Lost Innocence: The Ingénue in French Enlightenment Literature

By

Kelsey Roy

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The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Anne Vila (Advisor), Professor, French
Richard Goodkin, Professor, French
Martine Debaisieux, Professor, French
Ullrich Langer, Professor, French
Suzanne Desan, Professor, History

ABSTRACT: ***Lost Innocence: The Ingénue in French Enlightenment Literature***

This dissertation presents a character study of female ingénues in French literature between 1650 and 1800. I draw on scholarship in literary criticism, cultural history, gender studies, and art history to argue that the ingénue was uniquely well suited to serve as a motif in eighteenth-century literary discourses about the changes that were taking place in French society and culture. The ingénue's defining characteristics—youth, ignorance, lack of worldly experience, and tendency to express herself candidly—allowed her to function as a foil to the highly sophisticated social and cultural practices of Enlightenment France. Ultimately, I argue that the ingénue was a major figure in eighteenth-century French literature because her qualities spoke directly to the most fundamental philosophical preoccupations of the Enlightenment project: questions of human origins, human potential, the power and dangers of knowledge and ignorance, who could achieve enlightenment, and what French society should become as it transitioned into the modern era. The ingénue also represented qualities that, in the eyes of many French thinkers, had been lost to eighteenth-century France: simplicity, artlessness, plain-spokenness, and moral innocence.

Chapter 1 presents an overview of the ingénue's emergence as a literary persona, with a focus on the character's first appearance in Molière's *L'École des femmes* (1662). Chapter 2 discusses three texts in which ingénues are cast as "exotic" outsiders who come into contact with French polite society and provide critical perspectives on its cultural and social practices: Marivaux's *La Double Inconstance* (1723) and *L'Épreuve* (1740), and Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747). Chapter 3 examines the ways in which Diderot uses ingénues to express his theories of "good" aesthetics in his *Salons* and *La Religieuse* (1760/1780-1782). Finally, Chapter 4 explores how Choderlos de Laclos uses the three heroines of his novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782)—Madame de Merteuil, Madame de Tourvel, and the ingénue Cécile de Volanges—to do a case study of how different types of women were impacted by the dangers of living in late-eighteenth-century high society.

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INTRODUCTION: Defining the Ingénue

From a contemporary perspective, the ingénue might seem like a character who needs no introduction. In her present form, she can be broadly defined as an innocent, naïve, and virginal young woman: the "girl next door" who usually experiences disillusionment or distress upon entering the world for the first time, but who often manages to achieve happiness or wisdom as she grows more mature. Yet if we delve into the ingénue's history, it proves to be richer than we might at first assume. In French literature, the character as we know her today was effectively invented by Molière in the seventeenth century, when he created the ingénue Agnès to star in his comedy *L'École des femmes* (1662).[1] It was in the eighteenth century, however, that ingénues truly began to thrive in the French cultural imagination: many of that period's most prominent authors and artists, from Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux to Denis Diderot, featured ingénues in their major works. Ingénues also appeared in a remarkably wide range of literary and artistic genres over the course of the eighteenth century: one finds them in sentimental novels, social satires, libertine fiction, travel narratives, and genre paintings, to name a few examples. This study is an attempt to answer the following questions: firstly, what made the ingénue so well-suited to this cultural context? Secondly, how did she evolve as a literary figure over the course of the French Enlightenment? And finally, what insights can an analysis of this character type provide into the ideas of the authors and artists who depicted ingénues in their work?

To approach these questions, we must first understand what the term "ingénu(e)" meant in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French. Of course, Molière's Agnès was not the first naïve young woman to appear in French literature: premodern texts are full of female characters who are

[1] Françoise Berlan(-Lacourt), "L'ingénuité d'Agnès. Étude d'un champ lexical dans *L'École des femmes*," in *L'Information Grammaticale*, no. 24 (1985): 20-27.

variously labeled as "sottes," "jeunes filles," and "provinciales." Although these characters can vary somewhat in their basic traits and storylines, they are typically depicted as simple-minded girls whose role is to provide comic relief.[2] Conversely, the word "ingénu(e)" originally referred to a very different sort of person: as Françoise Berlan-Lacourt explains, it is derived from the Latin word "ingenuus," which can be defined as "inné, naturel, apporté au monde en naissant."[3] Yet as Berlan-Lacourt further explains, "ingenuus" also has civil and juridical connotations, in that it refers specifically to freeborn people as a social class. Consequently, in ancient times the term was associated with a particular code of conduct that was integral to this class's ethos: the notion that one should speak with sincerity, especially with regard to one's own faults and mistakes. As Berlan-Lacourt observes, these nuances were initially preserved when the term "ingénuité" was integrated into French: on the rare occasions when it appeared in print before the seventeenth century, it was used as a synonym for "noble franchise." In Berlan-Lacourt's words: "Presque toujours, comme on l'observera en français et dans d'autres langues comme l'italien et l'anglais, l'ingenuus dit la vérité pour reconnaître ses torts, fidèle en cela à ce code de non agressivité qui est à la base de sa conduite" (*Champ notionnel* 641).

In early seventeenth-century France, two developments produced a shift in the meaning of the word "ingénu(e)," thereby setting the stage for the creation of the fictional character as we know her today. The first of these was that the term "ingénuité" was increasingly associated with the word "naïveté," which is derived from the Latin "nativus." "Nativus" is similar to "ingenuus"

[2] On this topic, see Laurent Versini, *Laclos et la Tradition* (Paris: Librairie Klincksieck, 1968), 99-101, 109; and Charles Mazouer, *Le Personnage du naïf dans le théâtre comique du Moyen Âge à Marivaux* (Paris: Librairie Klincksieck, 1979). Mazouer's study provides a thorough overview of premodern works in which naïve young girls appear, but he is somewhat careless with his terminology: many of the characters whom he labels as "naïf/naïve" or "ingénu(e)" are never referred to as such in the texts he examines, but are instead described as "sot(te)," "niais(e)," "simple," and so forth.

[3] Françoise Berlan-Lacourt, *Le champ notionnel de l'ingénuité aux XVIIème et XVIIIème siècles*, thèse présentée à l'Université de Poitiers en vue de doctorat d'état, dir. Jean Pierre Seguin (le 27 juin 1994), 640.

in that it signifies "innate," "inborn," or "produced by nature," but unlike "ingenuus," it does not carry classist connotations.[4] In French, therefore, to express oneself with "naïveté" simply meant to express oneself naturally and openly, a concept which came to be associated with "ingénuité" as well. Secondly, in the 1620s, "ingénuité" and "naïveté" began to take on pejorative connotations in certain contexts. As Berlan-Lacourt observes, they could each be used to describe people of any class who expressed themselves *too* candidly, whether out of ignorance, foolishness, lack of attention to social customs, or some combination of these. In her words: "Après [1620] […] un deuxième sens apparaît. 'Ingénuité' et 'naïveté' sont, dans certains emplois, synonymes de franchise excessive, crédulité, niaiserie" (*Champ notionnel* 3). She adds that of these terms, "ingénu(e)" was the one that was most often used this way:

> Savoir ce qu'il faut "dire ou ne pas dire" [...] est le fondement même de tous les échanges sociaux. Or [...] la "naïveté, l'ingénuité," [et] plus tard la "candeur," s'appliquent à des comportements et surtout à des paroles qui heurtent certaines bienséances psychologiques ou sociales. Le mot le plus significatif, à cet égard, est "ingénu" et ses dérivés.
>
> (*Champ notionnel* 12)

It was against this backdrop that Molière created the first French ingénue, Agnès, who made her debut on stage in *L'École des femmes* in 1662. The play is especially noteworthy in that its characters propose not one, but two ways of defining "ingénuité": one that is faithful to the term's newly pejorative connotations (that is, the tendency to express oneself with a foolish degree of candor), and one that was of Molière's own invention. At the beginning of the play, Agnès is depicted as a *sotte* stock character: specifically, she is based on an ignorant and comical young girl

[4] Glosbe Latin-English dictionary, accessed via https://glosbe.com/la/en/nativus.

who appears in Paul Scarron's 1655 novella *La Précaution inutile*.[5] Her guardian and fiancé, Arnolphe, values her ignorance because he believes that it will render her incapable of deceiving him with other men after they marry. In conjunction with this, he uses the term "ingénuité" to pejoratively refer to her blithe manner of expressing her thoughts. In contrast, the play's third major character, Horace, invests the word "ingénuité" with positive connotations when he uses it to describe Agnès. For one, he lends an emotional dimension to it by linking it to Agnès's guileless expression of her feelings. To him, her ingenuousness is not simply a reflection of her ignorance; rather, it reflects her innocence, goodness, and emotional sincerity. He also describes her ingenuousness as an endearing quality that connects her to "nature," a concept that had never been expressed in French literature before this point. As the play progresses, Horace's perception of Agnès's *ingénuité* proves to be more accurate than Arnolphe's: although Agnès begins the play as a comical *sotte*, she evolves into a loving, curious, headstrong girl who learns to reject her guardian's authority. At the play's conclusion, she is presented to the audience as a sympathetic figure who has become determined to venture into the outside world.

Several elements of the modern conception of the ingénue can therefore trace their roots directly back to Molière's depiction of Agnès in *L'École des femmes*. Like many ingénues who appear in film and literature today, Agnès is a guileless, inexperienced, endearing young woman on the cusp of entering the world for the first time. She is also shown to be experiencing an emotional and sexual awakening—in other words, to be transitioning from childhood to adulthood—which is another theme that is commonly associated with contemporary ingénues. Thanks to Molière's complex portrayal of Agnès's character, his vision of the ingénue eventually took hold as a common motif in eighteenth-century French art and literature. The *Encyclopédie*

[5] Scarron's text was in turn based on a Spanish *novela* by María de Zayas y Sotomayor, "El Prevenido engañado" (1637). See Chapter 1.

article “Ingénuité” (1766) identifies Agnès as an archetype, and she was often a crucial source of inspiration for the dozens of ingénues who appeared in eighteenth-century fiction.[6] Marivaux and Françoise de Graffigny, for example, portray similarly naïve and artless young women in their major works. Diderot’s Suzanne Simonin, the heroine and narrator of *La Religieuse* (1760/1780-1782), also owes some of her conception to Agnès, in that she is often able to win sympathy from other people by speaking candidly about her experiences.[7] Diderot’s interest in ingénues is also evident in his art criticism, in which he often discusses paintings of guileless young girls. Yet the pejorative connotations of “ingénuité”—that is, “franchise excessive” and “niaiserie”—did not disappear during the Enlightenment: in literature and in everyday language, they persisted alongside the term’s more positive connotations. Thus, we can also find examples of eighteenth-century ingénues who are more comical than sympathetic at times, and who possess the flaws that Agnès exhibits at the outset of *L’École des femmes*: that is, *sottise* and a tendency to speak too candidly. Cécile de Volanges of Pierre-Françoise Ambroise Choderlos de Laclos’s *Les Liaisons dangereuses* is one such example.[8]

This brings us to the question of why ingénues gained such a foothold in eighteenth-century France. Why would so many authors and artists choose to incorporate them into their work? The beginnings of an answer can be found if we look at how the ingénue’s basic traits resonated with the era’s social, cultural, and philosophical discourses. Firstly, the ingénue’s youthful inexperience

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[6] *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert (8:744), accessed via the ARTFL Project, http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu.

[7] Of course, as is often the case in Diderot’s works, Suzanne’s role as a heroine and narrator has a degree of ambiguity. On the one hand, Diderot overtly encourages the novel’s reader to perceive Suzanne as worthy of sympathy, just as the novel’s benevolent secondary characters do. On the other hand, however, he occasionally suggests that Suzanne’s candor might not be exactly what it seems and uses this to explore the idea that readers can get too easily carried away by fiction. I discuss this topic more in Chapter 3.

[8] For another overview of Agnès’s legacy in eighteenth-century French literature, see Christophe Martin, “Agnès et ses sœurs: belles captives en enfance, de Molière à Baculard d'Arnaud,” in *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 104e année, No. 2 (April-June, 2004): 343-362.

tied into some newly relevant questions about human and cultural development. In the Enlightenment, the expansion of colonialism and international trade was putting France into contact with a large number of previously unknown societies. Because of this, thinkers were taking a new interest in how civilizations originated and grew. As the century wore on, these changes also sparked inquiries into the fundamental essence of human nature, giving rise to new theories about what humanity was like before people began living in complex communities.[9] In this context, ingénues could function well as literary representations of more "primitive" or childlike stages of human development, thanks to their innocence, simplicity, and lack of worldly experience. These qualities also made them a useful tool for experimenting with ideas about education, which was another major preoccupation of Enlightenment thinkers.[10] Furthermore, as Elena Russo observes, ingénues gained new importance in the visual arts in the mid-century: their natural manner of expression was antithetical to the exaggerated artifice of the early-century rococo aesthetic, which began to fall out of favor in the 1740s.[11] Finally, and most importantly, ingénues were often used to explore anxieties about what French society and culture were becoming in the face of all these changes: as vulnerable young girls who lack experience and sophistication, they are primed to be deeply and obviously affected by their experiences in the world and by the treatment they receive at the hands of more worldly people.

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[9] On eighteenth-century discourses about foreign civilizations, see for example Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993); and Tzvetan Todorov, *Nous et les autres: La Réflexion française sur la diversité humaine* (Paris: Seuil, 1989). On Enlightenment inquiries into human nature and human origins, see for example Jean Ehrard, *L'idée de nature en France à l'aube des Lumières* (Paris: Flammarion, 1970); and Anne Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

[10] On the topic of eighteenth-century pedagogical theory, see for example Christophe Martin, *Éducations négatives: Fictions d'expérimentation pédagogique au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris: Éditions Classiques Garnier, 2010); and Jean Bloch, "Discourses of Female Education in the Writings of Eighteenth-Century French Women," in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, ed. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 243-258.

[11] Elena Russo, *Styles of Enlightenment: Taste, Politics, and Authorship in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 110-112.

This point about vulnerability touches on a facet of the ingénue's cultural significance that I have not yet addressed: the fact that, in the eighteenth century, *ingénuité* was widely considered to be a predominantly feminine quality. Of course, Enlightenment texts do occasionally feature male ingénus, the most famous example being the titular character of Voltaire's *L'Ingénu* (1767); however, female ingénues were far more common. There are some obvious (and accurate) explanations for this: for one, Agnès, the first ingénue, was female, so she necessarily played a powerful role in linking ingenuousness and femininity in the French cultural imagination. For another, the female ingénue had a ready-made literary counterpart in the coquette stock character, a figure whom many French thinkers saw as emblematic of the heavily codified manners and speech styles that had come to dominate modern life (Russo, *Styles* 105-112). Furthermore, Enlightenment thinkers tended to believe that women's physiology caused them to remain "closer to nature" than men: that is, women were thought to be more subject to the "primitive" impulses of the human mind and body, given their purported lack of intellectual vigor and their tendency to follow the whims of their senses. They were also constantly associated with the most "natural" aspects of life, like childbearing, motherhood, and sexuality.[12]

Be that as it may, there is one further component of the ingénue's characterization to consider here: that is, her status as a young, unmarried virgin who typically enters the world without a dependable social support system. This is, in my view, what truly lies at the heart of the ingénue's frequent association with femininity and her importance as a character during the Enlightenment. Given that her role in eighteenth-century literature was often to serve as a foil to the complexities of modern culture and people, her femaleness helped to accentuate her

[12] On these topics, see Anne Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology*, especially 225-257; and Lieselotte Steinbrügge, *The Moral Sex: Woman's Nature in the French Enlightenment*, trans. Pamela E. Selwyn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

vulnerability to the effects of living in the world. This is especially true in light of the fact that Old Regime France was deeply patriarchal: women—and young girls especially—were generally thought to be in need of men's protection and were supposed to be defined in terms of their social relationships with men. In this context, who better to highlight the challenges and pitfalls of life in contemporary France than an unmarried, socially adrift young woman on the cusp of sexual awakening? That is, a girl who is on the point of transitioning from childhood to adulthood; who is most often depicted in environments that are alien to her; and whose youthful innocence (as we shall see in this study) is liable to draw the attention of potential lovers, seducers, benefactors, and abusers?

It is largely unsurprising, therefore, that, ultimately, stories about ingénues tend to include some measure of loss: as these young women navigate their first experiences with the world's social, sexual, and cultural dynamics, a degree of disillusionment or maturation seems inevitable. The stories of eighteenth-century ingénues, as we shall see in this study, come to many different ends: some girls develop in positive directions by gaining wisdom or awakening to love, often winning the sympathy and affection of people who find themselves touched by the ingénue's guilelessness. Conversely, other ingénues fall into outright disaster because their ignorance makes them easy to manipulate and deceive. Most of these characters, however, settle somewhere in between these two outcomes, and whatever their fates may be, ingénues rarely end their stories without losing at least some of the innocence they possessed at the outset. Moreover, given that they typically stand as counterparts to more mature and sophisticated characters—and by extension, to us as the audience—their losses can also serve to remind us of our own. That is, they can encourage us to think about the benefits and costs of the changes we commonly experience, whether it be transitioning from youth to adulthood, falling in love, forming more complex

societies, losing our moral compasses, or shedding our foolish naïveté. Their ultimate function in art and literature, therefore, is often to hold up a mirror to us even as we seek to gain an intimate gaze into who they are and will become.

Chapter Overviews

In this study, I offer an interpretation of the ingénue's role as a major literary motif over the course of the Enlightenment period. More precisely, I aim to explain why the ingénue was well-suited to this cultural context, how she evolved as a character, and what insights she can provide into eighteenth-century efforts to take stock of French culture and society in an era of rapid change. Given that so many ingénues appeared in eighteenth-century literature—and given that their traits and thematic significance varied widely across genres and contexts—attempting to trace a neatly linear history of the ingenue's evolution as a literary figure would run the risk of oversimplifying the character. Instead, therefore, I focus on the authors who, in my view, produced the era's most interesting examples of female ingénues and who used them to explore questions and anxieties about what French culture, art, and society had become (or should be) in the modern age.

To introduce these topics, Chapter 1, "From *Sottes* to Ingénues: Scarron, Molière, and the Birth of a Character," traces the ingénue's emergence as a distinct persona in seventeenth-century French literature. It begins with an analysis of Paul Scarron's novella *La Précaution inutile* (1655), which served as a major source of inspiration for the first ingénue, Agnès of Molière's *L'École des femmes* (1662). It then moves into a close analysis of Molière's comedy, with particular attention to the different meanings that the play's characters ascribe to the word "ingénuité." Finally, it closes with a brief reading of the *Encyclopédie* article "Ingénuité" (1766), which offers

insights into how Agnès's characterization came to underpin eighteenth-century conceptualizations of the ingénue.

Chapter 2, "Ingénues and Exoticism in Marivaux's Comedies and Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*," focuses on three texts in which ingénues are depicted as foreigners and/or social outsiders. In each of these texts, Marivaux and de Graffigny use their ingénues to provide a critical perspective on the cultural and social practices of early- to mid-eighteenth-century France. I begin with two of Marivaux's comedies, *La Double Inconstance* (1723) and *L'Épreuve* (1740), in which ingénues are depicted as provincial *bourgeoises* who clash with more worldly or urban characters. I then conclude with a reading of Françoise de Graffigny's novel *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747), in which a sixteenth-century Incan ingénue is transported to eighteenth-century France and learns to view its social and cultural practices with a critical eye.

Chapter 3, "Reading and Writing the Body: Ingénues as Aesthetic Objects in Diderot's *Salons* and *La Religieuse*," focuses on the ways in which Diderot uses ingénues to experiment with his theories of aesthetics. First, I analyze his reviews of two paintings by Jean-Baptiste Greuze which were exhibited at the Salons of 1761 and 1765. In these reviews, Diderot examines the ways in which the paintings depict the bodies of ingénues and uses this theme to explore his vision of what "good" art and "good" art critics should be. I also explore how Diderot's ideas about Greuze's work compare to those of his friend Friedrich Melchior, baron von Grimm, who wrote his own critique of Greuze's 1761 exposition. I then offer a reading of Diderot's novel *La Religieuse* (1760-1780-1782), which features an ingénue as its narrator and pushes the reader to reflect on how one should (or should not) read novels.

Finally, Chapter 4, "Pathological Ingenuousness, Radical Libertinism, and Principled Candor: Women's Modes of Life in Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*," examines Choderlos de

Laclos's negative portrayal of the ingénue Cécile de Volanges. First, I offer a reading of the ways in which Cécile's ingenuousness is modeled after the childlike *sottise* that Agnès exhibits in Molière's *L'École des femmes*. I also explore the different ways in which Cécile is perceived by the novel's other characters: whereas her lover Danceny sees her as a charmingly innocent girl, the libertines Madame de Merteuil and Monsieur de Valmont come to see her ingenuousness as a sign that she lacks mental acuity. I then propose a reading of Merteuil as a countermodel to Cécile, with a particular focus on Merteuil's unsuccessful effort to transform Cécile into a libertine like herself. Lastly, I present a reading of the novel's third major female character, Madame de Tourvel, who practices a form of principled *candeur* in a way that gives her striking points in common with both Cécile and Merteuil. I ultimately pull these threads together to explore Laclos's ideas about the ways in which different types of women were impacted by the dangers of living in late-eighteenth-century high society.

CHAPTER 1: From *Sottes* to Ingénues: Scarron, Molière, and the Birth of a Character

1.1 *Précautions Inutiles*: Inventing the Ingénue

The ingénue's rise as a character type was intimately linked to the *précaution inutile* motif, a comic tradition that reached its heyday in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Many influential authors, including Molière, Montesquieu, and Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, produced novels and plays that contributed to its popularity.[1] The basic premise of the *précaution inutile* motif is a conflict between two characters: an innocent youth who has been raised in a secluded place, and an elder person who wants to prevent the youth from escaping it. In most instances, as Christophe Martin has observed, this conflict stems from one of two types of scenarios. In the first, a parent (usually a father) withdraws his children from the world in an attempt to shield them from what he sees as its corrupting influence. Texts that belong in this category include Jean de la Fontaine's *Les Oies de frère Philippe* (which he adapted from Giovanni Bocaccio's *Decameron* [1353]) (1671), and Marivaux's comedy *Le Triomphe de l'amour* (1732). The second scenario—and the one that concerns us here—has a purely selfish motive: a lecherous older man raises a girl in isolation and fights to keep her all to himself.[2]

As we shall see in this chapter, there is some variation in what drives the men of this second category to sequester girls: whereas some are motivated mainly by fear, others actively enjoy the power that they have (or think they have) over the person in their charge. Yet as Christophe Martin explains, these men all share some essential traits, and their actions always stem from a pathological obsession with cuckoldry: specifically, they all suffer from jealousy, an intense need

[1] These include Molière's *L'École des femmes* (1662), Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (1721), and Beaumarchais's *Le Barbier de Séville, ou la précaution inutile* (1775).
[2] See Christophe Martin, *Éducations négatives: Fictions d'expérimentation pédagogique au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris: Éditions Classiques Garnier, 2010), 18-26, 211-215.

for control, and a deep-seated paranoia about the untrustworthiness of women. Their misogyny drives them to turn to sequestration as a means of creating ideal wives for themselves. This prompts Martin to link them to Pygmalion, the mythological sculptor whose disdain for women compels him to sculpt a girl of ivory for himself:

> Le scénario de la "précaution inutile" repose d'abord sur une motivation psychologique: la jalousie obsessionnelle d'un bourgeois vieillissant et enrichi, prêt à tout pour ne point être la dupe des femmes et de leurs "subtiles trames" pour paraphraser Arnolphe [of Molière's *L'École des femmes*]. Obsession du cocuage et hantise de la duplicité féminine que ces barbons héritent peut-être du Pygmalion d'Ovide, "révolté des vices dont la nature a rempli le cœur des femmes" [...].[3]

Ovid's line about natural vices points to the final trait that these men tend to possess, particularly in seventeenth-century texts: namely, the fact that they usually cloister girls to fortify the girls' ignorance, rather than to preserve them in an idealized state of "natural" innocence. In other words, by removing the girls from the world, and thereby arresting their mental and social development, these would-be Pygmalions seek to create *sottes* who can never learn to deceive them (Martin, *Éducations négatives* 211-215). Sequestration also has the added benefit of cutting the young women off from extraneous financial and familial support.

Of course, as the phrase "une précaution inutile" indicates, these schemes inevitably fail somehow. Often, the exact way in which they fail is determined by the resilience of the heroine's *sottise*. The catalyst is almost always the same: a young man discovers the secluded girl, and,

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[3] Christophe Martin, "Agnès et ses sœurs: belles captives en enfance, de Molière à Baculard d'Arnaud," in *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 104e année, no. 2 (Avril-Juin 2004): 343-362, at 343-344. Citing Ovide, *Les Métamorphoses*, X, v. 243, trans. Georges Lafaye (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1992), 329. In Ovid's rendition of the tale, Pygmalion is a Cypriot sculptor who grows wary of women when he sees the Propoetides prostitute themselves. He sculpts a statue of a perfect girl, falls in love with it, and prays for a wife who would be its living likeness. In response, the goddess Venus brings the statue to life so that Pygmalion can marry it.

thanks to her ignorance, he finds it easy to seduce her. Then, the story usually follows one of two classic formulas. In one, which concerns a phenomenon called "déniaisement," the sexual act itself has a pedagogical merit: it awakens the girl's mind enough to allow her to escape her captor, or at least to gain the wits to conceal her illicit affair from him. Alexandre Wenger describes this shift away from *sottise* (or "niaiserie," which denotes a type of simple-minded innocence that stems from inexperience) as "un double mouvement de prise de possession de [son] propre plaisir et d'émancipation de toutes les tutelles spirituelles, qu'elles soient familiale, morale ou religieuse."[4] Yet in some texts, like Paul Scarron's novella "La Précaution inutile" (1655), the sexual act only sparks an awakening to physical pleasure; that is, some girls possess a *sottise* that is so deeply ingrained that it condemns their minds to languish in an incurable state of stupor. Traditionally, both types of stories are meant to be funny and to satirize vices like vanity, although some touch on serious issues like the fear of betrayal and youthful resistance to tyranny.

In 1662, Molière revolutionized these formulas when he staged the first performance of his comedy *L'École des femmes*. The play's heroine, Agnès, had qualities of "sottise" *and* "ingénuité" that set her apart from the *sottes* who starred in older variants of the *précaution inutile* motif. For one, as Christophe Martin argues, Agnès's ignorance does not merely leave her vulnerable to seduction: it also makes her attractive to her seducer in a new way. The young man in question, Horace, comes to admire what he calls her "ingénuité," by which he means her aesthetically and emotionally compelling brand of natural innocence. In fact, in Molière's time, the meaning that

[4] Alexandre Wenger, "Comment l'esprit vient aux filles… et comment les garçons le perdent: Maladie d'amour, médecine et fiction romanesque au XVIIIe siècle," in *L'Esprit créateur*, vol. 56, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 11-21, at 11. See also Martin, *Éducations négatives*, 209-291. Examples of *déniaisement* narratives include l'abbé Du Prat's *Vénus dans le cloître* (1672) and Honoré-Gabriel Riqueti de Mirabeau's *Le Rideau levé ou l'éducation de Laure* (1786).

