautés des langues qu'elle étudioit. Durant ce commerce d'érudition l'amour vint se mêler de la partie. Ménage en apprenant le mariage de mademoiselle de Rabutin-Chantal sentit son erreur, et traitoit sa chimère de *défunte amitié* en écrivant à son élève. Toutefois cette lettre et la suivante, en réponse aux lettres de Ménage, décèlent



THE CERTIFICATE

Lot 966. Sévigné (Madame de)  
Autograph Letter to Madame  
de Bellise, not signed — fine  
specimen & an undoubtedly auto-  
graph, no date:

Articles of Marriage between  
Madame de Sévigné & the Count  
de Ligneron 1669.

BM

Extract from Ray's Catalogue

## THE FACSIMILE

Le bon monsieur de Proffe vous  
remettra la description de  
l'entree faite a Monsieur de Valinot  
en sa qualite de gouverneur de  
Lyon je n'ai tel follement rien  
compris au dernier emblème  
me l'expliquant. au moins qu'il ne  
signifie les provinces de Lyonnais  
Jords et ~~Bevois~~.

Ma fille est pres de moi, nous  
attendons Monsieur de gignons  
pour les Jours de pasque, mais nous  
esperons vous avoir avec.  
mille tendres amitiés



GRAPHIC COMPARISON

Le bon monsieur de la poste vous  
remettra la description de  
l'œuvre faite à l'usage de l'administration

vous m'avez mentionné dans la grande  
partie quand vous m'avez passé  
les mots, que si nous voyons  
par un de mes lettres, mais ce n'est  
rien maintenant que je m'occupe

## THE TEXT

le bon monfieur de broffe vous remettra la description de l'entré faite  
à monfieur de Halincour a fa qualité de gouverneur de Lyon. je n'ai  
abfolument rien compris au dernier embleme vous me l'expliquerai a  
moin qu'il ne fignifie des provinces de Lyonnois forêts et baujolois.

ma fille eft pres de mois, nous attendons monsieur de grignan pour les  
fettes de pasque, mais nous esperons vous voire avan milles tandres  
amitie

[superscription, on the verso side] Madame

Madame de Bellufe

a Lyon

## ANALYSIS OF THE SPELLING

le bon monfieur de broffe vous remettra la description de l'entré faite  
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- ▶ In 1686, Madame de Grignan is in Paris with her mother. Her husband is probably with his wife in Paris.

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- ▶ It could be a copy
- ▶ It could be misattributed
- ▶ Is it forged?

# THE CAEN MANUSCRIPT

## DESCRIPTION

- ▶ Ms. 505, Bibliothèque municipale de Caen



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- ▶ Ms. 505, Bibliothèque municipale de Caen
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- ▶ Personal collection of Albert Mériel (1840-1892), maire de Caen
- ▶ Balzac, Dumas, La Fayette, Richelieu, Tocqueville or Voltaire...
- ▶ ... and a excerpt of a poem attributed to Mme de Sévigné

## THE CERTIFICATE

Cette feuille, extraite en ma présence, le 4 juillet 1832, de la partie autographe de l'album déposé dans le secrétaire de la chambre à coucher de Madame de Sévigné aux Rochers, a été offerte par moi à Mr Lair, à Caen, le 10 juillet 1832, avec l'inventaire de cet Album dans lequel se trouve un certificat constatant l'identité de l'écriture de Mme de Sevigné, identité dont je me suis assuré moi-même en comparant cette partie reconnue autographe par Mr Emile Dubois-Keratry, et L. M. correspond à la signature marie Rabutin de Chantal marquise de Sevigné, apposée à la suite de plusieurs comptes arrêtés entr'elle et son intendant, sur un autre registre déposé dans le même secrétaire

Caen le 10 juillet 1832

## THE MANUSCRIPT

malheureux <sup>de vouloir former sur ce modèle</sup>  
 de ces diuins objets la nature éternelle  
 plus malheureux encor les croyant éternels  
 de les croire accablés de soins continuels  
 car de si imaginer hors des remparts du monde  
 les dieux comblés de biens en vne paix profonde  
 ce sont des sentimens que nous receuons tous  
 par nos peres transmis et nez avecque nous  
 mais de les concevoir comme fait le vulgaire  
 agitez d'un courroux à leur bonheur contraire  
 rongés de déplaisirs attendus de pitié  
 et preuenus pour nous de haine ou d'amitié  
 les tenir tout puissant et les remplis sans cesse  
 de ce desir d'honneur que produit la faiblesse  
 leur donner les transports la tristesse et le ruy  
 ces marques du besoin que nous auons d'eulx  
 ce ne sont pas des dieux les images certaines  
 mais des soupçons obscurs des coniectures vaines  
 ainsi ne estimez pas qu'on ayt iamais esté  
 dans le mespris des dieux et dans l'impieté  
 pour auoir retranchés tous ces dieux de la fable  
 dont les grecs ont adonné vne foule incroyable  
 l'impieté seroit à les représenter  
 Je mesme que la fable ora les inventer  
 et par des sentimens laschés ou temeraires  
 a vouloir les soumettre aux vices ordinaire  
 de cette sorte aussi ne vous figurez pas  
 qu'un mouuement pieux précipite vos pas  
 si des le point du iour quelque terreur fruide  
 vous fait aller au temple adorer vne idole  
 si le visage pale et les yeux etonnerz  
 vous courez à l'autel où vous vous prostornez  
 croyant que cest assez pour se purger d'un crime  
 de promettre le sang d'une iune victime  
 et homme en sa conduite a de la pieté  
 qui des dieux i'ignor les connoist la maiesté





### THE TEXT

Malheureux de vouloir former sur ce modèle  
de ces diuins obiets la nature eternelle  
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- ▶ Apparently involuntarily misattributed

# CONCLUSION

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- ▶ Creation of gigantic extra-illustrated books

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- ▶ Impact on the manuscript material
- ▶ Desperately looking for autographs (Sévigné-Monstre)
  - Introduction of dubious documents (London)
  - Destruction of the original document (Caen)
- ▶ This desperate quest obeys to a logic

## CONCLUSION

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- ▶ Compulsive collectors
- ▶ Impact on the manuscript material

## CONCLUSION

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- ▶ Compulsive collectors
- ▶ Impact on the manuscript material
- ▶ Filling the Gap

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- ▶ Early texts (Caen)

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- ▶ Other forms/genres (Caen)
  - Prove that she is a writer
- ▶ Early texts (Caen)
  - Precocious writer

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- ▶ “nivellement linguistique des éditions de Madame de Sévigné au XVIIIe”



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  - helped the diffusion of (new) autographs.
- ▶ Complex task (mistakes)

## CONCLUSION

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- ▶ The financial value of mss. gives an idea of the literary value at a given time, in a given place
- ▶ The autograph market is a non-literary one
  - ▶ Non-scientific (experts being honest or dishonest)
  - ▶ Speculation
  - ▶ Fetishism
- ▶ But it has effect on the literary level
  - ▶ Fragmentation of the manuscript material
  - ▶ Apparition of unauthentic documents
- ▶ Inauthenticity is a *continuum*
  - ▶ A forged letter is not necessarily a unauthentic (Mussey)
  - ▶ An unauthentic letter is not necessarily forged (Mériel)
- ▶ It obeys to a logic
  - ▶ filling the gap of the collector
  - ▶ Filling the gap of the writer's work