Horace ascribes to "ingénuité" was entirely new in itself, and it lent Agnès a sympathetic quality that the *sotte* traditionally lacked. In Martin's words:

> [L]'école de l'ignorance [in *L'École des femmes*] ne fait plus de la femme-enfant une proie d'autant plus aisée à séduire qu'elle a été plus longtemps abêtie, mais elle la rend d'autant plus séduisante que sa naïveté a été mieux préservée de la corruption du monde. C'est en quoi la comédie de Molière semble offrir le reflet d'une mutation fondamentale touchant à la question de l'enfance et de l'ingénuité.
>
> (*Éducations négatives* 227)[5]

Agnès's role in the play also distinguished her from many *sottes* who preceded her: she not only serves as an object of desire for Horace—and, in another way, Arnolphe—but, from the beginning, is an agent of her own awakening to desire. Moreover, the play's characters actively discuss the ways that they perceive her *sottise* and *ingénuité*, and her eventual participation in this conversation helps her to free her mind from the constraints that Arnolphe initially imposes upon it. Consequently, she marked a defining moment in the history of ingénues, and she ultimately set the standard for later incarnations of the character.

In this chapter, I trace the development of the ingénue as a distinct persona in the context of the *précaution inutile* motif. I begin with a reading of Paul Scarron's "La Précaution Inutile," which is thought to have been Molière's main source of inspiration for *L'École des femmes*.[6] Like

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[5] Martin also argues that Agnès's ingenuousness seduces Arnolphe in the same way that it does Horace, given that Arnolphe at one point claims to have been drawn to her "bonté naturelle" when she was a child (*Éducations négatives* 226-228). Yet as I will argue in this chapter, both men's feelings for Agnès change considerably over the course of the play and are different in key ways: whereas Horace falls in love with Agnès's emotional sincerity, Arnolphe only expresses romantic attraction to her when she rejects his authority and begins to develop a mind of her own.

[6] On this point, see for example Nathalie Fournier, "De *La Précaution inutile* (1655) à *L'École des femmes* (1662): la réécriture de Scarron par Molière," in *XVIIe siècle*, no. 186 (January-March 1995): 49-60; and Claude Bourqui, *Les sources de Molière: Répertoire critique des sources littéraires et dramatiques* (Paris: SEDES, 1999), 107-128. Bourqui argues that Scarron's novella is actually one of three possible sources for Molière's play: the other two are María de Zayas y Sotomayor's "El Prevenido engañado" (1637), the Spanish novella upon which Scarron's text is

Molière, Scarron portrays the downfall of a man who thinks that marrying a *sotte* will save him from cuckoldry. Yet unlike Molière, Scarron does not use the word "ingénuité" in that context, and his *sotte*, Laure, is incapable of developing a complex personality. I then discuss the leading couple of *L'École des femmes*, Arnolphe and Agnès, who are much more psychologically nuanced than Scarron's characters: Molière dramatizes Arnolphe's obsessions to make him at once loathsome and pitiable; and Agnès undergoes a mental and emotional awakening that is not exclusively focused on her feelings for Horace. I also explore the different ways that Arnolphe and Horace understand the word "ingénuité," and how they apply it to Agnès. Finally, I close with a brief reading of the *Encyclopédie* article "Ingénuité" (1766), which sheds light on Agnès's legacy in eighteenth-century art and literature.

1.2 Incurable *Sottise* and An Unhappy Cuckold: Paul Scarron's "La Précaution inutile"

From a modern perspective, it may seem questionable to credit Paul Scarron as the author of "La Précaution inutile." He first published the text in 1655 in a short story collection called *Les Nouvelles tragi-comiques traduites d'espagnol en français*. As the collection's title indicates, "La Précaution inutile" is an often word-for-word translation of a Spanish *novela*: María de Zayas y Sotomayor's "El Prevenido engañado" ("The Forewarned Man, Deceived"), which appeared in de Zayas's *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares* in 1637. In seventeenth-century France, translating and republishing *novelas* was common practice: Spanish literature was in vogue, and many French writers viewed the Spanish as the masters of short story writing.[7] For Scarron—who especially

based, and Antoine Le Métel d'Ouville's "La Précaution Inutile" (1656), which is also based on de Zayas's work. But most critics identify Scarron as Molière's likeliest source of inspiration.

[7] See René Godenne, *Histoire de la nouvelle française aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Geneva: Librairie Droz S. A., 1970), 27-39. Godenne argues that the widespread reliance on Spanish source material reflects a decline in the French *nouvelle*'s popularity after the Renaissance: apart from translations of Spanish texts, few *nouvelles* were published in France during the first half of the seventeenth century. For a history of how Spanish *novelas*

admired Miguel de Cervantes's *Novelas ejemplares* (1613)—*novelas* were appealing because they depicted people who were ordinary, relatable, and flawed. One of the characters in his novel *Le Roman comique* (1651-1657), a nameless *conseiller*, expounds on that idea by arguing that such people are a welcome change from classical heroes:

> Le conseiller dit que [...] les Espagnols avoient le secret de faire de petites histoires qu'ils appellent nouvelles qui sont bien plus à nostre usage et plus selon la portée de l'humanité que des héros imaginaires de l'antiquité, qui sont quelquesfois incommodes à force d'estre trop honnestes gens […]. [Il] conclud que, si l'on faisoit des nouvelles en françois aussi bien faites que quelques-unes de celles de Miguel de Cervantes, elles auroient cours autant que les romans héroïques.[8]

In short, Scarron's habit of borrowing from Spanish texts, which persisted throughout his career, was probably rooted in a desire to encourage the French to emulate Spanish literature. In terms of their characters and storylines, his *nouvelles* are largely faithful to his source material, and they cannot be credited to him as independent works.

Be that as it may, "La Précaution inutile" should not be reductively defined as a translation either: its content is not original, but Scarron made the text his own by altering the narrative structure and tone of de Zayas's story. De Zayas's *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares* is a frame narrative, written in the style of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1353) and Marguerite de Navarre's *L'Heptaméron* (1558).[9] Its stories are narrated by a group of nobles who are gathered around a sick friend, and de Zayas weaves the tales and interludes into a commentary on Spanish

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subsequently sparked a revival of the French *nouvelle*, see Frédéric Deloffre, *La Nouvelle en France à l'Âge Classique* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1967), 7-32.

[8] Paul Scarron, *Le Roman comique* [1651-1657] in *Romanciers du XVIIe siècle*, éd. Antoine Adam (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Éditions Gallimard, 1958), 645. Other admirers of Spanish *novelas* included Charles Sorel, who praised their "naturalness" and their moral suitability for female readers in *La bibliothèque française* (1667). On Sorel's and Scarron's interest in Cervantes's work, see Frédéric Deloffre, *La Nouvelle en France*, 17-31.

[9] In fact, de Zayas's *Novelas* is informally known as the "Spanish Decameron."

social issues, like the pervasive mistreatment of women. Scarron was dismissive of de Zayas's ideas and of her skill as a writer, which he made clear in his preface to "La Précaution inutile" by claiming that "[elle] écrit tout d'un style extravagant et rien de bon sens."[10] In his retelling of her story, he supplants her circle of storytellers with an anonymous French narrator, and thereby narrows the original text's multitude of narrative perspectives to a single point of view.[11] Moreover, as María Manuela Merino García has shown in her study of the *novela* in translation, Scarron's version has a burlesque quality that sets it apart from de Zayas's work. Specifically, his narrator inserts himself into the story with digressions, sardonic comments, and intertextual references that constantly remind the reader of his presence:

> [C]'est dans la version de Scarron que nous apprécions le plus de changements [made to the original text], suivant son style burlesque, caractérisé par le mélange des tons, par les dissonances, par les allusions à certains personnages mythologiques pour désigner le protagoniste, par les hyperboles et les circonlocutions pour parler de lui et aussi par un vaste réseau d'intertextualité qu'il tisse ici relatif au roman sentimental et à la poésie galante, ainsi qu'à certains de ses référents mythologiques et du roman courtois qui sont mis au profit de la parodie de cette galanterie usée, absurde et ridicule.[12]

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[10] Paul Scarron, "La Précaution inutile," in *Les Nouvelles tragi-comiques,* éd. Roger Guichemerre (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1986), 33.

[11] The narrator implicitly reveals his French nationality in the story's first sentence, when he jokes that the Spanish are known for their mania for elaborate names: "Un Gentil-homme de Grenade, dont je ne découvriray point le veritable nom et à qui je donneray celuy de Dom Pedre de Castille, d'Aragon et de Tolede, ou comme il vous plaira, puisqu'un beau nom ne couste pas plus qu'un autre, et c'est peut-estre pour cette raison là que les Espagnols qui ne sont pas contents du leur, ne s'en donnent jamais que des plus illustres et méme ne s'en donnent pas pour un [...]." Scarron, "Précaution inutile," 3.

[12] María Manuela Merino García, "La réception de María de Zayas en France: analyse de deux versions du *Prevenido engañado*," in *Anales de Filología Francesa*, n.22 (2014): 177-200, at 198-199. Joan DeJean also links Scarron's mastery of the burlesque to his playful use of narrative voice: in her study of *Le Roman comique*, she argues that "the most striking formal characteristic of Scarron's burlesque [is perhaps] the presence of a narrator with a very special voice and powers." DeJean, *Scarron's Roman comique: A Comedy of the Novel, A Novel of the Comedy* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1977), 25.

These alterations change the reader's relationship to the text and its protagonist, a Spanish nobleman named Dom Pèdre (or "Don Fadrique," in de Zayas's version). Typically, the storytelling characters in frame narratives debate the meaning of the tales they tell each other, and thereby present their readers with a range of perspectives to consider. Scarron, in the absence of a circle of storytellers, directly addresses his readers in order to establish a rapport with them. In doing so, he draws them into the text by making them a part of it. In a sense, as Merino García argues, they become the circle of friends who listen to his story and are called upon to react to it: "[E]n traduisant, Scarron se pose dès le début, depuis sa position forte de Français qui s'adresse à d'autres Français. La structure dialogique de la digression va du je-narrateur au vous-narrataire dont la participation active est demandée dès le début" ("De Zayas en France" 183). More importantly, the narrator's bond with his readers reinforces the distance between them and Dom Pèdre: although the hero's disastrous love affairs are somewhat pitiable, the narrator's biting remarks about his foolishness encourage readers to laugh at him. This is especially true when Dom Pèdre has his misadventure with Laure, the *sotte* who becomes his wife and who brings about his final, complete humiliation.

Dom Pèdre's desire to marry a *sotte*, and thereby avoid becoming a cuckold, is inspired by the birth of Laure herself within the *nouvelle*'s first pages: she is the illegitimate daughter of his fiancée and first love, a deceitful young beauty named Séraphine. The affair begins when Dom Pèdre falls in love with Séraphine from afar and resolves to win her by serenading her from the street outside her window. According to the narrator, his gallantries are apt to "ou faire pleurer sa maistresse de pitié, ou faire abboyer les chiens de son quartier" (39). They also fall flat because Séraphine already has a lover:

> Dom Pèdre s'apperceut bien-tost qu'il avoit un competiteur et ne s'en estonna [i.e. s'en effraya] guere, aiant de son côté l'avantage du bien. Il donnoit des musiques dans la ruë de sa maistresse, son Rival en avoit le plaisir dans sa chambre et peut-estre en recevoit des caresses, tandis que le miserable se morfondoit.
>
> (36-37)

The narrator goes on to underscore Dom Pèdre's blindness to Séraphine's true feelings: ignoring the signs that her heart lies elsewhere, he asks her parents for her hand and is confident that his overtures (coupled with his wealth) will win out: "Il estoit trop persuadé de son propre mérite pour douter du succez de ses galanteries et pour n'esperer pas d'étre beaucoup aimé de sa maistresse, lors qu'il en seroit mieux connu qu'il n'estoit, quand mesme elle auroit eü pour luy de l'aversion devant que de le connoistre" (38-39). His illusions are destroyed one night when Séraphine, unaware that he is following her, sneaks into a burnt-out building to give birth to Laure and abandons the baby in the wreckage.

At first, the shocking sight of Laure's birth awakens a new resolve in Dom Pèdre: it at once compels him to assume responsibility for her care and to entrench himself in a misogynistic worldview. He brings Laure to his aunt and leaves instructions for her education, asking that she be cloistered at age three and kept in total ignorance of the world: "[Il] la pria […] de recevoir chez elle une petite fille […], de n'espargner rien pour son éducation et, pour des raisons qu'elle sçauroit un jour, de la mettre dés l'aage de trois ans dans un Couvent, et surtout de donner ordre qu'elle n'eust aucune connoissance des choses du monde" (41). He then leaves to travel abroad and ponders his narrow escape from cuckoldry. Upon deciding that no woman is trustworthy, he concedes that "sottes" are preferable because clever wives are far more dangerous. These thoughts are enough to prompt the narrator to mock his reasoning:

> [Il était] fort dégousté du mariage, apres avoir eu si grande envie d'en taster. Toutes les femmes luy font peur et, sans considerer qu'il y en a de bonnes et de mauvaises aussi bien que des hommes, il conclut en luy-mesme qu'il s'en faut toûjours deffier, et plus encore des spirituelles que des sottes, entrant dans l'opinion de ceux qui croyent qu'une femme sçait plus qu'elle ne doit, quand elle sçait plus que le ménage de sa maison et l'éducation de ses enfans. Persuadé de ces Heresies-là, il entra dans Seville […].
>
> (42)

Scarron's use of the word "sottes" rather than "ingénues" begs the question of whether or not he believed that the terms held similar meanings, given that "ingénu(e)" could be used pejoratively in seventeenth-century French to signify "niais(e)" or "excessivement franc(he)."[13] One likely reason that Scarron favored "sotte" in "La Précaution inutile" is the fact that it presented an opportunity for word play, given that the masculine "sot" often served as a euphemism for "cuckold" in his day. We find another explanation for his choice of words by comparing his text to the original *novela*: de Zayas's protagonist, Don Fadrique, does not describe his ideal wife as "ingenua," but as "necia," meaning "foolish" or "stupid."[14] Yet this comparison also reveals that Scarron evokes the theme of *sottise* more than twice as often as de Zayas does: whereas she uses the term "necio(/-a)" a mere seven times, he repeats the words "sot(te)" and "sottise" nearly twenty times. Moreover, he frequently links the feminine "sotte" to synonyms like "idiote" and antonyms like "spirituelle," which places further emphasis on "sotte" as a signifier of low intelligence.[15]

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[13] On this point, see the Introduction.

[14] For example, when asked to explain what kind of woman he would consent to marry, Don Fadrique says "[V]engo tan escarmentado de las astucias de las mujeres discretas que de mejor gana me dejaré vencer de una mujer necia, aunque sea fea [...]." ("I am so chastened by the tricks of discreet women that I will best let myself be vanquished by a foolish woman, even if she is ugly [...].") My translation. María de Zayas y Sotomayor, *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares*, ed. Julián Olivares (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 2000), 330-331.

[15] Pierre Richelet's *Dictionnaire français* of 1680 defines "sot" as "celui qui n'a point ou peu d'esprit," and also as "ridicule, impertinent, niais, fait mal à propos." See Françoise Berlan-Lacourt, *Le Champ notionnel de l'ingénuité*

If we then compare Scarron's *nouvelle* with his *Le Roman comique* (1651-1657), which he published around the same time, we find an indication that he understood the words "sottise" and "ingénuité" quite differently. In the *Roman*, the latter term signifies "la bonne foi," and it refers to one's manner of expression rather than to one's intelligence.[16] Notably, for Scarron this "bonne foi" can be either feigned or sincere: whereas one of the novel's characters lies to others "[en] feignant une grande ingénuité," others speak "ingénument" out of a sense of *noble franchise*.[17] Thus, the meaning that Scarron imparts to "ingénuité" in the *Roman* is largely faithful to the term's Latin root word "ingenuus": that word at once signified "freeborn person" and the "noble frankness" that such people were expected to practice in keeping with their code of conduct.[18] Conversely, the stress that Scarron places on the word "sot(te)" in "La Précaution inutile" is deliberate, and it becomes more pronounced as the story progresses: despite Dom Pèdre's belief that "sottise" is an essential quality in wives, it soon becomes clear that he lacks a firm notion of what that quality entails.

For most of the *nouvelle*, Dom Pèdre remains too fickle to commit to his idea of marrying a *sotte*. Initially, his dictates for Laure's education suggest that he plans to wed *her*: by ensuring that she lacks the wits to deceive him, he could potentially remedy the injury that her mother inflicted upon him. Yet as soon as he hands Laure off to his aunt, he seems to forget her existence; indeed, he never mentions her again until she reappears as an adult at the end of the *nouvelle*. In the interim, he travels through Europe and falls in love with a series of worldly women, all of

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aux XVIIème et XVIIIème siècles, thèse présentée à l'Université de Poitiers en vue de doctorat d'état, dir. Jean Pierre (Seguin, le 27 juin 1994), xxi.

[16] On this point, see Françoise Berlan(-Lacourt), "L'ingénuité d'Agnès. Étude d'un champ lexical dans *L'École des femmes*," in *L'Information Grammaticale*, no. 24 (1985): 20-27, at 22. Her analysis of Molière's source material does not include de Zayas's *novela*, but instead focuses on French-language texts that directly or indirectly inspired *L'École des femmes*.

[17] Scarron, *Le Roman comique*, Project Gutenberg, eBook #27772, January 11th, 2009, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/27772/27772-h/27772-h.htm.

[18] On "ingénuité's" Latin roots and its integration into French, see the Introduction.

whom he considers marrying, and all of whom deceive him with other men. The narrator often invites the reader to laugh at Dom Pèdre's disregard for his own convictions, noting at one point that "Dom Pèdre, qui avoit solemnellement juré de ne se marier jamais qu'à une sotte, fit bien voir que les sermens que font les joüeurs et les amoureux, ne les obligent à rien" (59). In short, Dom Pèdre's choice to cling to the idea of wedding a *sotte* is purely a defensive gesture: he simply assumes that such a marriage would be the antithesis of the love affairs that disappoint him. Each time he feels humiliated by a clever mistress, he falls back on his refrain that only a stupid wife will suit him, but he never obliges himself to think very deeply on the subject.

The flaws in Dom Pèdre's thinking do come to light when other characters imagine what marrying a *sotte* would be like; some try to warn him of the problems that such a wife could cause him. The strongest objections come from the last woman who takes him as a lover before his marriage: a sly young Duchess whom he meets on his way back to his homeland. Their debate centers on the different ways that they each define *sottise*. In Dom Pèdre's eyes, it is simply the inability to deceive: "[Dom Pèdre] luy dit mesme qu'il avoit enfin resolu de se marier, s'il trouvoit une femme assez idiote pour ne luy faire point craindre tous les mauvais tours que les femmes spirituelles peuvent faire à leurs maris" (74). The Duchess, on the other hand, views *sottise* as a state of stupor that renders one unable to understand or connect to others. Thus, she argues that *sottes* are incapable of love and of appreciating the need to defend their virtue. Conversely, she notes that *femmes d'esprit* can at least maintain the *appearance* of virtue by concealing their indiscretions. As she puts it to Dom Pèdre:

> Et comment une sotte sera-t-elle honneste femme [...] si elle ne sçait pas ce que c'est que l'honnesteté et n'est pas mesme capable de l'apprendre? Comment une sotte vous pourra-t-elle aymer, n'estant pas capable de vous connoistre? Elle manquera à son devoir sans

> sçavoir ce qu'elle fait, au lieu qu'une femme d'esprit, quand mesme elle se deffieroit de sa vertu, sçaura éviter les occasions où elle sera en danger de la perdre.
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> (75)[19]

The Duchess then has a chance to demonstrate her point when her husband comes home early, obliging her to hide Dom Pèdre in a cupboard. She engages the Duke in conversation, and, knowing that Dom Pèdre can hear them, she admits her infidelity to her husband and then tricks him into thinking she was joking. Both men are amused by her playful banter, and the Duke remains comfortably secure in his faith in her (although he cheerfully calls her a "démon" for alarming him) (83). Thanks to her masterful manipulations, she manages to save her honor and to smuggle an impressed—and horrified—Dom Pèdre out of the house.

Unfortunately for Dom Pèdre, this lesson on the virtues of discretion falls on deaf ears, and he only comes to appreciate its wisdom when it is far too late. He returns home, fully determined to avoid the Duke's fate, and finds himself introduced to a sixteen-year-old Laure. For the first time, the effects of the education that he prescribed for her are revealed: she is "belle comme tous les Anges ensemble"—a metaphor that casts her as the antithesis of the "demonic" Duchess—"et sotte comme toutes les Religieuses qui sont venuës au monde sans esprit et en ont esté tirées dés l'enfance pour estre enfermées dans un Couvent" (85-86). Dom Pèdre's delight at Laure's beauty and simple-mindedness pushes the Duchess from his mind, but the reader can detect ominous echoes of her words in Laure's behavior. It is soon obvious that, just as the Duchess predicted, Laure's *sottise* has reduced her to an automaton. Unable to love—or to respond with strong emotion to anyone—she feels perfect indifference upon learning that Dom Pèdre plans to marry

[19] Dom Pèdre's cousin Dom Rodrigue also warns him that *sottes* are boring: "[J]e n'ay jamais veu d'homme raisonnable qui ne s'ennuye cruellement, s'il est seulement un quart d'heure avec une idiote." Dom Pèdre, apparently unable to think of a reply, just withdraws from the conversation: "Ne poussons point la dispute jusqu'où elle peut aller [...]. Aussi-bien il y a trop de choses à dire sur une telle matiere" (57).

her: "[elle] ne s'en réjouït, ny ne s'en attrista" (86). Negative conjunctions like "ni" are often used to describe her feelings about other important events; for example, upon Dom Pèdre's death at the story's end, she is "ny affligée, ny réjouïe" (97). The narrator also takes pains to emphasize Laure's mental deficiency: in addition to calling her "sotte," he labels her as "idiote," "imbécille," and "stupide" (but never as "ingénue"). In short, her claustration leaves her so dull-witted that she has no true character or will. Moreover, as the events of her marriage reveal, it renders her susceptible to the influence of anyone who cares to take advantage of her.

At first, Dom Pèdre is overjoyed at Laure's bovine-like docility; in fact, it inspires him to "test" the depth of her *sottise* by experimenting with the power that it gives him. He begins by reminding her that to revere one's husband is to obey God, driving the narrator to liken him to a pedant lecturing a schoolboy. The narrator also begins to redirect the adjective "sot" at Dom Pèdre, which paints him as the true object of ridicule here (and foreshadows his cuckoldry):

> Plus sot encore que sa femme, il voulut voir jusqu'où pouvoit aller sa simplicité. Il se mit dans une chaire, fit tenir sa femme debout et luy dit ces paroles, ou d'autres encore plus impertinentes. "Vous estes ma femme, dont j'espere que j'auray sujet de loüer Dieu, tant que nous vivrons ensemble. Mettez-vous bien dans l'esprit ce que je m'en vay vous dire et l'observez exactement tant que vous vivrez, et de peur d'offenser Dieu, et de peur de me déplaire." À toutes ces paroles dorées, l'innocente Laure faisoit de grandes reverences, à propos ou non, et regardoit son mary entre deux yeux aussi timidement qu'un escolier nouveau fait un Pedant impérieux.
>
> (87)[20]

[20] In his preface to Scarron's novella, Roger Guichemerre notes that de Zayas's version of this scene is much simpler: "Lorsque [don Fadrique] enseigne à sa jeune épouse les devoirs de la femme mariée, celle-ci, dans la *novela*, répond "avec beaucoup d'humilité qu'elle lui obéirait" […]." Thus, the *écolier*/*pédant* analogy is Scarron's invention. See "Précaution inutile," 32; and de Zayas, *Novelas*, 335.

Yet Dom Pèdre's experiment with domination stops short of sexual relations. Instead, he is far more interested in using Laure to stage a spectacle for himself. After arming her with a sword and spear, he explains that her wifely duty is to watch over him at night. Then, he goes to bed and takes pleasure in watching her patrol around their room. When he awakens the next morning, he cries tears of joy and kisses her—only to withdraw and order her to sleep:

> [Laure] fit [les tours] par hazard de si bon air, sa beauté naturelle et son habit de Pallas y contribuant beaucoup, que le trop fin Grenadin en demeura charmé. [...] [Le lendemain,] [l]e plus prudent et avisé de tous les maris du monde, ou du moins se croyant tel, [...] desarma sa femme, l'aida à se deshabiller et, l'ayant fait coucher dans le lict qu'il venoit de quitter, la baisa plusieurs fois, pleurant de joye d'avoir trouvé à son avis ce qu'il cherchoit.
>
> (88)[21]

For this brief space of time, therefore, Dom Pèdre becomes something like a Pygmalion: he marries the *sotte* he created and uses her to fulfill his fantasy of possessing his ideal woman.[22] Yet his desire for security is what he fetishizes here, rather than creative power, artistic expression, or sexual fulfillment. He admires Laure's "beauté naturelle," but as she carries out his orders, his strongest feeling is relief that she lacks a will of her own. His choice to stage this scene in their bedroom is also very deliberate: in his mind, it transforms their most intimate marital space into a

[21] Françoise Berlan links this scene to the forty-first tale of *Les Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*, a licentious short story collection assembled by Antoine de la Sale (ca. 1450-1460). "L'amour en armes" tells the story of a widower who marries a *sotte* and, in hopes of preventing her from growing fond of sex, obliges her to wear a hauberk whenever they engage in it. See Berlan, "L'ingénuité d'Agnès," 21.

[22] In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Pygmalion's statue of his ideal woman comes to life when he prays to Venus for a wife who bears its likeness. After his visit to Venus's temple, he acts out his fantasy by kissing the statue and finds that the goddess has transformed it into a living girl. See Ovide, *Métamorphoses*, 329-330. For an overview of the myth of Pygmalion and its influence on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French literature, see Aurélia Gaillard, *Le Corps des Statues: Le vivant et son simulacre à l'âge classique (de Descartes à Diderot)* (Paris: Éditions Champion, 2003), 23-33.

place where he can sleep soundly, free of worry and suspicion. But as the narrator's interjections remind us, Dom Pèdre's actions are ironically self-defeating: he not only neglects to indulge in marriage's physical pleasures, but also fails to notice that his obsession with cuckoldry has caused him to do so. His choice to present his wife with a literal sword and spear—phallic objects that contrast absurdly with his chaste caresses—further satirizes his failure to consummate his marriage. Predictably, as he discovers not long thereafter, others are only too happy to compensate Laure for his negligence. The narrator adopts a fatalistic tone to foreshadow this event, as though the tragedy that unfolds is heavenly retribution for Dom Pèdre's hubris: "[L]e mary fut assez sot pour n'employer pas mieux la seconde [nuict]. Le Ciel l'en punit" (88).

When Laure does experience her sexual awakening, her *sottise* produces the exact result that the Duchess anticipated: she betrays her husband "sans savoir ce qu'elle fait," and her heart and mind remain incurably stunted. The event occurs when Dom Pèdre is called away to court and obliged to remain there for six months. During his absence, another man spots Laure on her balcony and, admiring her beauty, resolves to seduce her. With the help of a corrupt old woman (90), he visits the unsuspecting Laure and offers to teach her "une autre façon d'exercer le mariage plus commode et plus plaisante que celle que luy faisoit pratiquer son mary [...]" (95). Laure turns out to be sensitive to pleasure and eagerly learns all she can about sex: "[son amant] apprit tout ce qu'il en sçavoit à Laure, qui ne se lassa point d'apprendre, tant que son mary fut à la Cour" (95). Her *sottise* forestalls any chance of real love between herself and her seducer: when Dom Pèdre signals his impending return, the man disappears without a word, "rien n'estant si fragile que l'amour que l'on a pour une sotte." Laure, for her part, "ne le trouva point à redire et receut son mary avec autant de joye et avec aussi peu de ressentiment de la perte de son galant que si elle ne l'eust jamais veu" (95). Her fondness for sex is also the basis of her joy at Dom Pèdre's return.

She joins him in bed that night, and, failing to notice his alarm, reveals that "un autre mary" taught her a delightful way to pass the time:

> [Dom Pèdre] luy demanda, tout troublé, pourquoy elle n'estoit pas armée. "Ah vrayement, luy dit-elle, je sçay bien autre façon de passer la nuict avec son mary, que m'a enseignée un autre mary que vous." "Vous avez eu un autre mary?" luy repliqua Dom Pèdre. "Oüy, luy dit-elle, si beau et si bien fait que vous serez ravy de le voir. Je ne sçay pourtant quand nous le verrons, car depuis la derniere lettre que vous m'avez écrite, il ne m'est pas venu voir."
>
> (95-96)

Ultimately, the image of *sottise* that emerges from this passage—which serves as the tale's climax—is that of a quality which, in marriage, is more dangerous than feminine wits could ever be. Rather than providing a lasting source of comfort for Dom Pèdre, Laure's *sottise* ironically compounds his pain at being cuckolded. For one, she describes her actions to him in thoughtlessly blunt language (and thus does not speak with the mindful sincerity that Scarron associates with ingenuousness). For another, by referring to her seducer as "un autre mary," as though "husband" is synonymous with "lover" or "man," she unwittingly saps her marriage of meaning and shows that she will never understand its obligations. Only then does Dom Pèdre come to appreciate the gist of the Duchess's warning: "il tourna le dos à sa femme […], se ressouvint des bons avis de la Duchesse, détesta son erreur et reconnut, mais trop tard, qu'une honneste femme sçait garder les loix de l'honneur et si par fragilité elle y manque, qu'elle sçait cacher sa faute" (96).[23] In other words, a wife's *sottise* not only makes virtue impossible for her: it also precludes the blissful

[23] Scarron repeats this lesson for the reader at the *nouvelle*'s conclusion, just as de Zayas does in the original *novela*: "L'histoire de Dom Pèdre […] fit connoistre à ceux qui en doutoient que, sans le bon sens, la vertu ne peut estre parfaite, qu'une spirituelle peut estre honneste femme d'elle-mesme, et qu'une sotte ne le peut estre sans le secours d'autrui et sans estre bien conduite" (97).

ignorance that a husband might at least enjoy with a *femme d'esprit*—that is, the kind of marriage that the Duke has with his Duchess. Laure's inability to conduct herself with discernment is a problem in the long term as well, as it obliges Dom Pèdre to monitor her actions at all times (96-97). The control that he had hoped her stupidity would grant him therefore becomes its own sort of burden.[24]

* * *

In Scarron's time, "La Précaution inutile" was a popular success, and it went on to inspire several adaptations, particularly in the theater. The most sophisticated of them all was certainly Molière's *L'École des femmes*, which made its debut on stage in 1662.[25] In terms of its basic premise, Molière's version of the story borrows heavily from Scarron's *nouvelle*: its leading man, Arnolphe, adopts a child named Agnès and has her raised in a convent in order to fortify her *sottise*. Arnolphe also finds his plans foiled in much the same way as Dom Pèdre does, although this occurs before he can marry his *sotte*: a young man spots Agnès on her balcony while Arnolphe is away and sets off a chain of events that leads to the latter's downfall. Yet thanks to the many changes that Molière made to the tale's characters, his play was quite different from Scarron's *nouvelle*—and indeed, from any *précaution inutile* story that had come before it.[26] Unlike Dom Pèdre, a respected nobleman, Arnolphe is a wealthy *bourgeois* who is consumed by the idea of improving his social status and image. His carefully crafted plan to wed a *sotte* is thus a matter of personal

[24] On Laure's persistent failure to learn, see Fournier, "Réécriture de Scarron," 51. Laure's enduring stupidity also sets her apart from the simple-minded wife in Antoine de la Sale's "L'amour en armes": when the latter discovers true sexual pleasure with her husband's clerk, she gains the wits to lie to her husband to conceal the affair. See Antoine de la Sale, *Les Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*, éd. crit. Franklin P. Sweetser (Geneva: Librairie Droz S.A., 1996).
[25] Other adaptations include Dorimond's *L'École des cocus ou la Précaution inutile* (1661) and Michel-Jean Sedaine's eighteenth-century comedy, *La Gageure imprévue* (1768). See Merino García, "De Zayas en France," 199.
[26] Marie-Odile Sweetser argues that *L'École des femmes* was "le traitement le plus complexe et le plus élaboré du thème [of the *précaution inutile*] à cette date [...]." Sweetser, "Reprises, variations, réécriture, sur un thème comique chez Molière," in *Le Labyrinthe de Versailles: Parcours critiques de Molière à La Fontaine: À la mémoire d'Alvin Eustis*, ed. Martine Debaisieux (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 33-51, at 42.

ambition as much as it is about his fear of being dishonored by a faithless wife. As a consequence, the play delves deeply into the anxieties and desires that drive his actions, and there is no clear indication at its end of how we are ultimately meant to feel about him. Against this backdrop, we also see a new kind of heroine in Agnès, whose awakening unfolds gradually over the course of the play. As she struggles to articulate the changes that she senses within herself, her *sottise* gives way to a type of *ingénuité* that had never been seen in French literature before.

1.3 The Ingénue Takes the Stage: Molière's *L'École des femmes*

The opening performance of *L'École des femmes* on December 26th, 1662, was a seminal moment in Molière's career. The play, which is regarded today as his first masterpiece, opened to acclaim and was performed more than sixty times over the next few months. It also set off a string of controversies that plagued Molière for several years afterward: following the *querelle de L'École des femmes*, which brought his play under fire for its references to sex and religion, his comedies were frequently targeted by censors and religious authorities.[27] What distinguished *L'École des femmes* from his earlier work was not the fact that it dramatized a *précaution inutile*: *L'École des maris* (1661), which he had produced just the year before, also features a jealous man who struggles to prevent a girl from cuckolding him. Rather, *L'École des femmes* was different in that its leading characters reached new levels of psychological and emotional complexity. Arnolphe and Agnès begin the play as type characters—the *pédant* and the *sotte*, respectively—but they soon surpass these conventional roles to become more individualized. This change comes

[27] On the play's role in Molière's career, see for example Stephen Bold, "Molière and Authority: From the *Querelle de L'École des femmes* to the *Affaire Tartuffe*," in *Romance Quarterly*, 44:2 (1997): 80-92; Michael Call, "Comedic Wars, Serious Moralists: Genre, Gender, and Molière's *L'École des femmes*," in *Guilty Pleasures: Theater, Piety, and Immorality in Seventeenth-Century France*, Yale French Studies 130 (2016): 52-64; and Joan DeJean, *The Reinvention of Obscenity: Sex, Lies, and Tabloids in Early Modern France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 84-121.

about as a result of Agnès's rebellion against Arnolphe, which she achieves, in part, by expressing herself "ingenuously" from the heart.

Although Agnès's role in the play is more substantial than Laure's role in Scarron's *nouvelle,* she does not appear in its first two scenes and has little dialogue until the middle of Act II. Until that point, our impression of her is largely shaped by Arnolphe, who describes his plans for her to his friend Chrysalde in the play's opening scene. As Arnolphe boasts of his impending marriage to his so-called "sotte," it is clear that with respect to his views on women, he bears a close resemblance to his predecessor Dom Pèdre. When Chrysalde incredulously asks him why he would want to marry a *sotte,* Arnolphe responds with a misogynistic rant about the dangers that *femmes d'esprit* pose to their husbands. Specifically, he attacks the witty banter and literary pursuits that are the lifeblood of these women's social circles because he sees them as gateways to sexual encounters with worldly men. Then, in a statement that echoes Dom Pèdre's vision of domestic bliss, he voices his belief that a wife's knowledge should be restricted to household affairs:

> Épouser une sotte est pour n'être point sot.
> Je crois, en bon chrétien, votre moitié fort sage;
> Mais une femme habile est un mauvais présage;
> […] Moi, j'irais me charger d'une spirituelle
> Qui ne parlerait rien que cercle et que ruelle,
> Qui de prose et de vers ferait de doux écrits,
> Et que visiteraient marquis et beaux esprits,
> Tandis que, sous le nom du mari de Madame,
> Je serais comme un saint que pas un ne réclame?

Non, non, je ne veux point d'un esprit qui soit haut;
Et femme qui compose en sait plus qu'il ne faut.
Je prétends que la mienne, en clartés peu sublime,
Même ne sache pas ce que c'est qu'une rime;
[…] Et c'est assez pour elle, à vous en bien parler,
De savoir prier Dieu, m'aimer, coudre et filer.

(I.1, vv. 82-4, 87-96, 101-2)[28]

Despite the similarities between Dom Pèdre's and Arnolphe's views on women, this scene also shows us that their actions are rooted in widely different motives. Arnolphe's indignation at the thought of being overlooked "sous le nom du mari de Madame" (v. 91) suggests that his desire to dominate Agnès stems from vanity, rather than from a past disappointment. Chrysalde gives us an even stronger clue about this in his first few lines in the play, which reveal that Arnolphe is a self-appointed social critic who is known for mocking the local cuckolds. Chrysalde warns him that if he suffers the same fate in his marriage as these men have, they will surely be eager to laugh at him: "Car enfin vous savez qu'il n'est ni grands ni petits / Que de votre critique on ait vus garantis; / Que vos plus grands plaisirs sont, partout où vous êtes, / De faire cent éclats des intrigues secrètes…" (vv. 17-20). In response, Arnolphe takes the opportunity to brag about his method of uncovering adulterous affairs. He explains that he begins by observing married women, which helps him to sniff out their secrets (vv. 21-42) and to become an expert on feminine wiles (or so he thinks): "Je sais les tours rusés et les subtiles trames / Dont pour nous en planter savent user les

[28] Molière, *L'École des femmes* in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, ed. Georges Couton (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971). In another throwback to Scarron's *nouvelle*, Chrysalde raises the same objections to Arnolphe that the Comtesse and Dom Rodrigue raise to Dom Pèdre: *sottes* are boring, they do not know how to defend their virtue, and so forth (vv. 107-16). Instead of directly refuting these arguments, Arnolphe reiterates his determination to follow through on his plans and emphasizes the precautions he has taken (vv. 117-54).

femmes […]" (vv. 76-7). Once he learns of an affair, he makes a show of talking about the cuckolded husband in public, thereby donning the role of a heckler who laughingly points out his victim's failings: "Enfin, ce sont partout des sujets de satire; / Et comme spectateur ne puis-je pas en rire? / Puis-je pas de nos sots...?" (vv. 42-3)[29] In this way, he places himself above the cuckolds—synonymous here with *sots*—whose weakness he disdains and rejects the notion that he himself could be fooled in the same way. Thus, his obsession with cuckoldry is not simply born of a fear of humiliation (which is nonetheless a part of it). Fundamentally, as Ralph Albanese, Jr. explains, it stems from a desire to feel superior to everyone else:

> [L]'obsession du cocuage fonctionne pour lui comme un tremplin, lui permettant de se dresser spectaculairement contre le monde. [...] Il s'aperçoit de sa singularité irréductible par rapport à autrui à tel point qu'il en vient à croire que le cocuage entraîne, nécessairement, la corruption de son être: en un mot être cocu [c'est] être comme autrui.[30]

At the play's outset, therefore, Arnolphe sees his impending marriage as the capstone of his quest to prove himself superior: by wedding a *sotte* of his own creation who lacks the wits to cuckold him, he will definitively and publicly buck the status quo as he sees it. Agnès thus serves as the locus of his idealized image of himself, as Thomas P. Finn argues: "Having a faithful wife, and boasting to society that he has created her, is the essence of his identity."[31] Arnolphe's pretentiousness even leads him to take on an aristocratic name to suit his new persona (a name that

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[29] Noël A. Peacock has explored the many additional ways in which Arnolphe wields language against others. These include dogmatic pontificating, monopolizing the dialogue, and constantly interrupting other people. See Peacock, "Verbal Costume in *L'École des femmes*," in *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 79, no. 3 (July 1984): 541-552.
[30] Ralph Albanese, Jr., *Le Dynamisme de la Peur chez Molière: Une analyse socio-culturelle de Dom Juan, Tartuffe, et L'École des femmes* (University [town of], Mississippi: Romance Monographs Inc., 1976), 147.
[31] Thomas P. Finn, *Molière's Spanish Connection: Seventeenth-Century Spanish Theatrical Influence on Imaginary Identity in Molière* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2001), 66. Finn also sees Arnolphe's guiding ambition as evidence of a link between *L'École des femmes* and *El Marido hace mujer* (1643), a Spanish play by Antonio de Hurtado. Finn argues that both texts play with the idea that "a man can elaborate on his own identity, in defiance of the community, by molding the identity of his fiancée" (66).

undoubtedly pleases him more than "le mari de Madame" ever would). He reminds Chrysalde of this near the end of the opening scene: "Mais enfin de la Souche est le nom que je porte: / J'y vois de la raison, j'y trouve des appas; / Et m'appeler de l'autre est ne m'obliger pas" (vv. 184-6). In fact, as Noël A. Peacock has pointed out, Arnolphe's choice of name is doubly pretentious: he claims to have chosen "de la Souche" because it is the name of his "maison" (v. 173), a phrase that evokes both his literal house (the actual source of the name), and the lineage of a noble family or "house" (the pedigree that he would like to claim for himself).[32]

All of this underpins the way that Arnolphe perceives Agnès's *sottise* in the play's early scenes. His remarks about it highlight the two facets of her character that contrast the most sharply with his description of *femmes d'esprit*. The first is her meek demeanor, which he identifies as the trait that compelled him to "love" her when she was a child. As he explains to Chrysalde in the opening scene, he decided to adopt her because of her "air doux et posé":

> Un air doux et posé, parmi d'autres enfants,
> M'inspira de l'amour pour elle dès quatre ans;
> Sa mère se trouvant de pauvreté pressée,
> De la lui demander il me vint la pensée;
> […] Dans un petit couvent, loin de toute pratique,
> Je la fis élever selon ma politique,
> C'est-à-dire ordonnant quels soins on emploirait
> Pour la rendre idiote autant qu'il se pourrait.

[32] Peacock adds that Arnolphe's adopted name would have sounded ridiculous to seventeenth-century audiences for several additional reasons: "[H]is ennobled title, chosen by Arnolphe for genealogical connotations ('faire souche' in the seventeenth century signified 'être le premier d'une suite de descendants') offers a comically proleptic illustration of his lack of success during the play. In addition to the meanings already adduced by critics: 'tree-stump' (its original meaning), 'stub,' 'shaft,' 'chimney-stack,' 'candle-stick,' 'water-pipe,' 'block-head,' 'insensitive man and fool,' it signifies 'grosse bûche ou pièce de bois' (Furetière) or 'grosse bûche de bois propre à brûler' (Richelet) [...]." Peacock, "Verbal Costume," 542-543.

[...] Je l'ai mise à l'écart, comme il faut tout prévoir,

Dans cette autre maison où nul ne me vient voir;

Et pour ne point gâter sa bonté naturelle,

Je n'y tiens que des gens tout aussi simples qu'elle[.]

(vv. 129-32, 135-8, 145-8)

As Arnolphe's attraction to Agnès's "air doux et posé" suggests, he does not "love" her as a person, but as a reassuringly passive, malleable object. In fact, he is so inclined to see her as an object that he neglects to mention her name at any point during this conversation with Chrysalde. The "bonté naturelle" that he aims to preserve in her is not so much a virtuous, profound quality of character; rather, it is her (seemingly) placid disposition, which is reinforced by her childlike lack of knowledge and experience.

The other aspect of Agnès's *sottise* that pleases Arnolphe is her inability to understand or use figurative language—that is, the kind of language that fosters poetic banter and wordplay, which are the marks of a *femme d'esprit*. Her literal-minded grasp of language is illustrated when she briefly appears on stage in Act I: when Arnolphe promises her that someone—namely, himself—will soon "chase away her fleas" each night, the sexual innuendo of his comment goes right over her head. This prompts Arnolphe to gloat to the audience about her difference from *femmes d'esprit*, who artfully write and speak of "fine sentiments":

ARNOLPHE: Vous vous êtes toujours, comme on voit, bien portée?

AGNÈS: Hors les puces, qui m'ont la nuit inquiétée.

ARNOLPHE: Ah! vous aurez dans peu quelqu'un pour les chasser.

AGNÈS: Vous me ferez plaisir.

ARNOLPHE: Je le puis bien penser.

[...] ARNOLPHE: Héroïnes du temps, Mesdames les savantes,

Pousseuses de tendresse et de beaux sentiments

Je défie à la fois tous vos vers, vos romans,

Vos lettres, billets doux, toute votre science

De valoir cette honnête et pudique ignorance.

(I.3, vv. 235-8, 244-8)

In Arnolphe's eyes, therefore, Agnès's *sottise* does not merely make her too foolish to cuckold him: it also closes her mind to the very notions of romantic love and sexual desire. Whereas *femmes d'esprit* think in terms of the conventional practices of courtship—which include writing "lettres [et] billets doux"—Agnès knows nothing of such things. Moreover, as Richard Goodkin argues, Arnolphe likely values her ignorance of the language of love because it frees him from all obligation to please her. Goodkin links this theory to Arnolphe's contempt for the love stories that one finds in novels, which is also expressed in the passage cited above: "One suspects that one of Arnolphe's goals in imposing a cloistered education on Agnès has been to protect her from the influence of novels so that she will neither expect any kind of courtship from him nor be receptive to courtship from other men."[33]

Of course, as Arnolphe's arrogant boasts encourage us to expect, neither of the traits that he associates with Agnès's *sottise* gives him full control over her. Notably, the scene in which he first confronts her about this is also the only scene in which he uses the word "ingénuité." He becomes aware of the problem near the end of Act I when he runs into Horace, the son of his friend

[33] Richard Goodkin, *How Do I Know Thee? Theatrical and Narrative Cognition in Seventeenth-Century France* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 176. Arnolphe also assumes that Agnès's lack of family connections and financial security will fortify his control over her, with the added benefit of forestalling any cause for complaint on her part. As he says to Chrysalde, "Je me vois riche assez pour pouvoir, que je crois, / Choisir une moitié qui tienne tout de moi, / Et de qui la soumise et pleine dépendance / N'ait à me reprocher aucun bien ni naissance" (I.1, vv. 125-8).

Oronte. Horace, who is unaware of Agnès's connection to Arnolphe, reveals that he has been courting the girl over the past few days while her mysterious "[monsieur] de la Zousse ou Source" was away (I.4, v. 328). He describes Agnès fondly, noting that "[...] dans l'ignorance où l'on veut l'asservir, / [Elle] [f]ait briller des attraits capables de ravir; / Un air tout engageant, je ne sais quoi de tendre, / Dont il n'est point de cœur qui se puisse défendre" (I.4, vv. 321-4). Yet at this point in the play, his interest in her also stems from the egotistical pleasure he feels at the prospect of stealing her from his unknown rival: "[...] [T]ous mes efforts, tous mes vœux les plus doux / Vont à m'en rendre maître en dépit du jaloux" (I.4, vv. 341-2). On top of this, he unwittingly presents Arnolphe with an unflattering description of himself, dealing a further blow to the latter's self-image: "Riche, à ce qu'on m'a dit, mais des plus sensés, non; / Et l'on m'en a parlé comme d'un ridicule. […] / Jaloux à faire rire […]" (vv. 330-1, 335). Arnolphe, fearful that Agnès has been seduced and hoping to regain his hold on her, decides to coax the details of the story from her instead of revealing himself to Horace. When Agnès next joins Arnolphe on stage in the middle of Act II, he prods her with hesitant questions about what she did during his absence. At first, her replies are comically simple-minded, just as they were when she complained of her fleas in Act I. Yet as soon as Arnolphe brings himself to mention Horace, she becomes much more animated:

ARNOLPHE: Quelle nouvelle?

AGNÈS: Le petit chat est mort.

[…] ARNOLPHE: Qu'avez-vous fait encor ces neuf ou dix jours-ci?

AGNÈS: Six chemises, je pense, et six coiffes aussi.

ARNOLPHE, *ayant un peu rêvé*: […]

Quelques voisins m'ont dit qu'un jeune homme inconnu

Était en mon absence à la maison venu,

Que vous aviez souffert sa vue et ses harangues;

Mais je n'ai point pris foi sur ces méchantes langues,

Et j'ai voulu gager que c'était faussement…

AGNÈS: Mon Dieu, ne gagez pas: vous perdriez vraiment.

ARNOLPHE: Quoi? c'est la vérité qu'un homme…?

AGNÈS: Chose sûre.

Il n'a presque bougé de chez nous, je vous jure.

ARNOLPHE, *à part*: Cet aveu qu'elle fait avec sincérité

Me marque pour le moins son ingénuité.

(II.5, vv. 460-1, 465-6, 469-78)

There are a few ways to interpret what Arnolphe means here by the word "ingénuité," many of which have been explored by Françoise Berlan-Lacourt in her lexicographic study of the term. She argues that Arnolphe's choice to pair it with "sincérité" means that it signifies "bonne foi," but she adds that he also seems to have its pejorative connotations in mind (namely, "trop de franchise" and "niaiserie"):

> Le rapprochement à la rime avec "sincérité" souligne la parenté sémantique des deux substantifs tout en les distinguant. Le premier étant chargé de l'idée de franchise, il faut déterminer quels sont les éléments de sens qu'ajoute "ingénuité." Le terme désigne avant tout ici la bonne foi, l'absence de "malice," de volonté de mal faire. Mais ces bonnes intentions ne sont envisageables que par l'ignorance d'Agnès, son incapacité à percevoir l'inconvenance de la situation. Cet aveu, contraire aux intérêts de la jeune fille, pourrait ressembler à de la sottise.
>
> (*Champ notionnel* 738)

Berlan-Lacourt bolsters this last remark by citing the terms that Arnolphe and Chrysalde use to describe Agnès in Act I: these words, as we have seen, include "sotte" and "idiote," both of which predispose the audience to think of Agnès as unintelligent (*Champ notionnel* 738). The full meaning that Arnolphe ascribes to "ingénuité" is also somewhat open to theatrical interpretation: for example, if one assumes that we are meant to laugh at Agnès for being foolishly indiscreet, the term could be played for comic effect. It could also express Arnolphe's relief at the girl's frankness, his shock at hearing her confirm his fears so bluntly, or his effort to reassure himself that her ignorance gives him the upper hand. Whatever the case may be, his notion of "ingénuité" clearly differs from Scarron's conception of it in *Le Roman comique*: in Arnolphe's eyes, ingenuousness is not the mindful good faith of *noble franchise*, but the innocent and heedless candor that one expects of a child. His use of the word therefore does not signal a significant shift in his perception of Agnès.

Be that as it may, Arnolphe's conversation with Agnès soon reveals that his problem is more complicated than he thought. Although he does not initially realize it, her budding romance with Horace has sparked an irreversible awakening in her mind. As she tells Arnolphe about the experience, we receive several clues that she is no longer the "sotte" whom he described in Act I. She begins by recalling the day that she first glimpsed Horace as he walked past her balcony:

> J'étais sur le balcon à travailler au frais,
> Lorsque je vis passer sous les arbres d'auprès
> Un jeune homme bien fait, qui, rencontrant ma vue,
> D'une humble révérence aussitôt me salue:
> Moi pour ne point manquer à la civilité,
> Je fis la révérence aussi de mon côté.

[…] Il passe, vient, repasse, et toujours de plus belle
Me fait à chaque fois révérence nouvelle;
Et moi, qui tous ces tours fixement regardais;
Nouvelle révérence aussi je lui rendais:
Tant que, si sur ce point la nuit ne fût venue,
Toujours comme cela je me serais tenue,
Ne voulant point céder, et recevoir l'ennui
Qu'il me pût estimer moins civile que lui.

(vv. 485-90, 495-502)

There are several things to note about the way that Agnès expresses herself here; in fact, this scene is particularly striking if we compare it to its counterpart in Scarron's *nouvelle*. In Scarron's text, Laure is spotted on her balcony by her seducer and is not at all curious about him: "Il vit souvent Laure en son Balcon [...], et Laure le laissa passer et repasser, sans sçavoir ce que cela vouloit dire et sans mesme avoir envie de le sçavoir" (89). In contrast, when Agnès meets Horace, it is she who first looks at him, and she remarks on the intensity of her gaze to Arnolphe: "un jeune homme bien fait, qui, rencontrant ma vue [...] / Et moi, qui tous ces tours fixement regardais [...]" (vv. 487, 497). Moreover, unlike Laure, who is merely an object of desire, Agnès wants her admirer's good opinion and strives to win it. In this respect, she is an agent as well as an object of desire, and she is also cognizant of how others might see her: "Toujours comme cela je me serais tenue, / Ne voulant point céder, et recevoir l'ennui / Qu'il me pût estimer moins civile que lui" (vv. 500-2). Finally, Agnès expresses curiosity about the pleasurable feelings (both emotional and physical) that Horace stirs within her. As Richard Goodkin points out, when she recalls Horace's words of love, she "does not make any attempt to replicate his discourse, limiting

herself rather to characterizing it and observing its ongoing effect on her" (*How Do I Know Thee* 178). As she says to Arnolphe later in this scene: "Il jurait qu'il m'aimait d'une amour sans seconde, / Et me disait des mots les plus gentils du monde, / Des choses que jamais rien ne peut égaler, / Et dont, toutes les fois que je l'entends parler, / La douceur *me chatouille et là-dedans remue* / *Certain je ne sais quoi dont je suis toute émue*" (vv. 559-64, my emphasis). Thanks to these lines, it is evident that Agnès has awakened to an inner life that would be impossible for a *sotte* like Laure to experience. The existence of that inner life also makes it clear to the audience that she is not—and perhaps has never been—quite as empty-headed or uninterested in the outside world as Arnolphe had hoped to make her.[34]

Despite the gravity of this situation, Arnolphe initially responds to it with little doubt of his ability to gain control of it. Still seeing Agnès as a malleable *sotte*, he decides to impose his will upon her by virtue of authority. He first attempts to quash her interest in Horace with warnings about the young man's intentions and the sinfulness of her visits with him (vv. 589-92, 595-9). Yet Agnès, instead of accepting Arnolphe's words without question (as she always does in Act I), responds with unexpected resistance. She asks Arnolphe to justify his arguments because she is not prepared to agree with them, thereby implying that her point of view holds equal weight with his: "Un péché, dites-vous? Et la raison, de grâce? [...] / Mais pourquoi faut-il que [le Ciel] s'en courrouce? / C'est une chose, hélas! si plaisante et si douce!" (vv. 600, 603-4)[35] This soon prompts

[34] This is not to say that Agnès's *sottise* plays no role in her awakening. As Nathalie Fournier and Richard Goodkin have argued, it seems likely that her inexperience with courtship makes Horace's conventional words of love seem that much more compelling to her. See Fournier, "Réécriture de Scarron," 57; and Goodkin, *How Do I Know Thee*, 176-177.

[35] Agnès's questions in this scene also recall an anecdote that Arnolphe shares with Chrysalde at the beginning of the play: he explains that the girl once asked him if children are conceived "à l'oreille" in the manner of Christ's conception, which had served as her only model of sexual relations thus far. Such a question is that of a child who has turned to an authority figure for an explanation, and Arnolphe—seemingly unperturbed by Agnès's curiosity about sex—simply finds her ignorance amusing: "Dans ses simplicités à tous coups je l'admire, / Et parfois elle en dit dont je pâme de rire" (I.1, vv. 159-60). In contrast, in Act II Agnès does not merely ask Arnolphe to explain the world: rather, she responds to his explanations by questioning his opinions.

Arnolphe to escalate from pedantic admonishments to tyranny. He orders Agnès to throw a rock at Horace while he—Arnolphe—watches her from the shadows, and thereby subjects her to the piercing gaze that he habitually directs at adulterous wives: "[J]e prétends [que] […] [v]ous lui fermiez au nez la porte honnêtement, / Et lui jetant, s'il heurte, un grès par la fenêtre, / L'obligiez tout de bon à ne plus y paraître. / M'entendez-vous, Agnès? Moi, caché dans un coin, / De votre procédé je serai le témoin" (vv. 630, 634-8). He then uses his command of language to reinforce his authority in the famous "Maximes du Mariage" scene of Act III: after lecturing Agnès about wifely submission, he forces her to parrot his domestic ideals by reading his Maxims aloud (III.2, vv. 675-807). The whole affair leaves him feeling godlike and inspires his most triumphant soliloquy in the play. In a speech that evokes the myth of Pygmalion, he proclaims his power to mold Agnès like a lump of wax:

> Je ne puis mieux faire que d'en faire ma femme.
>
> Ainsi que je voudrai, je tournerai cette âme;
>
> Comme un morceau de cire entre mes mains elle est,
>
> Et je lui puis donner la forme qui me plaît.
>
> […] De ces sortes d'erreurs le remède est facile:
>
> Toute personne simple aux leçons est docile;
>
> Et si du bon chemin on l'a fait écarter,
>
> Deux mots incontinent l'y peuvent rejeter.
>
> (III.3, vv. 808-11, 816-9)

Yet, tragically for this would-be despot, his victory is soon shown to be an illusion: as we discover in the next scene, Agnès responds to his tyranny by secretly attaching a letter to the rock that she throws at Horace.

Agnès's letter, which constitutes her first deliberate act of rebellion, engenders the second and final use of the word "ingénuité" in the play. Just as Arnolphe finishes gloating about his triumph over her, Horace joins him on stage with her missive in hand. Still unaware that Arnolphe and "monsieur de la Souche" are one and the same person, Horace exclaims at Agnès's resourcefulness and describes her message in the following terms: "Mais il faut qu'en ami je vous montre la lettre. / Tout ce que son cœur sent, sa main a su l'y mettre, / Mais en termes touchants et tous pleins de bonté, / De tendresse innocente et d'ingénuité, / De la manière enfin que la pure nature / Exprime de l'amour la première blessure" (III.4, vv. 940-5). With these lines, Horace invests the word "ingénuité" with much richer meaning than Arnolphe does in Act II, and he casts it in an entirely favorable light. For one, his second line, "Tout ce que son cœur sent, sa main a su l'y mettre," adds an emotional dimension to "ingénuité": whereas Arnolphe uses the term to describe Agnès's candid account of events, Horace links it to her guileless expression of her feelings.[36] Moreover, Horace's emphasis on the "touching" quality of her letter reveals that her words have struck a chord within him: in his eyes, her "bonté," "tendresse innocente," and "ingénuité" are well worthy of love, and have therefore deepened his attachment to her. This alone is a striking deviation from Scarron's "La Précaution inutile," which portrays Laure's *sottise* as not only amusing, but unlovable: as previously mentioned, her seducer abandons her without a thought, "rien n'estant si fragile que l'amour que l'on a pour une sotte" (95).

What is most remarkable about Horace's words, however, is the fact that he ties "ingénuité" to "nature," a move that Françoise Berlan-Lacourt identifies as "tout à fait nouveau" in the term's history (*Champ notionnel* 740). The full meaning that Horace ascribes to "nature" here is rather

[36] Berlan-Lacourt argues that in a few French texts that predate Molière's play, there is evidence of a conceptual link between the word "ingénuité' and the spontaneous expression of feeling. She cites Tristan l'Hermite's tragedy *La Mariamne* (1636) as one of a small number of early seventeenth-century texts in which the word is used this way. See *Champ notionnel*, 707-741.

vague. On the one hand, his use of the adjective "pure" casts "nature" as something simple and uncorrupted, and his reference to love's "première blessure" implicitly links it to youthfulness; yet on the other hand, he does not invest the term with a primitivist connotation or overtly contrast it with "civilized" qualities like worldliness. In this respect, his lines lend support to Patrick Dandrey's reading of the ways in which Molière uses the term "nature" in his corpus. In Dandrey's view, the meaning that Molière ascribes to "nature" is often challenging to pin down because he typically uses it to signify a nebulous quality of authenticity and equilibrium:

> [D]ans sa pensée […] *nature* est en quelque sorte un concept vide, qui ne peut se concevoir, justement, que comme *forme*. […] [D]ire "nature," chez Molière, c'est dire mesure, authenticité, lucidité, vérité, c'est définir les conditions d'approche de la nature, définir une optique intellectuelle, morale, philosophique, à travers laquelle elle se révèle sans se donner.[37]

In this vein, Agnès's ingenuousness is not simply an appealing form of candor in Horace's eyes. To him, it is endearing because it reflects a deeper quality of authenticity: that is, an unspoiled, unaffected innocence that yearns to express its awakening to love. By describing the change in her as a manifestation of "la pure nature," Horace characterizes it as wholesome and inexorable. In doing so, he underscores the hubris—and the failure—of Arnolphe's plan to mold her to suit his own desires.

For Agnès herself, the letter is more than an ingenuous account of her feelings. By expressing herself plainly to Horace—while simultaneously being forced to find a way to conceal her actions from Arnolphe—she manages to liberate her mind more completely than she did during

[37] Patrick Dandrey, *Molière ou l'esthétique du ridicule* (Paris: Librairie Klincksieck, seconde éd., 2002), 317. Dandrey also offers a detailed analysis of possible links between Molière's views on human nature and the thinking of philosophers like Blaise Pascal and Michel de Montaigne; see 285-325.

Horace's visits. The progression of her *déniaisement* is evident in her words, which are worth quoting at length:

> Je veux vous écrire, et je suis bien en peine par où je m'y prendrai. J'ai des pensées que je désirerais que vous sussiez; mais je ne sais comment faire pour vous les dire, et je me défie de mes paroles. Comme je commence à connaître qu'on m'a toujours tenue dans l'ignorance, j'ai peur de mettre quelque chose qui ne soit pas bien, et d'en dire plus que je ne devrais. En vérité, je ne sais ce que vous m'avez fait; mais je sens que je suis fâchée à mourir de ce qu'on me fait faire contre vous, que j'aurai toutes les peines du monde à me passer de vous, et que je serais bien aise d'être à vous. Peut-être qu'il y a du mal à dire cela; mais enfin je ne puis m'en empêcher […]. On me dit fort que tous les jeunes hommes sont des trompeurs […] mais je vous assure que je n'ai pu encore me figurer cela de vous, et je suis si touchée de vos paroles, que je ne saurais croire qu'elles soient menteuses. Dites-moi franchement ce qui en est; car enfin, comme je suis sans malice, vous auriez le plus grand tort du monde, si vous me trompiez; et je pense que j'en mourrais de déplaisir.
>
> (III.4, at v. 947)

With this letter, Agnès tries to compensate for her ignorance by using her emotions to navigate her thoughts, which leads her to shift from self-doubt to the beginnings of self-assurance. Her first lines focus on her fear of being too candid (or perhaps, too ingenuous), which highlights her awareness of the fact that she does not know how to talk about love within the bounds of good or prudent conduct. She also hints at a growing sense of injustice over the efforts that have been made to curb her knowledge ("Comme je commence à connaître qu'on m'a toujours tenue dans l'ignorance, j'ai peur de mettre quelque chose qui ne soit pas bien […]"). She then pushes past these concerns by shifting from mind-centered verbs like "savoir" and "connaître" to emotion-

centered expressions: "*je ne sais* comment faire [...] *mais je sens* que *je suis fâchée* [...], que *j'aurai toutes les peines* du monde [...], que *je serais bien aise* d'être à vous" (my emphasis). Declaring her love in this way allows her to decide on a course of action; namely, to disregard Arnolphe's warnings about Horace and to let her feelings guide her thoughts, at least for the moment: "*je suis si touchée* de vos paroles, que *je ne saurais croire* qu'elles soient menteuses" (my emphasis). Yet she also draws attention to her own sincerity in order to place the onus on Horace to respond to her in kind. She excuses her frankness by claiming that she could not help but profess her love, and then warns him that he would be wicked to repay her with deceit: "Peut-être qu'il y a du mal à dire cela; mais enfin je ne puis m'en empêcher [...]. [C]omme je suis sans malice, vous auriez le plus grand tort du monde, si vous me trompiez […]." Thus, while the feelings that she expresses in her letter are wholly sincere, she ends it by making a conscious (and successful) effort to shore up Horace's sympathy for her. In short, by recognizing her own vulnerability, she learns to advocate for herself and begins to judge others according to how they treat her.[38]

This leaves us with the questions of how Agnès's awakening affects Arnolphe and how his response to it helps to shape our overall impressions of both characters. In a strange way, the emotions that Agnès's letter stirs in him mirror some of her own: upon facing the prospect of losing her, he undergoes a crisis that leaves him feeling vulnerable and awakened to love. Yet in his case, the ordeal of falling in love (as opposed to "loving" Agnès as his creation and possession) proves

[38] To my knowledge, Agnès's letter has not received much close attention from literary critics. Two notable exceptions are Noël A. Peacock and Robert J. Nelson, who draw opposing conclusions about its style and content. Peacock argues that the letter makes an "unprecious, uninhibited emotional appeal" and that Agnès's "natural" language "finds its apogee in [it]," just as Horace says. Conversely, Nelson reads the letter as a "marvel of rhetoric" that is meant to "fool" Horace: "The parallelism [of its clauses] is too striking for the effect to show the sheer spontaneity of an innocent heart. Alongside the apparently fumbling innocence of her first sentence, her last is a very model of feline (in a less feminist age I might have said: 'feminine') wile." Although Nelson is right to argue that Agnès shows signs of astuteness in her letter, he overlooks her essential honesty: after writing the letter, she learns to hide Horace's visits from Arnolphe, but she never overtly lies to anyone about what she thinks or feels. See Peacock, "Verbal Costume," 550; and Nelson, "Molière: The Metaphysic of Comedy," in *L'Esprit Créateur*, vol. 15, no. 1/2 (Spring-Summer 1975): 119-129, at 122-123.

to be humiliating rather than empowering. As soon as Horace leaves him alone on stage, he launches into a tirade of amorous pining and self-abuse: “Et cependant je l’aime, après ce lâche tour, / Jusqu’à ne me pouvoir passer de cet amour. / Sot, n’as-tu point de honte? Ah! je crève, j’enrage, / Et je souffletterais mille fois mon visage” (III.5, vv. 998-1001).[39] His growing rage, fear, and desire culminate in a desperate bid to win Agnès’s love in Act V, when he catches her in the act of fleeing with Horace. In a clownish display (for the audience, at least), he mixes awkward promises of affection with dramatic gestures of despair and threats to harm himself. He even offers to let Agnès do as she pleases as his wife, effectively renouncing his dream of distinguishing himself from the cuckolds he so disdains. Unsurprisingly, his clumsy overtures leave Agnès unmoved, and she tells him so with her usual frankness:

ARNOLPHE: (*Il fait un soupir*) Écoute seulement ce soupir amoureux,

Vois ce regard mourant, contemple ma personne,

Et quitte ce morveux et l’amour qu’il te donne.

[…] Sans cesse, nuit et jour, je te caresserai,

Je te bouchonnerai, baiserai, mangerai;

Tout comme tu voudras, tu pourras te conduire:

Je ne m’explique point, et cela, c’est tout dire.

[…] Quelle preuve veux-tu que je t’en donne, ingrate?

Me veux-tu voir pleurer? Veux-tu que je me batte?

Veux-tu que je m’arrache un côté de cheveux?

[39] Arnolphe remarks on the change in his feelings in the next scene as well, after paying an angry visit to Agnès in her room: “Plus en la regardant je la voyais tranquille, / Plus je sentais en moi s’échauffer une bile; / Et ces bouillants transports dont s’enflammait mon cœur / Y semblaient redoubler mon amoureuse ardeur; / J’étais aigri, fâché, désespéré contre elle: / Et cependant jamais je ne la vis si belle, / Jamais ses yeux aux miens n’ont paru si perçants, / Jamais je n’eus pour eux des désirs si pressants” (IV.1, vv. 1016-23).

Veux-tu que je me tue? Oui, dis si tu le veux:

Je suis tout prêt, cruelle, à te prouver ma flamme.

AGNÈS: Tenez, tous vos discours ne me touchent point l'âme:

Horace avec deux mots en ferait plus que vous.

(V.4, vv. 1587-9, 1594-7, 1600-6)

Moreover, in addition to admonishing Arnolphe for not having tried to court her sooner (vv. 1534-6), Agnès reproaches him for her poor education and declares her intent to seek a better one with Horace: "Vous avez là-dedans bien opéré vraiment, / Et m'avez fait en tout instruite joliment! / Croit-on que je me flatte, et qu'enfin, dans ma tête, / Je ne juge pas bien que je suis une bête? / Moi-même, j'en ai honte; et, dans l'âge où je suis, / Je ne veux plus passer pour sotte, si je puis" (V.4, vv. 1554-9). Although she remains Arnolphe's captive until the play's last scene (when her long lost father conveniently appears and announces her betrothal to Horace), her mental emancipation is crystallized when she vows to flee from ignorance.

For critics like Patrick Dandrey, Agnès's rejection of Arnolphe represents a triumph of "nature," where "nature" means "mesure, authenticité, lucidité, [et] vérité" (*L'esthétique* 317). Specifically, Dandrey argues that Arnolphe's plan for Agnès—which Arnolphe himself describes as a means of preserving her "bonté naturelle" (I.1, v. 147)—is ultimately shown to be denaturing in that it artificially stymies her mental and emotional development. As a consequence, Dandrey contends that even as "l'école de l'amour" restores Agnès's humanity, it exposes Arnolphe's deep-seated corruption, to which Dandrey refers as his "difformités" (332). In this vein, Dandrey reads Arnolphe's ungainly words of love as part of a process of degeneration that reduces him to an object of ridicule and robs him of the power of speech. By the time that he exits the stage in the final scene, with nothing to say but a cry of "Oh!" upon losing Agnès for good (V.9, v. 1764), he

amounts to a "monster" and a "beast" in Dandrey's eyes. Agnès, on the other hand, rediscovers her "authentic" self and becomes a charming heroine in the process:

> [L]'évolution d'Agnès, passant de l'animalité obtuse à l'ingénuité charmante, puis à la transparence indécise, pour émerger à la conscience, à la souffrance, à la poésie, croise l'évolution inverse d'Arnolphe, qui glisse du cynisme à la fureur puis à la peur, de là au pathos ridicule, avant de s'évanouir de la scène dans un râle au dénouement. Il perd dans l'affaire la parole qu'Agnès apprend à conquérir, et tourne au monstre et à la bête tandis qu'elle s'humanise et s'affine. […] [P]our atteindre à l'évidence authentique du naturel, pour retrouver son identité, son père, sa condition, Agnès doit passer par l'enfer de la dénaturation et de l'inauthenticité, comme pour s'y purifier de tout ce qui l'a déformée, et reprendre à l'origine l'ascension vers elle-même qui avait entre-temps été détournée de sa voie naturelle.
>
> (*L'esthétique* 331-332)[40]

This reading of Agnès's *déniaisement* as a victory for her natural self finds ample support within the play. After showing her letter to Arnolphe, Horace frames her awakening in precisely those terms: "Avez-vous jamais vu d'expression plus douce, / Malgré les soins maudits d'un injuste pouvoir, / *Un plus beau naturel* peut-il se faire voir? / Et n'est-ce pas sans doute un crime punissable / De gâter méchamment ce fonds d'âme admirable[?]" (III.4, vv. 949-53, my emphasis) As he goes on to pelt "de la Souche" with invectives like "ce franc animal, / Ce traître, ce bourreau, ce faquin, ce brutal..." (III.5, vv. 958-9), the audience is invited to laugh at Arnolphe's impotent rage and humiliation (as well as at Horace's ignorance of his true identity). It is therefore

[40] In a similar vein, Christophe Martin views Agnès's curtailed education as a denaturing "projet monstrueux," and Noël A. Peacock reads Arnolphe's downfall as a dramatization of "the triumph of nature and its revenge on the one who sought to repress it." See Martin, *Éducations négatives*, 217; and Peacock, "Verbal Costume," 552.

reasonable to argue that Horace's function here is to funnel our sympathy to Agnès by bolstering Arnolphe's image as a loathsome, brutish buffoon.

Yet as much as we might cheer for Agnès as she rebels against Arnolphe, I would argue that losing her does not make him monstrous or beast-like. Rather, their conflict puts him in touch with his own humanity (albeit painfully so), even as it helps to humanize her. The fact that she has the innate capacity to fall in love and to be curious about the outside world exposes the limits of his power over her, which he had believed to be godlike. As a result, her awakening dissolves the foundation of his "monsieur de la Souche" alter ego and forces him to contend with his shattered self-image. As he pleads for her love in Act V, we catch a glimpse of a vulnerable Arnolphe in the midst of what may be his first emotionally honest conversation with someone else. He also forsakes his past resistance to being bracketed with other men and likens himself to those who are subjugated by love. After professing an urge to strike Agnès, he finds himself touched by her exclamation of "Hélas!" (V.5, v. 1568) and curses this as a masculine weakness: "Ce mot, et ce regard désarme ma colère, / Et produit un retour de tendresse de cœur, / Qui de son action m'efface la noirceur. / Chose étrange d'aimer, et que pour ces traîtresses / Les hommes soient sujets à de telles faiblesses!" (vv. 1569-73) Given that his predicament ironically stems from his misogyny and tyrannical behavior, the question of whether he deserves our pity, or our laughter (or both) is left to us to resolve. But by unveiling the fears and longings that drive his actions, his ordeal transforms his doomed desire to control Agnès into something unsettlingly relatable. At the same time, her refusals highlight the futility of trying to mold others' thoughts and feelings into exactly what one wants them to be—even if the object of one's efforts is an ignorant ingénue.[41]

[41] At least one of Molière's contemporaries entertained the idea that the audience is meant to pity Arnolphe. In his *Panégyrique de l'École des femmes ou Conversation comique sur les œuvres de M. de Molière* (1663), Charles Robinet wrote: "[C]ette *École* est non seulement contre toutes les règles du Dramatique, mais contre celles du Comique: le Héros y montrant presque toujours, un amour qui passe jusqu'à la fureur, et le porte à demander à

* * *

If we compare the conclusions of "La Précaution inutile" and *L'École des femmes*, it is tempting to argue that Laure and Agnès ultimately have little in common. Whereas Laure remains a mindless, malleable *sotte* at the end of Scarron's novella, Agnès's ingenuousness comes to play a key role in her rebellion against a tyrant. Her guileless expression of her feelings wins Horace's love and devotion, thereby making him into a steadfast ally in her efforts to escape from Arnolphe; and putting her desires into words can also be described as a liberating act in itself, insofar as it helps her to further her mental and emotional awakening. In these respects, her *ingénuité* reveals a depth of character that is antithetical to Laure's brand of *sottise*, and it underpins her transition from comical dupe to sympathetic heroine. It also makes Agnès unique in mid-seventeenth-century French literature, in that her characterization ties the concept of ingenuousness to a "natural," pure, and youthful quality of authenticity for the first time.

Despite these differences, however, Agnès's *ingénuité* is not completely dissociated from the *sottise* that also informs her character. For one, both qualities are reflections of her childlike innocence and ignorance of the world; and for another, both leave her vulnerable to people who are willing to take advantage of her. Horace sees her ingenuous candor as endearing, but it becomes imprudent and even foolish in the moments when she describes her feelings for him to Arnolphe. Horace himself laments her overly trusting nature in one of his last tête-à-têtes with Arnolphe, when he unwittingly warns his rival that Agnès intends to run away with him. Whereas *sottes* who unthinkingly fall victim to seducers were a common comic trope in Molière's time—as Laure's

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Agnès, si elle veut qu'il se tue, ce qui n'est propre que dans la Tragédie, à laquelle on réserve les plaintes, les pleurs, et les gémissements. Ainsi, au lieu que la Comédie doit finir par quelque chose de gai, celle-ci finit par le désespoir d'un Amant qui se retire avec un 'Ouf!' par lequel il tâche d'exhaler la douleur qui l'étouffe: de manière qu'on ne sait si l'on doit rire ou pleurer dans une Pièce, où il semble qu'on veuille aussitôt exciter la pitié que le plaisir." Text accessed via http://moliere.huma-num.fr/base.php?Pan%C3%A9gyrique_de_l%27Ecole_des_femmes.

story illustrates—Horace implies that dishonoring an unwary, loving ingénue would be tragic rather than humorous: "Considérez un peu, par ce trait d'innocence, / Où l'expose d'un fou la haute impertinence, / Et quels fâcheux périls elle pourrait courir, / Si j'étais maintenant homme à la moins chérir" (V.2, vv. 1412-5). In other words, Agnès's ingenuousness wins Horace's heart and attests to the resilience of her humanity, but it does not protect her from everyone or grant her full control over her destiny: as Horace's remarks to Arnolphe suggest, the girl's story could have ended badly had her admirer proved to be as unscrupulous as Laure's seducer, or had her real father not miraculously arrived to supplant Arnolphe as Agnès's guardian. Thus, despite the fact that Molière ultimately casts Agnès in a sympathetic light, his portrayal of her innocence and candor retains a faint hint of ambivalence. It is therefore unsurprising that ambivalent attitudes towards ingénues persisted into the eighteenth century, when Agnès became a key source of inspiration for a wide swath of characters.[42]

1.4 Agnès's Legacy: Defining the Ingénu(e) in the *Encyclopédie*

Among Molière's contemporaries, Agnès's awakening was one of several elements of *L'École des femmes* that attracted controversy. Seventeenth-century critical discourses about it tended to focus on the question of its verisimilitude, as one can see, for example, in Philippe de la Croix's *La Guerre comique ou la défense de L'École des femmes* (1664). The text is composed as a dialogue between a group of interlocutors, one of whom scoffs at the rapidity of Agnès's

[42] Notably, a few years after *L'École des femmes* was first performed, Jean de la Fontaine's *Contes et nouvelles en vers* (1666) put a comical spin on the seduction of a so-called "ingénue." In *L'Ermite*, a tale adapted from Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1353), a lecherous friar tricks a gullible peasant into letting him sleep with her daughter. De la Fontaine describes the girl as follows: "Jeune, ingénue, agréable et gentille; / Pucelle encor; mais à la vérité / Moins par vertu que par simplicité, / Peu d'entregent, beaucoup d'honnêteté, / D'autre dot point, d'amants pas davantage." Text accessed via www.lafontaine.net/lesContes. The girl's lowly birth, along with the satirical tone that is common to *nouvelles* as a genre, links her to a long tradition of simple-minded rustics who are duped by more savvy characters in premodern French literature. The text is also an early example of how ingenuousness was increasingly associated with virginal young girls after Agnès's debut on stage. On these topics, see the Introduction.

transformation: "[C'est] la plus sensible faute qui soit dans [la pièce]. Peut-on souffrir que cette Agnès qui dans les premières Scènes paraît l'innocence même, se déniaise si promptement?"[43] In response, another character argues that Agnès's escape from ignorance is entirely plausible: specifically, he insists that "Elle sort d'assez bon lieu pour avoir un fond d'âme fort raisonnable," and that love has an extraordinary power to awaken the mind (25-28).[44] Yet for the most part, in the seventeenth century the question of Agnès's character development was subsumed into broader debates about Molière's disregard for dramatic conventions, rather than standing as a point of interest in its own right. As Joan DeJean, Michael Call, and countless other critics have shown, the play's detractors usually focused on the obscenity of its sexual and religious subtexts, or on its unorthodox blend of comic and tragic registers.[45]

In eighteenth-century art and literature, however, the scope of Molière's achievement in creating Agnès comes into sharper focus. His nuanced portrayal of her character, coupled with the enduring popularity of *L'École des femmes*, allowed his conception of *ingénuité* to take root in the minds of many Enlightenment authors, artists, and thinkers. Several of the traits that were commonly associated with ingénues in this period trace their origins back to Agnès—or more precisely, to Horace's view of her ingenuousness as a touching quality of natural innocence and authenticity. Agnès's youth and modest origins also helped to detach ingenuousness from the class-specific ethos of *noble franchise*, which authors like Paul Scarron associated with the term well into the 1650s. In Françoise Berlan-Lacourt's words, "La notion [de l'ingénuité] n'[était] plus rattachée à l'excellence d'une origine ou d'une éducation [in *L'École des femmes*][.]" Rather, it

[43] Philippe de la Croix, *La Guerre comique ou la défense de L'École des femmes* (Paris: Pierre Bienfaict, 1664), 24. Text accessed via http://moliere.huma-num.fr/base.php?La_Guerre_comique.
[44] To bolster his argument, this interlocutor also cites a passage from the play's third Act, in which Horace remarks on love's pedagogical merits. In Horace's words: "Il le faut avouer, l'amour est un grand maître, / Ce qu'on ne fut jamais il nous enseigne à l'être" (III.4, vv. 900-1).
[45] See for example DeJean, *Obscenity*, 95-107; and Call, "Comedic Mores, Serious Moralists," 52-64.

was, for the first time, "l'expression d'un mythe, celui de la jeunesse comme image inaltérée de la nature loin des travestissements du jeu social ou de la pensée réflexive" (*Champ notionnel* 740). As a result, in addition to high-born ingénues like Choderlos de Laclos's Cécile de Volanges (*Les Liaisons dangereuses*, 1782), ingénues of modest birth often feature in eighteenth-century art and literature (including a few who appear in Marivaux's comedies, which I will discuss in Chapter 2). Moreover, while ingénues continued to star in *précaution inutile* narratives, like Beaumarchais's *Le Barbier de Séville* (1775), they radiated into a range of artistic and literary genres: one finds them in sentimental novels, social satires, travel narratives, libertine fiction, and mid-century genre paintings, to name a few examples.

Yet as Agnès's brand of ingenuousness was reimagined in these new contexts, certain aspects of her character tended to fall by the wayside. Whereas her story dramatizes her youthful rebellion, many Enlightenment authors and artists chose not to portray ingénues in revolt against tyrants.[46] Instead, they often focused on exploring the feelings (whether affectionate, predatory, or a mix of the two) that ingénues inspire in those who interact with them, and on how such young women fare when faced with unfamiliar environments or more worldly characters. Furthermore, beginning around the middle of the century, ingénues also became a common motif for exploring the body as a mode of expression: whereas Agnès's innocence and candor are reflected in her spoken language, eighteenth-century ingénues often possess a quality of artless physical expressivity as well.

[46] As Christophe Martin has shown, this was even the case in some eighteenth-century adaptations of the *précaution inutile* motif. The ingénues in Henri-François de la Solle's *Les Mémoires de deux amis* (1753) and Baculard d'Arnaud's *Liebman* (1775) remain cloistered and childlike well into adulthood, just as their tutors wish. The men's "useless" precautions therefore prove to be quite useful for an extended period of time. See Martin, "Agnès et ses sœurs," 343-362.

One of the texts that best illustrates these developments is the *Encyclopédie* article "Ingénuité," which appeared in the collection's eighth volume in 1766. Although the text is unsigned, the ARTFL Project identifies Denis Diderot as its most likely author.[47] For our purposes, it is noteworthy for two reasons: namely, the way that it describes the experience of beholding and listening to ingénu(e)s; and the fact that it identifies Agnès as an archetype who embodies all of their essential qualities.[48] The first of its two short paragraphs is worth quoting at length:

> INGÉNUITÉ, s. f. (*Gram.*): […] L'*ingénuité* est la qualité d'une ame innocente qui se montre telle qu'elle est, parce qu'il n'y a rien en elle qui l'oblige à se cacher. L'innocence produit l'*ingénuité*, & l'*ingénuité* la franchise. On est tenté de supposer toutes les vertus dans les personnes *ingénues*. Que leur commerce est agréable! Si elles ont parlé, on sent qu'elles devoient dire ce qu'elles ont dit. Leur ame vient se peindre sur leurs levres, dans leurs yeux, & dans leur expression. On leur découvre son cœur avec d'autant plus de liberté, qu'on voit le leur tout entier. Ont-elles fait une faute, elles l'avouent d'une maniere qui feroit presque regretter qu'elles ne l'eussent pas commise. Elles paroissent innocentes jusque dans leurs erreurs; […]. Voyez Agnès dans l'*école des femmes*. Leur vérité donne de l'intérêt & de la grace aux choses les plus indifférentes. Le petit chat est mort; qu'est-ce que cela? rien: mais ce rien est de caractere, & il plaît.[49]

In these lines, the author is clearly moved by the way that ingénu(e)s like Agnès express themselves, and he notes that their artlessness and innocence render their most trivial comments

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[47] In fact, as we shall see in Chapter 3, Diderot's depictions of ingenuousness in his *Salons* (1759-1781) and *La Religieuse* (1760/1780-1782) often echo the article's main points. "Ingénuité" also bears a stylistic resemblance to Diderot's article "Innocence," which was published in the same volume of the *Encyclopédie*.

[48] It is also worth noting that the author only cites examples of female ingénues, despite the fact that he does not explicitly associate ingenuousness with a particular gender. In addition to Agnès, he identifies the titular heroine of Jean Racine's *Iphigénie* (1674) as an ingénue. It is therefore possible that he regarded *ingénuité* as a chiefly feminine quality, but his article offers no further clues about this.

[49] *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert (8:744), accessed via the ARTFL Project, http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu.

"interesting"—that is, emotionally and aesthetically compelling. Yet his words also portray the attraction that such people hold for others in somewhat ambiguous terms. On the one hand, he claims that their guilelessness offers their admirers an exciting chance to engage in a sympathetic rapport: since one can both "see" and "feel" the true essence of their hearts, one can pour out one's heart to them "avec d'autant plus de liberté." The author also links ingenuousness to an attractive, involuntary language of the body: just as the ingenuous "soul" nakedly displays itself in speech, it "paints" itself upon the ingénu(e)'s face and form in an intensely pleasing spectacle. On the other hand, however, the relationship that the author describes here is inherently unequal, and the disadvantage is firmly on the ingénu(e)'s side. Regardless of whether ingénu(e)s choose to speak aloud (or are aware of expressing themselves at all), their bodies transparently articulate their emotional and psychological states.[50] The author's remark that "[l]eur âme vient se peindre sur leurs lèvres, dans leurs yeux, et dans leur expression" therefore carries a hint of voyeurism. In this way, he simultaneously casts ingénu(e)s as fellow human beings who deserve sympathy, and as thrilling, passive objects of desire.

At the same time, the author's remark that "[o]n est tenté de supposer toutes les vertus dans les personnes ingénues" suggests that one's feelings or ideals can unduly influence the way that one perceives such people: their appealing demeanor can inspire strong, positive emotions in others, but their candor does not necessarily indicate that they possess deeper sentiments or virtues.[51] The author elaborates on this in his second paragraph, in which he defines *ingénuité* against a countermodel: *naïveté*. He contends that *naïveté* is a form of candor born of intense

[50] Notably, this is not the case with Agnès. When Arnolphe learns that she wrote to Horace and enters her room "pour voir / Quelle est sa continence après un trait si noir" (*LDF*, III.5, vv. 1002-3), he fails to divine that Horace is hiding in her cupboard (IV.1).

[51] The Chevalier Danceny of Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* makes this mistake: his idealistic perception of Cécile de Volanges does not at all hold up to reality, given that she proves to be far less honest and virtuous than he initially assumes. See Chapter 4.

emotion, whereas *ingénuité* is the product of an unformed mind. Once again, Agnès serves as his main example of the latter trait:

> L'*ingénuité* a peu pensé, n'est pas assez instruite; la naïveté oublie pour un moment ce qu'elle a pensé, le sentiment l'emporte. L'*ingénuité* avoue, révele, manque au secret, à la prudence; la naïveté exprime & peint; […]. L'*ingénuité* semble exclure la réflexion; elle n'est point d'habitude sans un peu de bétise, la naïveté sans beaucoup de sentiment; on aime l'*ingénuité* dans l'enfance, parce qu'elle fait espérer de la candeur; on l'excuse dans la jeunesse, dans l'âge mûr on la méprise. L'Agnès de Molière est ingénue […].
>
> (8:744)[52]

The intellectual deficiencies that the author links to ingenuousness in this passage are twofold: the first half refers to the ignorance and heedlessness that come with inexperience, but the second describes a more ingrained "bêtise" that seems fundamentally incompatible with deep thought. These words thereby give the impression that ingénu(e)s are often primitive, vaguely animalistic creatures, given to showing themselves plainly but lacking moral integrity and emotional depth.

As eighteenth-century authors and artists transplanted their own versions of Agnès from the *précaution inutile* motif into other genres, all of these facets of ingenuousness came together to make the character into an effective, versatile device for exploring the period's complex social mores and cultural practices. Whether ingénues were portrayed as touching or absurd, full of sincere feeling or foolishly candid, they stood out against any sophisticated, codified social backdrop that they did not know how to navigate or to which they did not belong. Agnès's legacy also extends to the other types of characters (whether male or female) whom ingénues tend to

[52] The author also claims that Jean Racine's tragic heroine Iphigénie is both *naïve* and *ingénue*, but he does not delve into his reasons for doing so. For more on the semantic relationship between "naïveté" and "ingénuité," see the Introduction.

encounter in eighteenth-century literature and art. Many of these ingénues are paired with friends, benefactors, or lovers who admire and perhaps desire them for their artlessness, and who resemble Horace in that respect. Most also contend with cunning manipulators who seek to exploit their innocence, much as Arnolphe would. Still others cross paths with characters who share qualities with both Horace and Arnolphe, and whose feelings and motives for taking an interest in ingénues are consequently challenging to pin down. Ultimately, the ways in which these young women conduct themselves and are treated by others say quite a bit about the social and cultural contexts in which they find themselves, and about the people whom they encounter in those environments. We will turn to these topics in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 2: Ingénues and Exoticism in Marivaux's Comedies and Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*

2.1 Critical Voices: Seeing the World from the Ingénue's Perspective

Over the course of the French Enlightenment, the ingénue developed into a versatile and nuanced character type. Prior to 1750, much of this development took place in texts that cast ingénues as foreigners or other types of outsiders. As Gilbert Chinard has noted, "exotics" were already common in travel logs and other literature before 1700; but in the eighteenth century, they flourished as full-fledged characters whose views of France—which were often negative—were shaped by their own experiences within it:

> Ce n'est vraiment qu'au XVIIIe siècle que nous voyons apparaître le type de l'étranger ou du sauvage qui se transporte chez nous, prend de nos mœurs une connaissance directe, et s'étonne d'abord, puis s'indigne en découvrant des iniquités que nous acceptons sans les voir et presque sans en souffrir.[1]

This trope arose from several shifts that were taking place in French cultural perceptions in this period. For one, colonialism was putting Europeans into contact with more diverse populations than ever before, which drew tales of "savages" and other "exotics" more squarely into the public imagination. The Enlightenment also ushered in a new interest in how cultures develop and decline, which eventually helped to inspire broader inquiries into the essence of

[1] Gilbert Chinard, *L'Amérique et le rêve exotique dans la littérature française au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Librairie E. Droz, 1934 [first ed. 1913]), 221-222. Ellen R. Welch identifies precursors to the exotic visitor trope in her study of the "urban novel," a genre that was popular in France from the 1660s to the 1680s. These novels, which were written in the style of city guides and gazettes, explored Paris through the eyes of Europeans or French provincials who were visiting it for the first time. See Welch, *A Taste for the Foreign: Worldly Knowledge and Literary Pleasure in Early Modern French Fiction* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 51-81.

human nature towards the middle of the century.[2] But most of all, the foreigner/outsider's rise as a complex literary device stemmed from changes that were occurring *within* France. The early century was a period of profound shifts in the social, political, and cultural makeup of French society: it produced a burst of creative experimentation in the arts, later known as the "rococo" aesthetic; an increase in social mobility from the provinces to Paris; and the rapid growth of a new "class" of wealthy merchants and financiers, to name only a few examples.[3] In the wake of so many changes, fictional foreigners and outsiders were a means of exploring what it meant to be French: by depicting modern France through their eyes, authors pushed their audiences to examine themselves from an unfamiliar perspective.

Ingénu(e)s—whether male or female—who fill this role in eighteenth-century texts typically fall into one of two categories of personae. The first are literal foreigners: so-called "noble savages" of the Americas, found in texts like Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747) and Voltaire's *L'Ingénu* (1767). The second are native to France and can be described as cultural or social outsiders, depending upon the context in which they appear: they are *naïf* characters from the provinces who come into contact with Parisians, nobles, or other worldly figures. Examples of these include the heroines of Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux's *La Double Inconstance* (1723) and *L'Épreuve* (1740), whom Marivaux describes as "simples bourgeoises" of the countryside. Although different in some ways, these two character types are

[2] On these points, see for example Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993); and Tzvetan Todorov, *Nous et les autres: La Réflexion française sur la diversité humaine* (Paris: Seuil, 1989).
[3] On the difficulty of defining this "class," see Sarah Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 41-68. On eighteenth-century aesthetic and social trends, see Elena Russo, *Styles of Enlightenment: Taste, Politics, and Authorship in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 1-15, and Amy S. Wyngaard, *From Savage to Citizen: The Invention of the Peasant in the French Enlightenment* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 13-34.

related in that their otherness is chiefly defined in moral and temporal terms. By virtue of their moral innocence, simple natures, and "childish" or primitive ways, they represent the French as they were before the advent of modern society. Thus, their primary function is to speak for values that have been lost or neglected in modern France: in the face of the hypocrisies and other vices they observe, they champion qualities like virtue, honesty, and simplicity.[4] At the same time, many of these ingénu(e)s find their voices challenged, altered, or even silenced by their experiences, which forces them to question their own perspectives and identities. Often, how they fare in the modern world serves not only as a commentary on France's present (and likely future), but on the strength or weakness of its connection to the values, ideals, and customs of its past.

In this chapter, I examine three female ingénues who play the role of the outsider/foreigner in texts by Marivaux and de Graffigny. I begin with Marivaux's *La Double Inconstance*, which he himself regarded as one of his best plays.[5] I then follow with an analysis of *L'Épreuve*, one of his most successful plays. Taken together, they offer interesting insights into Marivaux's views on modernity. The first dramatizes its heroine Silvia's struggle to never change and to hold onto the past; conversely, the heroine of the second play, Angélique, lives in the modern world but is shown to be out of place in it. By virtue of her suffering, Angélique also resembles sentimental heroines like Zilia, the kidnapped protagonist of de Graffigny's epistolary novel *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*.[6] Zilia, by recounting her hardships in letters to her lost fiancé, allows the novel's reader to share in her experience on a more intimate level than is possible for the heroines of Marivaux's plays.

[4] This tends to set them apart from fictional visitors from eastern empires, like Usbek and Rica of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (1721). Unlike their ingenuous foreign counterparts, most eastern visitors judge France against the purportedly "mature" customs, mores, and governing philosophies of their own countries as they are in the present day. See Chinard, *Rêve exotique*, 222-223. On the advent of primitivism in French literature, see Thomas M. Kavanagh's chapter on "Lahontan and the Moment Between Cultures" in *Esthetics of the Moment: Literature and Art in the French Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 26-44.
[5] See Jean Fleury, *Marivaux et le marivaudage* (Paris: E. Plon et Cie., Imprimeurs-Éditeurs, 1881), 125.
[6] In fact, Angélique's original name was Marianne, the same name as the heroine of Marivaux's novel *La Vie de Marianne* (1731-1742), which is often considered a precursor to the sentimental mode.

Finally, all of these texts explore language itself as one of their major themes: each heroine, as she grows alienated from herself and her surroundings, finds herself fighting to stay connected to her own voice.

2.2 Changing Places, Changing Identities: Marivaux's *La Double Inconstance*

Marivaux's *La Double Inconstance* (1723) dramatizes a clash between the value systems of two distinct worlds: a Prince has fallen in love with a village girl named Silvia, and, in hopes of winning her away from her lover Arlequin, has swept the young couple off to his palace. From the moment of their arrival, the villagers are beset by courtiers who entreat them to accept a proposition: if they agree to renounce each other, each will be rewarded with the pleasures of palace life. Their efforts to resist these temptations lead them to debate with the courtiers about the value of the luxuries that the Prince's world has to offer. As Christophe Martin has argued, the villagers' outside perspectives on court society encourage the play's spectators to take a critical view of it:

> [P]ar la médiation du regard étranger que ses deux héros rustiques portent sur la société de cour, Marivaux offre en spectacle l'étrange « trafic » (le mot est d'Arlequin) dont cette cour est le lieu, et confronte la fragilité, voire la vanité des valeurs qui la fondent aux modestes mais solides bénéfices de l'économie rurale.[7]

Yet by engaging in conversation with the courtiers, Silvia and Arlequin are forced to reflect on their own feelings and values to a far greater extent than they have before. Under the direction of Flaminia, the Prince's cunning servant, the courtiers stage scenes that play upon the villagers' doubts, desires, and vanities in order to push them to reconsider what they truly want. As Silvia

[7] Christophe Martin, "Le jeu du don et de l'échange. Économie et narcissisme dans *La Double Inconstance* de Marivaux," in *Littératures* (35) (automne 1996): 87-99, at 88.

and Arlequin grow increasingly enmeshed in the court's web of theatrical illusions, they are no longer able to take their perceptions of themselves, of each other, and of their life together in their village for granted.

As Martin's remark on "rural economy" suggests, the language of exchange is not in itself foreign to Silvia and Arlequin: both characters freely employ "market" terms like *étalage*, *dédommagement*, and *prix* when they dispute the worth of the gifts that the Prince contrives to send them ("Jeu du don" 90-91). Martin contends that, far from being bewildered by the wealth of honors and worldly goods with which they are presented, Silvia and Arlequin believe that these things cannot measure up to rural ideals like fidelity: "ils font partie d'un système économique où, contrairement à celui qui règne les échanges à la cour, il existe des valeurs intrinsèques dont certaines sont absolues (en l'occurrence, la fidélité)" (90). Of the two characters, Silvia is the most vocal champion of constancy in love, and of constancy in general. She makes her strongest statement about it to Flaminia at the beginning of Act II, when she exclaims that stating her principles to the courtiers is like speaking to them in a tongue they do not know. Faced with their advice to accept the Prince's love for its social and material advantages, Silvia claims to feel herself a foreigner, adrift in a strange country to which she is ill-suited:

> C'est quelque chose d'épouvantable que ce pays-ci; je n'ai jamais vu de femmes si civiles, des hommes si honnêtes […] de tous ces gens-là il n'y en a pas un qui ne vienne me dire d'un air prudent: Mademoiselle, croyez-moi, je vous conseille d'abandonner Arlequin, et d'épouser le Prince […]. Mais, leur dis-je, j'ai promis à Arlequin, où est la fidélité, la probité, la bonne foi? Ils ne m'entendent pas, ils ne savent ce que c'est que tout cela, c'est tout comme si je leur parlais grec; ils me rient au nez, me disent que je fais l'enfant […].

> Ne valoir rien, tromper son prochain, lui manquer de parole, être fourbe et mensonger, voilà le devoir des grandes personnes de ce maudit endroit-ci.[8]

Taken at face value, Silvia's outburst appears to be an unequivocal condemnation of what she sees as the court's "foreign" quality: not the economy of exchange upon which all social relationships in the court depend, but the inconstancy and fluidity of the courtiers' language. With her defiant declaration, "j'ai promis à Arlequin," Silvia intends to portray her own language as straightforward and absolute, and thereby to establish a firm distinction between the mentalities of courtiers and villagers. As Lionel Gossman explains, the latter is grounded in "an unreflecting realist stage [of understanding language] at which words are assumed to be, as if by some divine or natural institution, the direct images of things."[9] In this way, Silvia declares village and court to be hopelessly irreconcilable: her frank and simple moral vocabulary is all Greek to the courtiers.

Despite the noble sentiments that Silvia expresses here, however, the events that precede her outburst infuse it with another layer of meaning: its deeper significance is not fully clear to Silvia at this point, but any observant spectator of the play would be able to grasp it. In the Prince's first appearance on stage in the second scene of Act I, he tells his conspirators Flaminia and Trivelin that he began courting Silvia some time ago—that is, while she was still in the village with Arlequin. He fondly recalls meeting her while hunting one day and explains that he continued to visit her in disguise as a modest palace official:

> [U]n jour à la chasse, écarté de ma troupe, je la rencontrai près de sa maison; j'avais soif, elle alla me chercher à boire: je fus enchanté de sa beauté et de sa simplicité, et je lui en fis l'aveu. Je l'ai vue cinq ou six fois de la même manière, comme simple officier du palais:

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[8] Marivaux, *La Double Inconstance* in *Théâtre complet*, ed. Henri Coulet and Michel Gilot (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, vol. 1, 1993), Act II, scene 1, 214.
[9] Lionel Gossman, "Literature and Society in the Early Enlightenment: the Case of Marivaux," in *MLN*, vol. 82, no. 3, French Issue (May 1967): 306-333, at 319.

> mais quoiqu'elle m'ait traité avec beaucoup de douceur, je n'ai pu la faire renoncer à Arlequin, qui m'a surpris deux fois avec elle.
>
> (Act I, scene 2, 196)

If these lines make the audience suspect that Silvia already returns the "Officer's" feelings, her remark to Flaminia just after her tirade in Act II removes any lingering doubt: "Tenez, si j'avais eu à changer Arlequin contre un autre, ç'aurait été un officier du palais, qui m'a vue cinq ou six fois, et qui est d'aussi bonne façon qu'on puisse être: il y a bien à tirer si le Prince le vaut; c'est dommage que je n'aie pu l'aimer dans le fond, et je le plains plus que le Prince" (Act II, scene 1, 215). The different ways in which the Prince and Silvia engage in this courtship—he, choosing to conceal his true status from her, and she, regretfully stating that she is "unable" to love him—hinge on what each of them values most about Silvia herself, and on how her qualities reflect the ideals that they each claim to espouse.

Although the Prince identifies Silvia's beauty as one of the first things that attracted him, he is much more enamored of her "simplicité"—that is, her ingenuousness—which he praises at every opportunity. As he explains to Flaminia at the beginning of Act III, he loves this quality because it sets Silvia apart from the purportedly denatured women of the court. Having just concluded a tête-à-tête with her—where he delighted in watching her waver between her desire to love him, on the one hand, and her desire to be faithful to Arlequin, on the other—the Prince shows himself to be deeply touched by her artless manner of expression:

> Non, je le dis encore, il n'y a que l'amour de Silvia qui soit véritablement de l'amour; les autres femmes qui aiment ont l'esprit cultivé, elles ont une certaine éducation, un certain usage, et tout cela chez elles falsifie la nature; ici c'est le cœur tout pur qui me parle, comme ses sentiments viennent, il les montre, sa naïveté en fait tout l'art, et sa pudeur toute la

> décence: vous m'avouerez que tout cela est charmant, tout ce qui la retient à présent, c'est qu'elle se fait un scrupule de m'aimer sans l'aveu d'Arlequin.
>
> (Act III, scene 1, 235)

In short, to the Prince Silvia represents an ideal Other: someone he wishes to transplant into his world because it lacks the qualities that he adores in her. In contrast to the palace coquettes, who strategically wield language and social graces as tools for self-advancement, Silvia's true feelings bypass her spoken words in a naïve display of love.[10] The Prince's desire to win the heart of a woman who will love him for himself rather than for his wealth and position of power is also the reason he gives for disguising himself, as he explains to Silvia upon unmasking himself at the end of the play: "je vous ai jusqu'ici caché mon rang, pour essayer de ne devoir votre tendresse qu'à la mienne" (Act III, scene 8, 251).

As much as the Prince admires Silvia for her difference from the courtiers, he does not seem to realize the potential implications of bringing her into his world. To engage in this new environment and openly declare her feelings for her "Officer," Silvia must begin by changing somehow. This question of change, specifically on the issue of fidelity, is at the heart of her hesitation to accept the Officer/Prince as her true love. As his casual allusions to her efforts to stay faithful to Arlequin suggest, the Prince merely sees this point as an obstacle—and not without reason, as Silvia's professed "wish" to love him instead assures him that she already does. ("Si vous saviez combien, dit-elle, elle est affligée de ne pouvoir m'aimer, parce que cela me rend malheureux et qu'elle doit être fidèle à Arlequin!" [Act III, scene 1, 235]) Yet while the uncertainty

[10] Christophe Martin compares the Prince's love for Silvia's "natural" manner of expression to the love that Horace expresses for Agnès's ingenuousness in *L'École des femmes* (1662): "[C]omme Horace avec Agnès, ce qui séduit le Prince est surtout la transparence d'un langage où s'exprime une 'pure nature,' miraculeusement soustraite à l'influence pernicieuse de la galanterie et des usages de la cour." Martin, *Éducations négatives: Fictions d'expérimentation pédagogique au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris: Éditions Classiques Garnier, 2010), 226. On Marivaux's exploration of the links between sentiment and language, see also Philip Stewart, *L'invention du sentiment: roman et économie affective au XVIIIe siècle*, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation (*SVEC* 2010:02): 123-126.

that the Prince detects in Silvia's heart is a typical example of Marivaux's tendency to portray love as a fickle emotion, his tale of their first meeting evokes a literary genre in which the maiden is usually faithful to her rustic lover. As Janet Whatley argues:

> Silvia and Arlequin are pastoral as well as *commedia dell'arte* figures, closely related to the Marion and Robin of medieval pastoral tradition; in fact, it is specifically the basic situation of the *pastourelle* that is evoked when the Prince tells how, one day while hunting, he met a country maiden and asked to quench his thirst. The maiden of the *pastourelle* usually rejects and outwits the nobleman to stay faithful to her Robin.[11]

In this respect, therefore, *La Double Inconstance* represents a departure from a traditional formula: it is a blend of genres in which a modern Marion is torn between a premodern pastoral ideal of faithful love and a desire to accept her change of heart, which is wholly antithetical to that ideal. In conjunction with this, Elena Russo argues that Silvia's state of confusion and emotional transition is evocative of the eighteenth-century rococo aesthetic: a style that celebrates spontaneity, complexity, newness, and surprise. Thus, in a sense, Silvia is not merely torn between the village and the palace, but between a premodern world and a modern world. Russo also observes that many of Marivaux's characters, including Silvia, spend his plays approaching a series of transformational "thresholds," by which she means that they experience ever-more profound realizations (or "surprises") about their feelings as they struggle to articulate them

[11] Janet Whatley, "*La Double Inconstance*: Marivaux and the Comedy of Manipulation," in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 10, No.3 (spring 1977): 335-350, at 340. Whatley is likely referring to texts like Adam de la Halle's *Jeu de Robin et Marion* (c. 1282), which Marion herself begins with a song about Robin's love for her. Early *pastourelles* were often known for bawdy humor or violence, and they typically consisted of a nobleman's tale of his efforts to seduce—or rape—a shepherdess. See Geri L. Smith, *The Medieval French Pastourelle Tradition* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009). The Prince's use of a disguise is also a homage to seventeenth-century pastoral literature; see Lucette Desvignes, "Survivance de la pastorale dramatique chez Marivaux," in *French Studies*, vol. XXII, is. 3 (1 July 1968): 206-224.

through spoken language. In Russo's words, imposing a name upon a feeling often causes the speaker to perceive it differently—whether they wish to or not:

> Marivaux is the poet of thresholds [...]. [His] characters confront the difficulties of expressing [...] the surge of emotion just before the mind takes hold of it and language alters it beyond recognition [by definitively naming it]. [...] The moment of surprise, that fundamental mode of the rococo aesthetics, is the mind's response to the flow of experience and its effort to make sense of it.
>
> (*Styles* 123)

Moreover, because Silvia's love for the Officer did not begin in the palace, but rather, *in the village* (where she welcomed his visits "cinq ou six fois" behind Arlequin's back [Act I, scene 2, 196]), her claim that inconstancy is foreign to her *as a villager* is problematic. As a result, her ongoing efforts to fortify her commitment to Arlequin by asserting her identity as a villager prove to be an ineffective strategy. For Silvia, love for the Officer engenders an identity crisis that *culminates* in the palace but extends beyond its walls into the village (that is, into the pastoral setting), where (according to Silvia) infidelity is supposed to be unthinkable.

As is typical of Marivaux's characters, Silvia's ordeal unfolds through a crisis of language; that is, through her struggles to find the right words to describe what is happening to her. Her speech about the importance of constancy in the first scene of Act II is a sincere statement, an attack of conscience, and a half-conscious expression of doubt all at once. Its length and fervor suggest that she is trying to convince herself that she still loves Arlequin; yet the greater her efforts, the more ineffectual her words become. Mere moments after her tirade about the courtiers' inability to understand the language of fidelity, she raises the hypothetical possibility of "exchanging" Arlequin for the Officer ("Tenez, si j'avais eu à changer Arlequin contre un autre

[...]" [Act II, scene 1, 215]). She still firmly rejects the idea of accepting the as-yet unknown Prince, but she has clearly launched her tirade with his alter ego in mind: she is at once asking Flaminia to second her opinion about constancy and betraying a hint that she wishes to be persuaded otherwise. In the same vein, she punctuates her rant with anxious questions to Flaminia, half-hoping that her confidante will answer "no" to all of them: "Mais ne suis-je pas obligée d'être fidèle? N'est-ce pas mon devoir d'honnête fille? [...] Par-dessus le marché, cette fidélité n'est-elle pas mon charme?" (Act II, scene 1, 214) Her claim that constancy is her "charm" is also telling, in that it suggests that her greatest concern is the link between her constancy and her self-worth: she makes no mention of how her abandonment of Arlequin could affect the Officer's opinion of her but is instead focused on how it could damage her opinion of herself. Thus, her effort to be constant is primarily about pride, guilt, and losing her sense of self, rather than faithfulness to an abstract principle or a particular lover.

Ultimately, Silvia's tirade only confirms what she fears, and, also, desires: that she is becoming foreign to herself; that the modern-day Marion is changing or has changed. In a sense, it is the old "Marion" who is championing constancy in Act II, and this voice was already fading before Silvia began to talk about her feelings for the Officer. As early as her first conversation with Arlequin in Act I, she peppered her speech with questions that suggested doubts about their love: "Si je vous aime, cela se demande-t-il? est-ce une question à faire?" (Act I, scene 8, 210) For the rest of the play, she struggles between seeking to understand her "new" voice and trying to distance herself from it. Following her outburst in Act II, she hesitates to make definitive declarations, often wishing that others would absolve her guilt (and spare her pride) by making her choice for her. As she confesses to the Officer in Act III: "Oh ce que je veux, j'attends qu'on me le dise, j'en suis encore plus ignorante que vous; voilà Arlequin qui m'aime, voilà le Prince qui

demande mon cœur, voilà vous qui mériteriez de l'avoir [...] je suis bien malheureuse d'avoir tout ce tracas-là dans la tête" (Act III, scene 9, 233). Notably, she also begins to consciously think of language as a tool she could use to resolve her dilemma, as she goes on to tell her Officer that she wishes he *were* the Prince. This would allow her to leave Arlequin by telling him a technical truth: she could truthfully say that their duty is to obey their Prince and neglect to add that her feelings have changed. She quickly retreats from this idea and tries once again to recover her pride, but it reveals a significant shift in her thinking:

> Ce n'est pas à cause de la principauté que je voudrais que vous fussiez prince, c'est seulement à cause de vous tout seul; et si vous l'étiez, Arlequin ne saurait pas que je vous prendrais par amour, voilà ma raison. Mais non, après tout, il vaut mieux que vous ne soyez pas le maître, cela me tenterait trop, et quand vous le seriez, tenez, je ne pourrais me résoudre à être une infidèle, voilà qui est fini.
>
> (Act III, scene 9, 234)

Thus, while Silvia and Arlequin both provide the audience with foreign perspectives on the court, as Martin argues, the play's dramatic tension chiefly turns on Silvia: specifically, the fact that her voice is increasingly splintered between identities.[12] In this respect, her crisis aligns with Bernard Dort's theorization of the conflicts between past and present identities that "les maîtres" in Marivaux's comedies typically experience. In Dort's words:

> [L]eur crainte et leur défiance […] naissent de la peur de rompre avec ce que, jusqu'au moment de la surprise [de l'amour], ils croyaient être; […] de l'antagonisme entre le

[12] This is a common fate among Marivaux's characters: for example, Silvia of his *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard* (1730) also has this experience.

> personnage social qu'ils ont joué jusqu'alors et ce qu'ils sont en fait, entre leur rôle et l'*être* dans lequel ils se sont reconnus, étonnés.[13]

Dort also notes that these crises are always realized through language, as "Jusqu'à la surprise, [les maîtres] ont réglé leur langage sur ce qu'ils croyaient être, sur leur rôle social" (*Théâtre* 53).

Be that as it may, there is an important detail that sets *La Double Inconstance* apart from much of Marivaux's other work. Whereas the challenge that Marivaudian *maîtres* face (according to Dort) is to find a way to express their new selves within the conventions of their *original* language (61), Silvia's crisis is unusual in that it is externalized in the villager/courtier duality. As we have seen, when she tries to deny her new feelings in the first half of the play, she seeks comfort in pointing out the contrast between the court's ethos of inconstancy and her rustic moral vocabulary. However, as the play unfolds, the courtiers' artful manners and speech begin to throw Silvia's lack of sophistication into relief, which exacerbates her identity crisis. In fact, it is her village-girl ingenuousness that finally allows Flaminia to make progress in her effort to draw the girl away from Arlequin in the play's second half. For one, Silvia's *ingénuité* gives Flaminia (and the Prince) a clear advantage over her in that they are always able to discern her true feelings. For another, Flaminia contrives to increase Silvia's confusion by making her self-conscious about how her ingenuousness looks in court. As Silvia grows preoccupied with the unflattering image of herself that Flaminia presents to her, her ingenuousness—the very thing that won the Prince's love—seems in danger of being destroyed altogether.

Flaminia's attack on the villagers' faithfulness to each other is launched on two fronts: to kill Arlequin's love for Silvia, Flaminia simply elects to seduce him herself.[14] Yet to pull Silvia

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[13] Bernard Dort, *Théâtre public, 1953-1966* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), 52-53.

[14] As Flaminia says to the Prince, "[J]e vous dis, Seigneur, que j'ai vu Arlequin, qu'il me plaît à moi, que je me suis mis dans la tête de vous rendre content; que je vous ai promis que vous le seriez [...]" (Act 1, scene 6, 207).

away from him in turn, Flaminia's plan hinges on what is, in her eyes, the "natural" vanity that all women possess. As Flaminia assures the Prince, "[J]e connais mon sexe, il n'a rien de prodigieux que sa coquetterie; du côté de l'ambition, Silvia n'est point en prise, mais elle a un cœur, et par conséquent de la vanité, avec cela, je saurai bien la ranger à son devoir de femme" (Act I, scene3, 196). Her first chance to put this plan into action occurs in Act II, when Silvia protests that, as a villager who is "confuse qu'on la trouve belle," she cannot be as attractive to the Prince as the coquettes must be.[15] Flaminia obliges her by praising her ingenuousness and then slyly claims that the coquettes have been mocking her for it behind her back: "[V]oilà ce que [le Prince] estime; c'est cette ingénuité, cette beauté simple, ce sont ces grâces naturelles: eh, croyez-moi, ne louez pas tant les femmes d'ici, car elles ne vous louent guère" (Act II, scene 1, 216). Moments later, Flaminia's sister Lisette and the Prince (under the guise of his Officer alter ego) enter the scene. Posing as a haughty *dame de la cour*, Lisette sardonically compliments Silvia's naïveté for its "rustic charm": "On dit qu'elle est naïve, c'est un agrément campagnard qui doit la rendre amusante, priez-la de nous donner quelques traits de naïveté, voyons son esprit" (Act II, scene 2, 217). The Officer heroically offers to force Lisette to apologize, which Silvia gratefully accepts. Both flattered and outraged by this incident, she begins to take a courtly—or what Flaminia would call a "womanly"—interest in her appearance. She accepts a dress that the Prince sends her and finds pleasure in the thought of competing with other women, as she exclaims to Arlequin shortly afterward: "[A]h! que je viens d'essayer un bel habit! Si vous me voyiez, en vérité vous me trouveriez jolie; demandez à Flaminia. Ah, ah! si je portais ces habits-là, les femmes d'ici seraient bien attrapées, elles ne diraient pas que j'ai l'air gauche" (Act II, scene 6, 227).

[15] In this instance, Silvia is referring to the "Prince" whom she does not know, but it is very likely that she also has the Officer in mind.

Flaminia, the Prince, and Lisette therefore succeed in changing Silvia's sense of self-worth: that is, they shift its focus away from pride in her constancy—a self-sustaining quality—towards vanity about her appearance, a feeling that is dependent on securing the approval of other people.[16] This in itself already threatens to destroy Silvia's *ingénuité*: caring about how she looks and compares to others could lead her to behave like the palace coquettes, whose artful manners and language are so distasteful to the Prince. However, Flaminia's real purpose is to use Silvia's vanity to deepen the girl's doubts about Arlequin, and by extension, to alienate her from their shared rustic identity and values. In the women's next tête-à-tête, when Silvia notices that Arlequin has been neglecting her, Flaminia "confesses" that she finds Arlequin too coarse to suit a girl of Silvia's caliber: "Voulez-vous que je vous dise? Vous me paraissez mal assortis ensemble. Vous avez du goût, de l'esprit, l'air fin et distingué; lui il a l'air pesant, les manières grossières, cela ne cadre point [...]" (Act II, scene 8, 231). This talk of suitability naturally steers the conversation to the Officer, which renews Silvia's struggle to decide what she wants. Still clinging to her old pride, she notes that she would have an excuse to leave Arlequin if he were unfaithful first, adding a haughty remark that echoes Flaminia's criticism of his vulgarity: "mais [...] qui est-ce qui voudrait d'Arlequin ici, rude et bourru comme il est?" (Act II, scene 8 232) Such words suggest not only a burgeoning disdain for Arlequin, but an ominous desire to disassociate herself from the unrefined manners of the village.

Thus, the changes in Silvia's feelings and self-image in Act II are certainly dramatic. However, exactly how they will affect her character in the long term is less clear than it may first appear to be. The significance that one attributes to Silvia's transformation chiefly depends upon how one interprets the courtiers' roles in it. It is evident that Flaminia holds a great deal of power

[16] In Christophe Martin's words, "Lisette [est] l'instrument d'une valorisation de Silvia, qui permet l'adhésion de celle-ci au régime des valeurs relatives" ("Jeu du don" 94).

over the palace and the people in it: she is the stage manager who engineers most of the play's events, and she creates every illusion that the villagers experience.[17] It is a role in which she is wholly successful: after the feud with Lisette, Silvia grows more receptive to the Officer's overtures and more dependent on Flaminia as a confidante as she struggles to put her feelings into words. It is also through further conversations with Flaminia that Silvia finally accepts her love for the Officer in Act III.[18] Janet Whatley therefore fully credits Silvia's change of heart to Flaminia and the palace environment—which is effectively an extension of Flaminia: "Flaminia's "trick" is to undo the structure of [Silvia's] wholeness. [...] [T]he mark of [Silvia's] membership [in the modern world] is a new division in her, a new trace of *mauvaise foi*. The palace has both made Silvia change and assured her that it is perfectly all right to change [...]" ("Manipulation" 342-343). In this case, Flaminia's exploitation of Silvia's ingenuousness and vanity engenders something like an annexation: it results in the absorption of a formerly self-assured, rustic innocent into the fragmented and shadowy social dynamics of the court.

It is important to note, however, that while Flaminia and the palace play a vital role in Silvia's transformation, their influence only goes so far: they are responsible for the girl's *acceptance* of her true feelings, but they did not *create* those feelings. Long before the Prince literally stole Silvia away to his castle, he figuratively stole her heart during their tête-à-têtes in

[17] In this, Flaminia is a predecessor of other "stage manager" types in Marivaux's work, especially the cunning valet Dubois of *Les Fausses Confidences* (1737). Upon succeeding at engineering his master's marriage to a wealthy widow, Dubois gloats to the audience about his mastery of the stage and the people he ostensibly serves: "Ouf! ma gloire m'accable: je mériterais bien d'appeler cette femme-là ma bru." Marivaux, *Théâtre complet*, ed. Henri Coulet and Michel Gilot (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, vol. 2, 1994), 401. See also Jean Rousset, "Une Dramaturge dans la comédie: la Flaminia de *La Double Inconstance*," in *Rivista di letterature moderne e comparate*, vol. 41, is. 2, (1988): 121-130.

[18] Upon hearing Silvia's naïve comment that her feelings seem to have come and gone of their own accord, Flaminia takes a moment to be privately amused: FLAMINIA, *les premiers mots à part*: "Rions un moment [...]" (Act III, scene 7, 248).

the village.[19] It is not clear exactly how or why this happened: we never discover how she came to love the Prince or how deeply she loved Arlequin before the Prince appeared. In her conversation with Flaminia near the end of Act II, Silvia claims to have fallen in love with Arlequin because, as a member of the same village, she was accustomed to him and he was simply the best option at the time. Notably, in doing this, Silvia once again sets herself apart from the Marion character of medieval pastorals, who is not at all put off by her lover Robin's vulgarity.[20] As Silvia puts it to Flaminia:

> Mettez-vous à ma place: c'était le garçon le plus passable de nos cantons […] il était mon voisin […] il me faisait quelquefois rire, il me suivait partout, il m'aimait, j'avais coutume de le voir, et de coutume en coutume je l'ai aimé aussi faute de mieux: mais j'ai toujours bien vu qu'il était enclin au vin et à la gourmandise.
>
> (Act II, scene 8, 231)

Silvia's retrospective assessment of Arlequin may simply signify that their once passionate affair now seems dull to her, especially when compared to the Prince's sophisticated overtures of love. However, it may also be true that she and Arlequin were not well matched to begin with. In fact, Arlequin's way of speaking about Silvia suggests this at times: he describes their courtship to Lisette in comically animalistic terms, as though he is showing off his success at taming a wild horse or deer. In his version of their story, Silvia comes across as a mute *sauvageonne* who gradually acquires the power of speech, thereby becoming more "human" thanks to him:

> [L]es premiers jours il fallait voir comme elle se reculait d'auprès de moi, et puis elle reculait plus doucement, et puis petit à petit elle ne reculait plus; ensuite elle me regardait

[19] Perhaps this is another instance of *double inconstance*: Silvia and Arlequin are unfaithful to each other, but Silvia also shows herself to be inconstant in both the pastoral setting and the palace.
[20] Charles Mazouer discusses the Marion/Robin couple in *Le Personnage du naïf dans le théâtre comique du Moyen Âge à Marivaux* (Paris: Librairie Klincksieck, 1979), 13-15.

> en cachette, et puis elle avait honte quand je l'avais vu faire, et puis moi j'avais un plaisir de roi à voir sa honte; ensuite j'attrapais sa main, qu'elle me laissait prendre, et puis elle était encore toute confuse […] ensuite elle me donnait des regards pour des paroles, et *puis des paroles* qu'elle laissait aller sans y songer, parce que son cœur allait plus vite qu'elle […] *voilà ce qui s'appelle une fille* […].
>
> (Act I, scene 5, 206; my emphasis)

In light of all this, it is impossible to know if an idyllic pastoral romance took place before the Prince arrived to spoil it. It may be more accurate to say that at one time, Silvia and Arlequin *thought* that they had such a romance: that, like many young lovers, they believed (or wanted to believe) that they were bound together by a perfect love that would last forever. In this way, *La Double Inconstance* could be said to dramatize the deconstruction of a myth: it suggests that Silvia and Arlequin's vision of pastoral love—that is, of a bond sheltered from the ravages of time and the complexities of the outside world—was an illusion. Thus, while the play begins by juxtaposing the village and the palace's distinct value systems, the inconstancy of the human heart proves to be common to both worlds, thereby blurring the line between them.

What are we to make of this meeting between village and palace, in that case? What impression does the play ultimately give us of the court and its long-term effect on Silvia? The courtiers' manipulation of both villagers still constitutes an intrusive, even cruel deception; Flaminia's boasts about her power over these "children" and their "species" of heart invite comparison with master manipulators like Choderlos de Laclos's Marquise de Merteuil.[21] Some critics view the Prince's love for Silvia as narcissistic: they argue that she appeals to him because

[21] As Flaminia exclaims to the Prince: "Quoi, Seigneur, Arlequin et Silvia me résisteraient? Je ne gouvernerais pas deux cœurs de cette espèce-là, moi qui l'ai entrepris, moi qui suis opiniâtre, moi qui suis femme? c'est tout dire" (Act I, scene 6, 207). One can easily imagine Merteuil saying the same about Cécile, Danceny, and Madame de Tourvel, whom she classifies as ridiculous "enfants" and "espèces." See Chapter 4.

her ingenuousness allows him to exert near-total power over her.[22] In fact, it is probable that Flaminia comes to feel that kind of love for Arlequin, whom she describes as a pleasing "distraction" and marries at the end of the play.[23] Yet although Arlequin is blind to Flaminia's domination of him, he places a check on the Prince upon learning his true identity in Act III. Despite being half in love with Flaminia by this point, he admonishes the Prince for abusing his power in order to "steal" Silvia: "[V]ous ne voudriez pas avoir une principauté pour le contentement de vous tout seul." In response, the Prince does not choose to put an end to Flaminia's intrigues, but his *apartés* during the scene show that he is somewhat chastened: "Il a raison, et ses plaintes me touchent […]. Que lui répondre?" (Act III, scene 5, 243-244)

Furthermore, the Prince expresses worry that Silvia will resent him when he reveals himself. His eventual confession that he wished to be loved for himself is calculated to procure her forgiveness, but it still leaves him vulnerable to injury: "Je vous avoue que j'ai peur" (Act III, scene 8, 250). In sum, the act of exercising power seems to hold more interest for Flaminia than it does for the Prince: the latter uses his absolute authority over his kingdom to win the girl he wants, but he is content to cede control of the stage to Flaminia and does not express interest in exercising power for its own sake. Like many of Marivaux's heroes, the Prince is ultimately an ambiguous figure whose more dubious impulses are externalized in a "double," as Janet Whatley argues:

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[22] In addition to making this claim, Christophe Martin argues that the Prince's love for Silvia points to a nostalgia for rustic simplicity, a sentiment that was common among aristocratic heroes in the pastoral mode: "le choix par le Prince d'une simple bergère pourrait n'être pas seulement lié à une nostalgie aristocratique pour des formes idéalisées de la vie pastorale, mais aussi, comme l'a souligné R. Démoris, au fait que « le choix paradoxal comporte […] une appréciable gratification narcissique, puisqu'il renvoie au Prince une image de sa propre supériorité… »" ("Jeu du don" 92; citing René Démoris, *Lecture de* Les Fausses Confidences *de Marivaux. L'être et le paraître* [Paris: Belin, 1987], 27). Yet while the Prince prefers Silvia to the coquettes, he never speaks in nostalgic terms and never expresses distaste for palace life itself. He also explains at one point that "la loi [...] veut que j'épouse une de mes sujettes" (Act I, scene 2, 196).

[23] Flaminia's *apartés* clearly express her sense of superiority: "En vérité le Prince a raison, ces petites personnes-là font l'amour d'une manière à ne pouvoir y résister. Voici l'autre. À quoi rêvez-vous, belle Silvia?" (Act III, scene 7, 248)

"Lovers may love, but they depend on the ruthless analysts to obtain their results. (As Bernard Dort has suggested, Dubois may be the truth of Dorante [of *Les Fausses Confidences*], as Flaminia may be the truth of the Prince)" ("Manipulation" 349).[24] Thus, although the Prince is manipulative, his love for Silvia is genuine, and Flaminia and Arlequin may be said to allow him to *mostly* remain the gentle lover.

Silvia, for her part, also ends the play as an ambiguous figure: in its last scenes, she falls somewhere between village and palace, between ingenuousness and courtliness. She is clearly not the country ingénue she was at the play's outset: even if she returned to the village, she could not undo her awakening to the inconstancy and vanity of which she is capable. Yet in the end, she rejects vanity "enough" to openly declare her love for the Officer, which carries a degree of humiliation for her: she must accept that others will see that she has not lived up to her rustic ideals of fidelity. She resolves her guilt by deciding that her change of heart was beyond her control; as she tells Flaminia, whose role in the affair she never discovers: "[L]orsque j'ai aimé [Arlequin], c'était un amour qui m'était venu; à cette heure que je ne l'aime plus, c'est un amour qui s'en est allé; il est venu sans mon avis, il s'en retourne de même, je ne crois pas être blâmable" (Act III, scene 7, 248). Yet, paradoxically, she still harbors a naïve belief that she can make promises about her feelings. Seeing the Officer's fear as he prepares to reveal himself to her, and mistaking it for insecurity (as he says, "lorsque vous connaîtrez [le Prince], vous ne voudrez peut-être plus de moi"), she begins to pledge never to love "the Prince," only to be interrupted when he hastily unmasks himself: "Quel homme! il faut bien que je lui remette l'esprit; ne tremblez plus, je n'aimerai jamais le Prince, je vous en fais un serment par—" (Act III, scene 8, 250). Her discovery

[24] Whatley is citing Dort, "À la recherche de l'amour et de la vérité: Esquisse d'un système marivaudien," in *Théâtres*, 69: "Les comédies tardives de Marivaux sont grosses de lendemains violents. À Dorante, l'amoureux parfait des *Fausses Confidences*, se superpose la figure de Dubois, ce double vorace et intrigant, qui est peut-être la vérité de Dorante."

of his identity at this moment underlines the instability of relationships and understanding, as well as the fact that Silvia still clings to some illusions about their permanence. Yet upon seeing the Prince unmasked, she is merely happy to have chosen the man she wanted. She also reasserts a degree of faith in her own voice by expressing the "truth" of her love for him, as it is in this moment: "si vous avez cherché le plaisir d'être aimé de moi, vous avez bien trouvé ce que vous cherchiez, vous savez que je dis la vérité, voilà ce qui m'en plaît" (Act III, scene 8, 251). Thus, although she has lost her ingenuous simplicity, she may be said to *mostly* remain a genuine and loving girl at the play's conclusion.

Ultimately, *La Double Inconstance* may ask us to accept that love simply is an alienating thing: subject to the whims of the heart, it reflects the changeable nature of life and always makes one feel "foreign" to oneself when it begins. Moreover, in its deconstruction of the pastoral mode—which had reached its apogee in the seventeenth century and had begun to decline by Marivaux's time—this play also expresses what Lionel Gossman describes as the mix of nostalgia and hope that shaped Marivaux's early thought on modernity:

> [Marivaux] seems to have shared both the nostalgia of his audiences for a no-longer-believed-in age of innocence and noble virtues (one might call it the golden age myth of the nobility) before the social comedy (that is, the court) began[,] and their presentiment of a new world of individual experience. [...] But this nostalgia for the past was closely allied in his thought and feeling to the modern experience of a private individual self with its own particular desires and longings and to the modern "bourgeois" dream of intimate and inward communication.
>
> ("Case of Marivaux" 323)

In this vein, if Silvia's loss of her village-girl ingenuousness serves as a metaphor for the loss of the golden age of love and constancy that was mythologized in the seventeenth-century pastoral mode, it also heralds an important cultural development: that is, her growth reflects upper-crust France's shift from the (relatively) fixed social identities and roles of feudal society towards a modern age of changeable individuals, for better or worse. For Silvia herself, it signals a transition from the simple, childish love of the pastoral motif to a complex love that has "become adult," to borrow a phrase from Dort.[25] She has also (as far as feelings go) achieved a slightly better understanding of herself than she had at the play's outset.

In these respects, Silvia could not be more different from Angélique, the ingénue who would appear seventeen years later in Marivaux's one-act comedy *L'Épreuve* (1740). In that play, the character who fills the roles of "stage manager" *and* lover—a man named Lucidor—does not pressure the heroine to recognize a truth about herself. Rather, his stagecraft is designed to stifle her voice and sabotage her ability to communicate with everyone around her. By the time the play comes to its equivocal conclusion, the spectator is left to question whether any of its characters have achieved meaningful connections with one another, or whether ingenuous young women can truly find a place in such a world. Thus, if Marivaux presents a cautiously optimistic vision of the uncertainties of modernity and love in *La Double Inconstance*, *L'Épreuve* suggests that he took a dimmer view of both in the later stages of his writing career.

2.3 No Country for Ingénues: Marivaux's *L'Épreuve*

L'Épreuve was one of Marivaux's greatest triumphs in his own time, far surpassing *La Double Inconstance* in both critical and commercial success. *La Double Inconstance* earned

[25] Dort uses the phrase "Cet amour est devenu adulte" to describe the love story in *Les Fausses Confidences* (*Théâtre* 63).

modest praise in the *Mercure de France* upon its debut, where it was acclaimed for its "esprit" but criticized as overly metaphysical.[26] Of all the major plays that were staged at the Comédie-Italienne between 1715 and 1750, it was the sixth most performed and attracted nearly 38,000 spectators in total; but by the end of the 1750s, it had faded from the stage and would remain forgotten until the twentieth century.[27] *L'Épreuve*, for its part, debuted at the Comédie-Italienne on November 19th, 1740, and was added to the troupe's regular repertoire the following January. The database "Calendrier électronique des spectacles sous l'ancien régime et sous la révolution," also known as CESAR, lists more than eighty performances of *L'Épreuve* that took place between 1740 and 1799. The play also enjoyed great success outside France during this period: it was translated into Danish and Dutch as well as English and German.[28] Yet the most remarkable aspect of its early history was the fact that it earned acclaim from French critics and *gens de lettres*, who usually viewed Marivaux's work with a dismissive eye at best. The play won high praise in the November 1740 edition of the *Mercure de France*, where it was hailed as "pleine d'esprit, simple en action, [et] élégamment dialoguée." Henri Coulet and Michel Gilot note that it even had an admirer in Voltaire, who normally took pains to cast himself as Marivaux's harshest critic in the world of letters:

> Dès le XVIIIe siècle, *L'Épreuve* a été l'une des pièces de Marivaux le plus souvent représentées; entrée au répertoire du Théâtre-Français au tout début du XIXe siècle, elle y est devenue la pièce la plus jouée après *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard*. En 1760, Voltaire

[26] Digital copies of the *Mercure de France* accessed via the Hathi Trust Digital Library, at babel.hathitrust.org.
[27] Henri Lagrave, *Le Théâtre et le Public à Paris de 1715 à 1750* (Paris: Librairie Klincksieck, 1972), 603.
[28] On these points, see *Théâtre complet de Marivaux*, ed. Frédéric Deloffre (Paris: Classiques Garnier Multimédia, 1999), 508, and Edward J. H. Greene, *Marivaux* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 223. The CESAR website can be found at www.cesar.org.uk/cesar2.

> lui-même la fit jouer aux Délices, lui qui n'aimait guère Marivaux, en même temps que sa propre *Alzire*.
>
> (Marivaux, *Théâtre complet, vol. 2* 1040)

As the above passage suggests, *L'Épreuve* is also remarkable for its enduring popularity: able to appeal to post-Revolutionary as well as Ancien Régime audiences, it was one of the bare handful of Marivaux's plays that continued to be performed in the nineteenth century. Today, it still ranks as one of his most-staged plays of all time, and it is thought to be the most-staged one-act play of the French eighteenth century (Deloffre, *Théâtre complet de Marivaux* 501, 510).[29]

L'Épreuve's ability to please such a range of audiences may be partly attributable to its rich literary background: it blends elements of Marivaux's greatest comedies with touches of drama and early eighteenth-century farce. Its basic premise rehashes the clash of worlds that was dramatized in *La Double Inconstance*: Lucidor, the son of a rich Parisian merchant, has fallen in love with a "simple bourgeoise de campagne" named Angélique, whose mother happens to be the concierge of his new country estate. As Lucidor explains to his valet Frontin in the play's opening scene, he plans to marry Angélique—provided he can determine that her love for him is financially disinterested. To that end, he contrives to "test" Angélique by offering to procure her marriage to Frontin, whom he disguises and presents to her as a wealthy Parisian like himself. This ploy of testing a lover through the use of a double is a throwback to Marivaux's own *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard* (1730), which (along with *L'Épreuve*), is a reimagining of yet another play: an early-

[29] On the performance history of Marivaux's plays in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see *Le Théâtre français du XVIIIe siècle: histoire, textes choisis, mises en scène*, dir. Pierre Frantz and Sophie Marchand (Paris: Éditions L'avant-scène théâtre, 2009), 207-208. Other Marivaux plays that remained on stage throughout the nineteenth century included *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard* (1730), *La Mère confidente* (1735), *Le Legs* (1736), and *Les Fausses Confidences* (1737). On Voltaire's troubled history with Marivaux, including his persistent efforts to sabotage Marivaux's career, see Elena Russo, *Styles*, 45-46, 72-73, 135.

eighteenth-century farce called *L'Épreuve réciproque* (1711), by Marc-Antoine Le Grand.[30] Marivaux's *L'Épreuve* also owes a debt to both of these earlier comedies in that, like them, it explores the relationship between status and love as one of its major themes: it is staged against a background where social mobility through marriage is becoming more common, and its characters tend to be keenly conscious of that fact.

However, *L'Épreuve* diverges from these earlier comedies in fundamental ways as well. For one, while *L'Épreuve réciproque* and *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard* both take place in Paris, *L'Épreuve* is set at Lucidor's country estate and features a mix of rural and urban characters. Furthermore, the difference in social status between the lead characters in *L'Épreuve* (and in *La Double Inconstance*) is real, while it is illusory in *Le Jeu* and nonexistent in *L'Épreuve réciproque*. The most important divergence, however, concerns Marivaux's choice of heroine for *L'Épreuve* and the role that she fills in that play. The heroines of *L'Épreuve réciproque* and *Le Jeu*—Philaminte and Silvia, respectively—stage *épreuves* to test their lovers and are tested by them in turn. Moreover, even though both women fail to maintain full control over their schemes, they remain savvy enough to retain an active role in them: Philaminte, a worldly coquette, is no less manipulative than her lover Valère, and Silvia eventually emerges as the cleverest player of *Le Jeu*. Angélique of *L'Épreuve*, in contrast, is a rural ingénue, the object of a one-sided *épreuve*, and a figure who holds no control over the play's events. Instead, her sole function is to serve as the locus of the play's exploration of sentiment: that is, she drives the plot through her emotional reactions to the "test," rather than through decisive action.

L'Épreuve begins with a tête-à-tête between Lucidor and Frontin, who has just arrived from Paris to receive his master's instructions. In addition to providing the audience with an exposition

[30] On the links between these plays and the history of *épreuves* in French literature, see Frédéric Deloffre, *Théâtre complet*, 503-510.

of the planned *épreuve*, the scene presents a portrait of Angélique's ingenuousness. When Frontin objects that Lucidor's wealth could land him a "better deal" than Angélique on the marriage market, Lucidor angrily defends her, although he does so with a hint of snobbishness: "Tais-toi, tu ne connais point celle dont tu parles; il est vrai qu'Angélique n'est qu'une simple bourgeoise de campagne; mais originairement elle me vaut bien, et je n'ai pas l'entêtement des grandes alliances [...]" (Scene 1, 473).[31] He then goes on to gush about her innocence, tender-heartedness, and guilelessness. He explains that he fell ill shortly after they met and recalls the moment when he first felt sure of her love for him. As he describes it, the revelation occurred when he saw her weep at his bedside, ingenuously expressing her distress at his condition:

> [J]e ne lui ai jamais dit que je l'aime; mais toutes mes façons n'ont signifié que cela; toutes les siennes n'ont été que des expressions du penchant le plus tendre et le plus ingénu. Je tombai malade trois jours après mon arrivée […] je l'ai vue inquiète, alarmée, plus changée que moi; j'ai vu des larmes couler de ses yeux […] et depuis que la santé m'est revenue, nous continuons de même; je l'aime toujours, sans le lui dire, elle m'aime aussi sans m'en parler; et sans vouloir cependant m'en faire un secret, son cœur simple, honnête et vrai n'en sait pas davantage.
>
> (Scene 1, 473)

In some ways, Lucidor's portrait of Angélique aligns him with the Prince of *La Double Inconstance*: he claims to love a country girl for her genuine demeanor and for the way that her feelings for him bypass spoken language to express themselves. Although he does not overtly compare her to other women here, it would be reasonable to assume that he values her difference from the worldly women of Paris. His professed wish to confirm that he is loved for himself also

[31] All citations of *L'Épreuve* are taken from the Gallimard edition of Marivaux's *Théâtre complet*, ed. Henri Coulet and Michel Gilot, vol. 2.

suggests that, like the Prince, he dreams of forging a sincere emotional connection with someone else: as he says to Frontin, "si elle m'aime comme je le crois, je ne serai jamais qu'à elle" (Scene 1, 473). The object of the *épreuve* that he plans for Angélique, however, is to conceal his own feelings while testing his ability to hurt hers: by offering her a husband other than himself, he means to discover the depth of her love for him by provoking a candid reaction of pain. The references to Christian mythology in the names "Angélique" and "Lucidor" also infuse this opening scene with an ominous note: in addition to evoking Lucifer, Lucidor's name contains a reference to money ("d'or"), which is disquieting in light of his stated aversion to marrying for financial gain. Finally, Lucidor's own description of Angélique invites us to question his motives from the start: his near-clinical observation of her features, combined with his confidence in his ability to discern her unspoken feelings, suggest a calculating mind and a kinship with stage-crafters like Flaminia and Dubois.

The play's next scenes set up the impending *épreuve* against a backdrop of cultural clash between Paris and the provinces. Whereas Lucidor and Frontin represent Paris, the play's provincial setting is evoked with a cast of stock characters. Immediately following Lucidor's portrait of his endearing "ingénue" in scene 1, we are introduced to two more rustic "types": Blaise, a rich farmer who wants to marry Angélique for her dowry, and Lisette, a village-born servant girl who waits upon Angélique and her mother. Lisette is largely the same as other maids who feature in Marivaux's plays, in that she is unsentimental and has no qualms about openly pursuing material gain. Conversely, Marivaux rarely made use of the Blaise character: the peasant's vulgar manners and thick *patois* make him more suited to Molière's burlesque comedies, in which he often appears.[32] As Antoine Spacagna has noted, Blaise's presence also has the effect of infusing

[32] Bernard Dort argues that in Marivaux's work, the Blaise persona is a deviation from the norm: most of Marivaux's other low-born characters serve as voices of reason in addition to providing comic relief. In fact, Blaise

L'Épreuve with two competing images of the provinces, in that his brashness contrasts as starkly with Angélique's country-girl innocence as it does with Lucidor's urban sophistication:

> L'opposition Paris/province, très marquée à l'époque de Marivaux, se manifeste de deux manières: Angélique [...] est généreuse, naïve, douce et réservée et Maître Blaise se montre très intéressé par l'argent et s'exprime dans le patois […]. On peut imaginer que, de son côté, Angélique est fascinée par le raffinement, la délicatesse, et l'aisance qu'exhibe le Parisien, manières qui contrastent plutôt favorablement avec celles des paysans qui l'entourent […].[33]

The rural characters who surround Angélique also embody several eighteenth-century stereotypes about provincial social climbers. For one, Blaise's vulgar desire to marry for money acts as a foil to Lucidor's professed wish to marry for love.[34] For another, the play expressly alludes to this period's growing phenomenon of social mobility: Frontin informs Lucidor that he already knows Lisette from when they both worked in Paris and reveals that they have both changed masters at least once in the past few years. He explains: "j'ai rencontré près de l'hôtellerie une fille […] qui m'a bien la mine d'être une certaine Lisette que j'ai connue à Paris il y a quatre ou cinq ans, et qui était à une dame chez qui mon maître allait souvent." In reply, Lucidor remarks that Lisette, "qui est du village, [et] qui y a toute sa famille," has indeed worked in Paris (Scene 1, 472). As Amy Wyngaard has noted, the movement of servants from the provinces to Paris was often viewed as threatening in the eighteenth century: such people were seen as "highly ambitious"

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only makes three other appearances in Marivaux's theater, usually in a minor role: *L'Héritier de village* (1725), *L'Heureux stratagème* (1733) and *Les Acteurs de bonne foi* (1757). See Dort, *Théâtre*, 43.

[33] Antoine Spacagna, "Le Jeu linguistique et les preuves dans *L'Épreuve*," in *Langue, littérature du XVIIe et du XVIIIe siècle: mélanges offerts à M. le professeur Frédéric Deloffre* (Paris: SEDES, 1990): 393-404, at 394.

[34] Upon learning that Lucidor intends to marry Angélique, Blaise ruefully recalls the concern he claims to have felt for Lucidor's health—as well as the dowry he stands to lose: "Morgué, vous me faites là un vilain tour […] c'était bian la peine de venir vingt fois demander, comment va-t-il, comment ne va-t-il pas, velà-t-il pas une santé qui m'est bien chanceuse […] Sans compter que c'est cinq bonnes mille livres que vous m'ôtez, comme un sou, et que la petite aura en mariage" (Scene 2, 475-476).

individuals who challenged traditional hierarchies (*Savage to Citizen* 38). It is, however, fairly unusual to see financial and social ambition portrayed with overt cynicism in Marivaux's work: his pre-1740s plays, like *L'Héritier de village* (1725) and *Le Legs* (1736), tend to explore such desires in a more indulgent, if satirical, light.[35]

When Angélique joins Blaise and Lisette on stage shortly before the *épreuve* begins, she proves to be as different from the other provincials as Lucidor's portrait of her suggested: she shows herself to have a sensitive constitution and speaks with sincerity. Moreover, unlike many of Marivaux's "lovers," who often struggle to understand and articulate their sentiments, she has a rather strong grasp of her words and feelings in her first scenes. Blaise informs her that Lucidor has made plans with her mother, Madame Argante, to procure her a husband but has not yet revealed the man's identity. Hearing that the man will be an *homme du monde* and suspecting that it is Lucidor himself, Angélique turns aside to indulge in her happiness: "(*d'un air content et discret*) 'D'un homme du monde qu'il ne nomme pas'" (Scene 5, 481). Her joy soon causes her to lose her composure and she struggles to stave off Lisette's questions about whether the man could be Lucidor: "Oh, je rougirais trop, si je me trompais. [...] Bon, lui, je ne sais pas seulement moi-même ce que je veux dire, on rêve, on promène sa pensée, et puis c'est tout; on le verra, ce mari, je ne l'épouserai pas sans le voir" (482). These words and the gestures that accompany them leave the play's spectators in little doubt of Angélique's feelings, but she manages to recover herself to await the proposal she hopes to hear. When Lucidor appears moments later, they engage in a conventionally flirtatious conversation in which she expresses herself as adeptly as he does:

> LUCIDOR: [...] [V]ous ne haïssez pas de me parler, je vous le rends bien, ma chère Angélique: quand je ne vous vois pas, vous me manquez, et je vous cherche.

[35] On the themes of money and social status in Marivaux's comedies, see Elena Russo, *Styles*, 134-140.

ANGÉLIQUE: Vous ne cherchez pas longtemps, car je reviens bien vite, et ne sors guère.

LUCIDOR: Quand vous êtes revenue, je suis content.

ANGÉLIQUE: Et moi, je ne suis pas mélancolique.

(Scene 8, 485)

This banter laces the scene with dramatic irony, thereby serving to socially isolate the deceived Angélique in the eyes of the play's spectators. That is, she believes that this exchange signifies that she and Lucidor are in perfect sympathy with one another: they are both speaking of love to each other in well-worn, conventional idioms. However, as the audience knows, Lucidor is using these idioms with ironic detachment because his sole object here is to set the scene for his *épreuve*. When the conversation turns to the husband he claims to have chosen for Angélique, the irony becomes more pronounced. Angélique does her best to confirm that Lucidor is talking about himself by posing an indirect question: "[…] tout le cœur me bat; loge-t-il avec vous?" to which he replies, "Oui, Angélique, nous sommes dans la même maison" (Scene 8, 485). As he allows her to grow certain that they both understand his words in the same way, she uses their banter to declare her love for him without indecently stating it outright. He in turn exploits his previously affectionate behavior toward her ("toutes mes façons n'ont signifié que [je l'aime]" [Scene 1, 473]) and raises her hopes as highly as he can by playing upon her expectations:

ANGÉLIQUE: […] Quel homme est-ce?

LUCIDOR: Un homme très riche.

ANGÉLIQUE: Ce n'est pas là le principal; après.

LUCIDOR: Il est de mon âge et de ma taille.

ANGÉLIQUE: Bon, c'est ce que je voulais savoir.

LUCIDOR: Nos caractères se ressemblent, il pense comme moi.

ANGÉLIQUE: Toujours de mieux en mieux, que je l'aimerai!

LUCIDOR: C'est un homme tout aussi uni, tout aussi sans façon que je le suis. […] Qui n'a ni ambition ni gloire, et qui n'exigera de celle qu'il épousera, que son cœur.

ANGÉLIQUE (*riant*): Il l'aura, monsieur Lucidor, il l'aura, il l'a déjà; je l'aime autant que vous, ni plus, ni moins.

LUDICOR: Vous aurez le sien, Angélique, je vous en assure, je le connais, c'est tout comme s'il vous le disait lui-même.

(Scene 8, 485)

Angélique's exuberance in these lines could not contrast more sharply with how she expresses herself in the scene of the *épreuve*. Lucidor, satisfied that he has fulfilled his purpose, offers her jewelry as a wedding gift and leaves under the guise of obtaining her mother's consent. Upon seeing him return with Frontin in tow, Angélique is shocked into speechlessness. Her shock is compounded when Frontin's presence proves to be merely the first ordeal to endure: Lucidor follows up by showing her a portrait of his sister, whom he falsely identifies as a Parisian girl he is likely to marry. He asks Angélique for her opinion of the woman, at which point she makes her despair plain: "(*d'un air mourant [elle] repousse [le portrait]*): 'Je ne m'y connais pas'" (Scene 10, 487). Lucidor's use of a portrait is especially striking when viewed in parallel with *L'Épreuve réciproque* and *Le Jeu*: whereas Philaminte and Silvia's self-appointed "rivals" for their lovers are their own maids, who disguise themselves at their mistresses' behest and act out their assigned roles upon the stage, Lucidor pits Angélique against an absent, unknowable rival who is of a more desirable social station than she and with whom she cannot hope to compete. As he goes on to ask Angélique if she is satisfied with Frontin, she abandons speech altogether and expresses herself only in gestures: "*Angélique, sans lui répondre, tire la boîte aux bijoux, et la lui rend sans le*

regarder; elle la met dans sa main, et il s'arrête comme surpris, et sans la lui remettre, après quoi il sort" (Scene 10, 487). Lucidor's comprehension of her feelings is already evident in the stage directions, and he has no cause left for doubt after she rejects Frontin in the next scene.

At this point, Lucidor's *mise en scène* takes a dramatic turn. Angélique, hurt and with no reason to hope for his love, attempts to salvage her dignity by retiring to her room. Yet instead of declaring the *épreuve* a success, Lucidor chooses to prolong it: he goes to Lisette and Madame Argante to feign shock at Angélique's rejection of Frontin, knowing full well that they will want an explanation from Angélique. She, obliged to reappear before the group to face their bombardment of questions, is unable to articulate more than a few words in reply: "Ma mère... [...] Monsieur… […] (*vivement*): En tout cas, je ne suis pas née babillarde" (Scene 15, 493). As Madame Argante, Lisette, and Frontin continue to needle her for answers, Lucidor interjects with comments that feed their frustration and confusion: "Lisette a raison, et je pense comme elle" (491); "Que je suis mortifié!" (493) This quickly succeeds in turning everyone against Angélique: her mother, enraged at losing a chance to gain a wealthy gentleman as a son-in-law, leaves in fury and threatens to disinherit her.[36] Lisette, for her part, foregoes the maid's traditional role of confidante and criticizes her mistress's actions.[37] Indeed, she even berates Angélique with a query that comes across as an ironic throwback to *La Double Inconstance*: "En vérité, Mademoiselle, on ne saurait vous excuser; attendez-vous qu'il vous vienne un prince?" (Scene 16, 493) In this way, Lucidor shows himself to be a master of both the stage and the provincial milieu. As a refined, clever Parisian, he seamlessly manipulates the greed that he detects in the rural characters, all of whom, as he knows, are only interested in profiting from Angélique's marriage. Madame

[36] "Je sors, je ne pourrais pas me retenir, mais je la déshérite, si elle continue de répondre aussi mal aux obligations que nous vous avons, Messieurs" (Scene 15, 493).
[37] Bernard Dort argues that Marivaux's valets and maids normally act as "mirrors" for their masters; that is, they intervene in their masters' affairs to help them to see the truth about their feelings. Dort, *Théâtre*, 59.

Argante's callous fixation on wealth and status, paired with Lisette's cynical belief that one rich husband is worth another, leave Angélique alienated from everyone in her household.

For the rest of the play, Angélique struggles to shield her pride and wounded feelings. She does manage to recover the power of speech in her scenes with Lisette and Frontin, fighting back against their admonishments by insisting that her heart is what matters:

> [I]l est juste que je parle à mon tour, et je commence par vous, Lisette, c'est que je vous prie de vous taire, entendez-vous; il n'y a rien ici qui vous regarde […]. [Et] je vous dirai donc, Monsieur, que je serais mortifiée s'il fallait vous aimer, le cœur me le dit, on sent cela, non que vous ne soyez fort aimable […].
>
> (Scene 16, 494)

Angélique's reassertion of her voice and values in this scene is a hollow victory, however, as she finds herself hopelessly outmatched in her conversations with Lucidor. At several points, she tries to make him recognize the source of her anger and despair, even as she endeavors to hide the love she still feels for him. Yet each time she attempts to communicate—and perhaps, to figure out what it is that she *wants* to communicate—he hints at the feelings that he knows she is struggling to express and then pretends to misunderstand them. At one point, he goes so far as to state that she must have a "secret love," only to subsequently humiliate her by "guessing" that she wants to marry Blaise:

> LUCIDOR: Dites-moi de quoi vous vous plaignez?
>
> ANGÉLIQUE: Moi, Monsieur, me plaindre, et qui est-ce qui y songe? Où sont les reproches que je vous fais? Me voyez-vous fâchée? Je suis très contente de vous, vous en agissez on ne peut pas mieux; comment donc? vous m'offrez des maris tant que j'en

> voudrai; vous m'en faites venir de Paris sans que j'en demande; y a-t-il rien là de plus obligeant, de plus officieux? […]
>
> LUCIDOR: Quoi que vous en disiez, vos discours ont une aigreur que je ne sais à quoi attribuer, et que je ne mérite point. […] C'est-à-dire, que vous ne voulez pas que je songe à vous marier, et que malgré ce que vous m'avez dit tantôt, il y a quelque amour secret dont vous me faites mystère.
>
> (Scene 17, 495-496)

Lucidor's feigned blindness to Angélique's love makes it increasingly painful for her to speak at all. By tempting her fellow provincials with money and otherwise feeding their worst impulses, he makes her an outsider in her own world. His refusals to understand her also sabotage her use of language at its most fundamental level. The situation grows quite serious late in the play when Blaise and Lisette exclaim that Angélique must secretly love Lucidor. Upon hearing Lucidor dismiss that notion as a "folly" born of the "little conversations" that he and she used to share with each other, Angélique is driven to express hatred for him instead:

> LUCIDOR: Mais en vérité, Angélique, vous n'êtes pas raisonnable; ne voyez-vous pas que ce sont nos petites conversations qui ont donné lieu à cette folie, qu'on a rêvée, et qu'elle ne mérite pas votre attention.
>
> ANGÉLIQUE: Hélas, Monsieur, c'est par discrétion que je ne vous ai pas dit ma pensée; mais je vous aime si peu, que si je ne me retenais pas, je vous haïrais depuis ce mari que vous avez mandé de Paris; oui, Monsieur, je vous haïrais, je ne sais trop même si je ne vous hais pas [...].
>
> (Scene 18, 497)

Yet, as dangerous as these words are for Lucidor, he does not reveal his ruse or his love until scene 21, when Angélique finally breaks down and cries at his offer to arrange for her to marry Blaise: "Vous pleurez, Angélique" (Scene 21, 500).

The extremity of Lucidor's behavior has made him one of the most polarizing figures in Marivaux's corpus. The play gives him no monologues or *apartés* with which to explain himself, and his motives for prolonging the *épreuve* remain difficult to assess when it ends. His enigmatic character has led critics to interpret him in a remarkable variety of ways, most of which can be classed into one of three basic categories. The first, represented by critics like Antoine Spacagna, holds that Lucidor is a sensitive soul in search of authenticity in a flawed world. Spacagna posits that the *épreuve*, which he deems a triumph of true love, ultimately benefits Angélique because it prepares her for the complexities of Parisian society—adding that it makes her a more pleasing choice of wife for the worldly Lucidor:

> Angélique, grâce à l'épreuve que lui a fait subir Lucidor a peu à peu appris à nuancer ses réponses et toujours laisser un léger doute subsister. Elle est maintenant prête à entrer dans le milieu parisien de Lucidor et on peut facilement imaginer qu'avec un peu plus d'expérience, ce langage « entre le oui et le non », lui permettra une fois mariée et établie dans la société parisienne de déjouer les avances qui lui seront faites par les admirateurs qui l'entoureront, tout en ménageant leur susceptibilité. […] De plus le doute entretient l'amour et une jeune femme qui sait doser ses réponses aura plus de chance de maintenir en éveil le désir de son mari.
>
> ("Jeu linguistique" 402)[38]

[38] Other Lucidor apologists include Nicolas Bonhôte, *Marivaux ou les machines de l'opéra* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'homme, 1974), 169. Spacagna provides a thorough summary of *L'Épreuve* criticism in his *Entre le oui et le non: Essai sur la structure profonde du Théâtre de Marivaux* (Berne: Éditions Peter Lang SA, 1978), 321-335.

Moreover, as James Gaines points out, some of Marivaux's contemporaries also saw Lucidor as sensitive and admirable. Gaines provides an overview of how the character was described by eighteenth-century critics—some of whom made the intriguing mistake of calling Angélique "Marianne," which was her original name:

> It is interesting that two contemporary reviews of the play, both of which mention the original name of the character Angélique, which was Marianne, present Lucidor in a remarkably favorable, but oddly stilted light. The account in the November 1740 edition of the *Mercure de France* foreshortens the action, saying that as soon as Lucidor receives incontrovertible proof of the lady's love in the form of her return of the jewel box, he is overcome with joy and throws himself immediately at her feet to ask for her hand. This reading obviously skips over the eleven scenes that constitute Angélique's "passion," as her expectations are deliberately disappointed and then ground underfoot by Lucidor's unsolicited efforts to pair her with Frontin and/or Blaise. The marquis d'Argenson's resumé of the action calls Lucidor "rich and loveable," a "benefactor" who develops "delicate tests" [...]. According to the marquis, [Lucidor] throws himself at ["Marianne's"] feet when his final ruse with Blaise is "exhausted."[39]

Gaines himself falls into the second category of *L'Épreuve* critics: those who attribute its prolonged dramatic tension to Lucidor's ineptitude or lack of introspection. Because Lucidor does not test Angélique "objectively," Gaines deems him a "failed" scientist who heedlessly sows seeds of hatred in his marriage ("Experiment" 413, 418). Other critics like Edward J. H. Greene label Lucidor as "inexperienced" and contend that his youthful egocentrism leaves him unable to see

[39] The *Mercure de France*'s inaccurate summary of the play is not necessarily surprising; a similar error occurred in its summary of *La Double Inconstance* in April 1723. James Gaines, "Experiment or Ordeal?—Marivaux's *L'Épreuve*," in *Neophilologus*, vol. 93, is. 3 (July 2009): 411-419, at 417.

himself "in any kind of perspective" (*Marivaux* 227). Consequently, they tend to argue that the *épreuve* is protracted because it escapes Lucidor's control, and that Angélique's tears drive him to unmask himself by overwhelming him with emotion (Greene, *Marivaux* 226-227). Valentini Brady, who also belongs in this camp, notes that "the only knowledge Angélique acquires [...] is that Lucidor suspected her love of being interested," and that this might grant her "maturity" by making her question people's motives in the future.[40]

The third category of criticism attributes Lucidor's actions to outright cruelty or snobbery and is most passionately represented by the nineteenth-century critic Jules Lemaître. Lemaître argues that Lucidor prolongs the *épreuve* for two reasons: firstly, because Angélique's pain flatters his ego, and secondly, because a girl who suffers for love presents an inherently pleasing spectacle. Thus, Lemaître contends that Lucidor's real objective is to make Angélique cry, full stop:

> Il faut qu'Angélique souffre et pleure à cause de lui, parce que c'est une chose adorable que la douleur d'amour chez une jeune fille, et qui se traduit par des mouvements et des mots si spontanés, si gentiment inconscients et déraisonnables—et aussi par des airs de visage, des attitudes, des troubles extérieurs si délicieux à observer! [...] C'est un spectacle qu'il se donne. Et il croit aimer![41]

Although Lemaître himself clearly finds pleasure in contemplating Angélique's suffering, he does not mince words in his remarks about Scene 21, in which she accepts Lucidor's belated offer of marriage. Lemaître imagines an alternate ending in which Angélique rejects Lucidor, complete

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[40] Valentini P. Brady, *Love in the Theatre of Marivaux* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1970), 329. Oscar A. Haac also argues that Lucidor's lack of self-confidence makes him a misanthropic "fanatic of sincerity"; see Haac, *Marivaux* (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1973), 103.

[41] Jules Lemaître, *Impressions de Théâtre* (Paris: Nouvelle Bibliothèque Littéraire, cinquième édition, 1892), 67-68. Haydn Mason proposes a similar reading of Lucidor in "Cruelty in Marivaux's Theatre," in *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 62, no. 2 (April 1967): 238-247.

with a monologue for her in which she indignantly tells him off for treating her as an inferior.[42] Lemaître then concludes that, while Lucidor's deception is "innocent," "Il y a déjà un tout petit Valmont [of Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782)] dans Lucidor" (*Impressions* 70). Notably, the case for interpreting the character this way also finds support in Marivaux's own work. The Lucidor stock character appeared in his theater on only one other occasion, in an allegorical work called *Félicie* (1757). The Lucidor of this play, a vain and smooth-talking tempter, nearly seduces the title character but is thankfully chased away by her friends: La Modestie, La Fée, and Diane, who represents the Roman goddess of chastity. If Lucidor of *L'Épreuve* has any connection to the Lucifer-like character of the later play, it seems all the more likely that his manipulation of Angélique and the other provincials stems from his vanity.

While I am inclined to view Lemaître's interpretation as the most persuasive, I think it is also worthwhile to reevaluate it in light of the play's first scene. We should recall that Lucidor begins the play by recounting the moment when he first felt sure of Angélique's love. He explains to Frontin that he saw it expressed upon her features as she wept by his sickbed: "je l'ai vue inquiète, alarmée, plus changée que moi; j'ai vu des larmes couler de ses yeux" (Scene 1, 473). He also emphasizes the fact that he and Angélique have exchanged no verbal declarations of love, attributing his own silence on the matter to a wish to confirm that he is loved for himself beforehand. Yet this explanation of the *épreuve* does not make sense in retrospect: as we have seen, if he ever had a reason to doubt Angélique, he had none left after her rejection of Frontin.

Lucidor's choice to continue the *épreuve* after that point *would* make sense, however, if his real goal were to recapture the moment he describes in Scene 1. His description of Angélique

[42] Among other things, Lemaître's Angélique says: "Et surtout vous m'avez prise pour votre jouet. [...] [Le] véritable amour [...] crée l'égalité entre ceux qui aiment. Je ne suis qu'une humble petite fille; mais si vous m'aimiez bien, jamais vous ne m'auriez traitée ainsi" (*Impressions* 68-69).

weeping over his sickbed presents an idealized vision of love, one that is completely divorced from spoken language. His repeated use of the verb *voir*—"je l'ai vue," "j'ai vu [s]es larmes"—portrays her as a pleasing spectacle and casts him as her beholder. If we then turn to the scene in which he lays the groundwork for the *épreuve*, his ironic use of the platitudes of love appears intriguing: he uses them to raise Angélique's hopes to make the *épreuve* more acute, but they can also be read as an ideological attack on language as a means of expressing love. His words to Angélique in that scene underscore the banalities of the conventional language of courtship, although she is unaware of it. Once she is made to believe that she and Lucidor do not understand each other, her only options are to struggle to find other words to express herself or to avoid speaking altogether. This allows Lucidor to prolong her struggle until she breaks down in tears: that is, in another display of pure, naïve, and wordless emotion. In fact, in this climactic scene, when Lucidor finally abandons his ruse, he makes his declaration of love just as Angélique's tears redouble:

> Quand vous auriez pensé que je vous aimais, quand vous m'auriez cru pénétré de l'amour le plus tendre, vous ne vous seriez pas trompée. (*Angélique ici redouble ses pleurs et sanglote davantage et Lucidor continue.*) Et pour achever de vous ouvrir mon cœur, je vous avoue que je vous adore, Angélique.
>
> (Scene 21, 501)[43]

Thus, Lucidor's *épreuve* is about more than feeding his ego on a whim or indulging a fetish for weeping girls. At heart, it is an effort to relive an idealized moment of his past (when Angélique wept as he lay ailing). It is a moment that he values for disturbingly selfish reasons: namely, because it allowed him to behold the depth of her anguish as she suffered for her love for him.

[43] Angélique does not remain completely silent in this scene: after Lucidor first remarks on her tears with his "Vous pleurez, Angélique," she admits that she "could have believed" that he loved her based on his past kindness and that her "good faith" deceived her (500). But Lucidor's decision to reveal the truth comes in the previous scene, just as she is on the verge of tears (Scene 20, p.500).

This interpretation leaves us with the question of what the *épreuve* means for Angélique and for the cultural clash between Paris and the provinces. If Lucidor sees the *épreuve* as a means of recapturing a moment of the past, he may fail to realize (or may simply not care) that he only produces an outward imitation of it. Angélique's tears are the result of a very different kind of pain this time: they are prompted not by her lover's suffering, but by his deliberate effort to make *her* suffer. The past moment also carried a degree of reciprocity: Lucidor's memory of it casts Angélique as the spectacle and himself as the clear-eyed, admiring beholder, but she was also a beholder when she wept in sympathy at the spectacle of his illness. Lucidor's *épreuve,* in contrast, depends upon denying reciprocity with her: that is, upon undermining language to cut off communication, thereby shifting her role in their courtship from that of an equal partner to that of a desired object. Moreover, to what extent that communication is restored between them in the end is difficult to determine. Angélique meets Lucidor's first declaration of love with angry skepticism, prompting him to claim that he was going to propose if not for the hatred she expressed for him earlier. This remark produces the following exchange, which encompasses Angélique's last lines in the play:

> ANGÉLIQUE: Vous dites que je vous hais, n'ai-je pas raison? Quand il n'y aurait que ce portrait de Paris qui est dans votre poche.
>
> LUCIDOR: Ce portrait n'est qu'une feinte; c'est celui d'une sœur que j'ai.
>
> ANGÉLIQUE: Je ne pouvais pas deviner.
>
> LUCIDOR: Le voici, Angélique, et je vous le donne.
>
> ANGÉLIQUE: Qu'en ferai-je, si vous n'y êtes plus? un portrait ne guérit de rien.
>
> LUCIDOR: Et si je restais, si je vous demandais votre main, si nous ne nous quittions de la vie.

ANGÉLIQUE: Voilà, du moins, ce qu'on appelle parler, cela.

LUCIDOR: Vous m'aimez donc?

ANGÉLIQUE: Ai-je jamais fait autre chose?

LUCIDOR *se mettant tout à fait à genoux*: Vous me transportez, Angélique.

(Scene 21, 501)[44]

On a superficial level, this exchange appears to signal both a happy ending and a recovery of spoken communication. Angélique's lines suggest that she is still in love with Lucidor, and he appears genuinely moved as well. Her response to his proposal, "Voilà, du moins, ce qu'on appelle parler," also seems to indicate that, in her mind, words have returned to save the day by bringing the couple to an understanding. Yet this scene passes quickly and leaves several things unsaid: upon discovering that the portrait was a ruse, Angélique merely says "Je ne pouvais pas deviner," which gives no indication of how she feels about having been deceived and humiliated. Perhaps she is not sure herself, as she is given no time to process this discovery. Her line about loving Lucidor, "Ai-je jamais fait autre chose?", could be interpreted as an expression of tenderness, but an actress could also choose to infuse it with reproach, incredulity, or stunned relief. Furthermore, if the scene's emotional undercurrents are somewhat open to interpretation, the dialogue reveals even less about how the *épreuve* will affect Angélique in the long term. She might simply lose her country-girl ingenuousness, as Spacagna's vision of her future life with Lucidor in Paris suggests ("Jeu linguistique" 402), or she might become skeptical of people in general, as Brady argues (*Love* 329); but she could also feel latent resentment towards Lucidor, as Lemaître proposes (*Impressions* 69). Thus, the cost of Lucidor's egotistical quest to recapture an idyllic moment

[44] Angélique has a few lines in the *divertissement* that follows the play's last scene, but because Pierre Duviquet (1765-1835) is thought to have added it to the text, I am not counting it as part of the play (see Deloffre, *Théâtre complet*, n.59, 897).

might be higher than he anticipated: because he hurt Angélique, the innocent love that he finds so flattering might now be wholly lost to the past.

While Angélique's story ends on an equivocal note, the other low-born characters exacerbate the play's ambiguity: their parts could be performed with a serious edge, as a source of comic relief, or as a mix of the two. In the final scene, Frontin unmasks himself and admits to Lisette that he is the valet whom she loved years ago in Paris. He proposes to her, signaling that the play will close with a traditional marriage of the domestics—only to find that she has cast him aside for Blaise. Her reason for abandoning Frontin gives the audience one last reminder of the "d'or" in Lucidor's name: in Scene 2, upon learning that Blaise covets Angélique's dowry, Lucidor promises to pay him more than double its worth on the condition that Blaise play along with the *épreuve* (Scene 2, 476-477). Because Blaise was only to be paid in the event of his own marriage, he and Lisette choose to marry for the sole object of gaining the promised money. Lucidor then dismisses the whole affair with a call for music and dancing:

> FRONTIN: (*À Lisette*) Ma reine, puisque vous aimiez tant Frontin, et que je lui ressemble, j'ai envie de l'être.
>
> LISETTE: Ah, coquin, je t'entends bien, mais tu l'es trop tard.
>
> MAÎTRE BLAISE: Je ne pouvons nous quitter, il y a douze mille francs qui nous suivent.
>
> MADAME ARGANTE: Que signifie donc cela?
>
> LUCIDOR: Je vous l'expliquerai tout à l'heure, qu'on fasse venir les violons du village, et que la journée finisse par des danses.
>
> (Scene 22, 502)

This marriage born of greed adds a cynical edge to the final scene (even if it is also meant to provide comic relief), and the effect is compounded by the fact that Frontin is rejected as a result

of his own master's actions. Lucidor himself is not at all concerned by this: he offers no word of consolation to Frontin and no reward for his help with the *épreuve*. Yet it is also true that Lucidor is not solely responsible for the play's outcome: he appears to enjoy toying with his social inferiors, but he did not enter an idyllic countryside and corrupt its inhabitants with promises of money. Rather, he merely persuaded the provincials to do his bidding by offering them what they already coveted.

Ultimately, whether a given theatrical troupe chooses to perform these final scenes in a serious register or for comic effect, the play's ending carries a somber undertone. If we are meant to admire Angélique's (formerly) ingenuous brand of love, the naked self-interest of all of the other characters encourages us to see it is an anomaly. In this respect, the delicate balance between nostalgia for an idealized pastoral setting and cautious optimism about modernity that we find in *La Double Inconstance* gives way here to pessimism. *L'Épreuve* contains no clear example of intimate communication between its characters, and the only one whose love is disinterested is mistreated by all the others. Indeed, her inability to conceal her suffering only makes it that much easier for Lucidor to manipulate her pain for his own pleasure. In broad terms, therefore, *L'Épreuve* can be read as a heavily critical portrait of modern France: it depicts a society in which money and vanity have corrupting effects on love affairs, thanks to the ambitions of provincial social climbers and the nation's new class of arrogant Parisian elites. In such a world, guileless hearts like Angélique's have become truly exotic, and it seems that they have little chance of surviving for long or being properly appreciated. In short, they simply do not belong.

On a broader scale, however, Angélique also illustrates a crucial step in the ingénue's development as a stock character: to a greater degree than the heroines of Marivaux's earlier plays, she is presented in a way that plays directly and intensely to the audience's emotions. The carefully

orchestrated tears, silences, and gestures that are outlined in her stage directions form a spectacle of suffering that is reinforced by her struggle to find words to express her feelings. Because the other characters conspicuously fail to respond to her with compassion, it is up to the audience to feel pity for her (or, depending on their temperament, to laugh at her predicament). Moreover, the fact that eighteenth-century critics mistakenly called her "Marianne"—the name she originally shared with the sensitive heroine of Marivaux's *La Vie de Marianne* (1731-1742)—evokes the public's growing interest in seeing ingénues depicted as suffering innocents. To follow this trend's development, we must turn to another text whose ingenuous heroine suffers a disorienting emotional crisis: Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747).

2.4 Feeling One's Way and Finding One's Voice in a New Land: Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*

In a literal sense, the heroine of Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747) is much more "foreign" than Marivaux's ingénues. The young woman, whose name is Zilia, begins the novel as a sixteenth-century Incan princess who has just been torn from her cloister by Spanish invaders. After enduring captivity at sea, she is rescued by Déterville, a compassionate French nobleman who transports her to his home in eighteenth-century France. As she narrates these experiences in letters to her lost fiancé, the exiled Sun King Aza, she often gives the novel's reader a sense of sharing in her ordeal on a more intimate level than the spectators of Marivaux's plays can experience. As a result, the reader is pushed not only to see, but to *feel* what is lacking in modern French society as Zilia struggles to understand it.

As Anne Vila has shown, "the distance between Zilia's Peruvian moral traits and those attributed to the French is described in terms that are not so much ethnic or geographical as moral

and temporal."[45] In contrast to the "denatured sensibility" and "mannered delicacy" that she finds in Déterville's compatriots, Zilia is modest, candid, and possessed of a "pure, uncorrupted sensibility" which serves as the basis of her moral judgment (*Enlightenment and Pathology* 140-141). Thus, in Vila's words, "Zilia represents what the French once were naturally, and what she believes they could be again, if only they had better examples to guide them" (142). Zilia herself comes to these realizations late in the novel, in letters 29 and 32. She writes to Aza of having felt deeply moved upon hearing her French acquaintances discuss their ancestors, whose honesty, frugality, and conscientiousness remind her of her fellow Peruvians and the "naïveté de nos mœurs." She later reports that her French companions, who only regard France's cultural past with amusement, are nonetheless touched by her accounts of the Peruvian ethos:

> Naturellement sensibles, touchés de la vertu, je n'en ai point vu qui écoutât sans attendrissement le récit que l'on m'oblige souvent de faire de la droiture de nos cœurs, de la candeur de nos sentiments et de la simplicité de nos mœurs; s'ils vivaient parmi nous, ils deviendraient vertueux: l'exemple et la coutume sont les tyrans de leur conduite.[46]

By using terms like "naïveté," "simplicité," and "candeur" to describe Zilia's Peruvianness (and overall demeanor) throughout the novel, de Graffigny invests these terms with complex moral, emotive, and aesthetic meaning. In some ways, Zilia's use of them in the passages cited above links her to other literary "noble savages" of the Americas, such as the titular characters of Louis François Delisle de la Drevetière's comedy *Arlequin sauvage* (1721) and Voltaire's novel *L'Ingénu* (1767). Like Zilia, these men are "ingenuous" in that they speak candidly and adhere to

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[45] Anne Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 142.

[46] Françoise de Graffigny, *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1993), 122, 134. This edition includes de Graffigny's revisions of the novel for its reprinting in 1752; most importantly, she added two new letters (29 and 34) and reworked parts of the original letters 28 and 29.

a more *naïf*—as in "primitive" or "natural"—way of life than the French do.[47] Yet unlike Zilia, their struggles to understand French culture are a satirical device: their childlike ignorance causes them to take everything they observe literally, which leads them to inadvertently unmask the underlying absurdity of French social graces, prejudices, and hypocrisies. By contrast, Zilia's tale of being thrust into an alien world centers on her intense feelings of fear, loss, and longing, which invest her storytelling with what Robin Howells describes as a "new interiority."[48] This is especially the case in the novel's first half, before Zilia learns the French language. Surrounded by strangers with whom she can barely communicate, she pours her heart out in unsent letters that, for her, become a sort of diary in which she processes her bewilderment.[49] Thus, Zilia's brand of ingenuousness has a much different effect on the novel's reader than what one finds in other texts about foreign visitors. In Howells's words, it is "a new version of the failure to understand—now less an instrument of objectifying satire than a source of subjective feeling. Instead of intellectually distancing the author, and the reader, it invites emotional identification" (*Regressive Fictions* 33).[50] At the same time, the gaps in Zilia's initial understanding of her new surroundings invite the reader to play an active role in judging how the French respond to her.

Zilia's first "failure to understand," which serves as the reader's first chance to connect with her, provides the reader with a framework for interpreting the rest of the novel. This "failure"

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[47] For example, Voltaire's Ingénu explains that "On m'a toujours appelé l'Ingénu [...] parce que je dis toujours naïvement ce que je pense, comme je fais tout ce que je veux"; and Delisle's Arlequin exalts the virtues of frank speech and his own simple life in the forest. Voltaire, *L'Ingénu* (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 2004), 40-41; and Delisle, *Arlequin sauvage* (Paris: Briasson, 1731 [1721]).

[48] Robin Howells, *Regressive Fictions: Graffigny, Rousseau, Bernardin* (London: LEGENDA, Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2007), 26.

[49] Before she masters French, Zilia writes with *quipus*, woven cords that were used as a recording device in Andean South America. The text's *Avertissement* explains that Zilia later translated them into French and adds that the text's stylistic faults are evidence that its "esprit d'ingénuité" has been preserved (4). On Zilia's use of *quipus* and subsequent translation of her letters into French, see Laurence Mall, "Traduction et original dans *Les Lettres d'une Péruvienne*," Romance Quarterly 44:1 (Winter 1997), 13-23.

[50] Specifically, Howells uses the word "naïveté" to refer to Zilia's lack of knowledge as well as her candid manner of expression.

is the result of brutal violence and imperialistic avarice rather than cultural difference: Zilia begins letter 1 with a cry of despair on having been torn from the Temple of the Sun by Spanish raiders. Her voice at this point in the novel, as Thomas Kavanagh explains, is "a writing consciousness shattered by the impact of a moment which has abolished the law of her religion, the narrative of her love, and the sense of her identity" (*Esthetics* 58-59). Cut off from everything she has ever known for reasons she cannot fathom, she writes a lament to Aza about her feelings of alienation and amorous longing. She then exclaims at the Spaniards' failure to be moved by her *naïf* signs of suffering:

> Plongée dans un abîme d'obscurité, mes jours sont semblables aux nuits les plus effrayantes. Loin d'être touchés de mes plaintes, mes ravisseurs ne le sont pas même de mes larmes; sourds à mon langage, ils n'entendent pas mieux les cris de mon désespoir. Quel est le peuple assez féroce pour n'être point ému aux signes de la douleur? Quel désert aride a vu naître des humains insensibles à la voix de la nature gémissante?
>
> (*Lettres d'une Péruvienne*, letter 1, p.18)

With these lines, Zilia establishes the idea that sensitivity to other people's pain is the measure of one's humanity and locates her own expression of pain in a universal language of the body: all peoples, in her view, *should* be sensitive to the natural, physical signs of human suffering, regardless of the differences between their cultures or spoken languages. Thus, while Zilia has the Spanish in mind when she poses the two questions at the end of this passage, they also function as rhetorical queries to the reader. That is, they encourage the reader to begin judging all of the people Zilia meets according to how they respond to her emotionally and, building upon this, to ask how these people's capacity or incapacity to be moved by her might reflect the overall health of the societies to which they belong.

Zilia's first impressions of the elite French social circle to which Déterville belongs are decidedly mixed, but for the most part, she proves to be a good judge of the moral character of its members (Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology* 144). For example, when she meets Déterville's family, whom she describes in letters 13 and 15, her sensibility and *naïveté* help her to see straight into the heart of the group's emotional makeup. As she watches Déterville greet his mother, she immediately senses the woman's coldness towards him and towards herself: as she puts it, "si je n'eusse été avertie, je n'aurais pas reconnu les sentiments de la nature dans les caresses de cette mère" (letter 13, p.62). In contrast, she senses a close bond between Déterville and his sister Céline and muses that the signs of compassion she receives from them make them both seem wholly Peruvian: "Les manières simples, la bonté naïve, la modeste gaieté de Céline feraient volontiers penser qu'elle a été élevée parmi nos Vierges. La douceur honnête, le tendre sérieux de son frère, persuaderaient facilement qu'il est né du sang des *Incas*" (letter 15, p.69).[51] From the reader's perspective, the cause of the mother's coldness to Zilia and Déterville becomes clear as soon as Zilia learns that Déterville has a married older brother (letter 13, p.66). Under the French system of primogeniture, an aristocratic mother had reason to disfavor her younger son to keep the family estate intact. She also has reason to regard women like Zilia, who might tempt her younger son into marriage, with suspicion. Yet by presenting this family from Zilia's perspective first, the novel narrows the reader's focus to this system's toxic effects on family bonds. Thus, Zilia's ignorance of the rationale behind this family dynamic has the effect of suggesting that this rationale is not important: what really matters is that its result is denatured and morally wrong. In other words, *because* of her naïveté and natural sensibility, Zilia can only sense the emotional side of the issue, which in turn encourages the novel's reader to feel this fundamental truth about it.

[51] In fact, Zilia does not fully realize that France is not a province of the Incan Empire until letter 18, when she writes to Aza (in French) to report that she has learned the French language.

At the same time, however, Zilia's Peruvian worldview and general lack of experience blinds her to certain aspects of her relationships with others. Most notably, until she learns French, she is unable to comprehend the true nature of Déterville's feelings for her. When he first becomes her protector, she mistakes his attentions for idolatry and then for faithful service to the Incan Sun King: that is, to Aza. Yet from their first scenes together at sea, his amorous passion for her is very clear to the reader:

> Rien ne peut se comparer, mon cher Aza, aux bontés qu'il a pour moi: loin de me traiter en esclave, il semble être le mien; […] Il commence par me faire prononcer distinctement des mots de sa langue. Dès que j'ai répété après lui, *oui, je vous aime,* ou bien, *je vous promets d'être à vous,* la joie se répand sur son visage, il me baise les mains avec transport, et avec un air de gaieté tout contraire au sérieux qui accompagne le culte divin.
>
> (letter 9, pp.47-48)

In Déterville's eyes, his one-sided love scenes with Zilia attest to his respect for her: when he professes his love to her in the middle of the novel, he mentions that he steadfastly refused to take advantage of her innocence (letter 23). Yet while Déterville does indeed refrain from making overtly improper declarations and gestures (letter 12), the passage cited above reveals that the situation is more complex. As the reader can discern, there is an echo of the Pygmalion myth in Déterville's treatment of Zilia here: by appropriating her voice for the sake of indulging in his own desires, he "brings her to life" as the woman he wants her to be and hopes she will become. He also evokes that myth when he confesses his love to her some months later, after she becomes proficient enough at French to understand his words. Specifically, he describes her as the incarnation of an ideal woman he has often created in his imagination:

> Né tendre, paresseux, ennemi de l'artifice, les peines qu'il aurait fallu me donner pour pénétrer le cœur des femmes, et la crainte de n'y pas trouver la franchise que j'y désirais, ne m'ont laissé pour elles qu'un goût vague ou passager; j'ai vécu sans passion jusqu'au moment où je vous ai vue; votre beauté me frappa; mais son impression aurait peut-être été aussi légère que celle de beaucoup d'autres, si la douceur et la naïveté de votre caractère ne m'avaient présenté l'objet que mon imagination m'avait si souvent composé.
>
> (letter 23, p.96)

Thus, much like the Prince's love in *La Double Inconstance*, Déterville's love is at least partly based in a distaste for artifice. More precisely, as his mention of "la crainte de [ne] pas trouver la franchise que [je] désirais [dans le cœur des femmes]" suggests, he fears being deceived by worldly women and fetishizes Zilia's ingenuousness as an antidote to that. While his love for her is quite sincere, it casts her as an object of desire and as a manifestation of his own ideals. It also leaves the reader with a rather bleak impression of high-society French women.

To Zilia, however, these interactions with Déterville represent something quite different: although their nuances generally escape her, they also spur her to recover her ability to communicate through speech. In letter 9, her account of unwittingly parroting Déterville's words of love reminds the reader of her extreme vulnerability; yet just afterward, she writes that the strangeness of his language has begun to make her doubt that he is Incan at all.[52] She also notes that, more than ever, her doubts about his connection to Aza have roused her desire to learn his language: "Je savais que la privation d'un sens peut tromper à quelques égards, et je vois avec surprise que l'usage des miens m'entraîne d'erreurs en erreurs. L'intelligence des langues serait-elle celle de l'âme?" (letter 9, pp.48-49) Her notion of a link between language and the soul (or

[52] "Tranquille sur sa religion, je ne le suis pas entièrement sur le pays d'où il tire son origine. Son langage et ses habillements sont si différents des nôtres, que souvent ma confiance en est ébranlée" (letter 9, p.48).

mind) is particularly striking here, given that it comes just after the scene in which Déterville appropriates her voice.[53] This notion resonates again when she later becomes able to articulate a response to his words of love, which she does during the first real conversation they have together in French. Now able to communicate through speech and having come to understand that her French rescuer is not one of Aza's subjects, she rejects Déterville (although she offers him her friendship and gratitude). She then asserts herself by candidly affirming her love for Aza, which she declares to be inextricably linked to her Peruvianness and sense of self. This moment therefore marks a crucial transition: in the novel's first half, her body's physical language of suffering naturally expressed her feelings to the world; yet here, her willfully candid words allow her to reaffirm herself with purpose. That is, by using her acquired language (French) to articulate her feelings, she redefines her place in her relationship with Déterville, thereby taking some control of it. As she recalls saying to him:

> [J']aime [Aza] toujours de même [...] et je l'aimerai jusqu'à la mort: je ne sais [...] si vos lois vous permettent d'aimer deux objets de la même manière, mais nos usages et mon cœur me le défendent. Contentez-vous des sentiments que je vous promets, je ne puis en avoir d'autres; *la vérité m'est chère, je vous la dis sans détour*.
>
> (letter 23, p.97; my emphasis)[54]

[53] Zilia's notion of a link between language and mind touches on the central argument that Madeleine Dobie presents in "The Subject of Writing: Language, Epistemology, and Identity in the *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*," in *The Eighteenth Century* 38:2 (1997), 99-117: at 100. Dobie argues that "language is presented [in the novel] as both the inevitable medium of subjective experience, including the most rudimentary forms of sensory experience, and as an arbitrary and foreign sign-system which is not simply the instrument of the writing subject, but is also constitutive of that subjectivity."

[54] This is not the first time that Zilia speaks of her love for Aza in French. When Madame Déterville sends her to a convent with Céline for some months, she expresses it to Céline and to a priest (letter 22). In that instance, however, she does not manage to assert herself: the priest insists that her marriage to Aza (her close blood relative) would be morally objectionable, thereby imposing a European perspective on the worth and validity of Zilia's feelings and desires. Conversely, her talk with Déterville is her first extended *conversation* about her love and the first one that she records in minute detail.

From this point on, Zilia's newfound mastery of French reshapes both her relationship to the reader and her efforts to understand France: she speaks more as an authoritative social critic than as a bewildered ingénue (Kavanagh, *Esthetics* 76). Yet until her last few letters, her idyllic memories of Aza continue to serve as the basis of every judgment she makes: in her mind, as Anne Vila explains, he embodies "a universal ideal of virtue, empathetic humanity, and honesty" (*Enlightenment and Pathology* 144). Zilia's faith in this vision of him is based not only in love and in his role as the Sun King, but in the fact that (back in Peru) he took the culturally unusual step of providing her with a moral education. In letter 2, she fondly describes their first meeting as a tender melding of souls (p.26) and recalls his decision to defy the custom of leaving women in ignorance. As she puts it to her absent lover: "[T]on âme, supérieure aux coutumes, ne les a regardées que comme des abus; tu en as franchi les barrières pour m'élever jusqu'à toi" (p.23). She then expresses her belief that the shared cultivation of virtue is what serves to fortify love and mutual regard: "[Ô] lumière de ma vie [...]. Sans le désir de mériter ton estime, ta confiance, ton respect, par des vertus qui fortifient l'amour, et que l'amour rend voluptueuses, je ne serais que l'objet de tes yeux; l'absence m'aurait déjà effacée de ton souvenir" (p.23).

This vision of love as a union of souls and minds eventually leads Zilia to present her most important criticism of France: namely, her condemnation of what she sees as its mistreatment of women.[55] Much like Déterville—and the Prince of *La Double Inconstance*—she finds high-society women to be too prone to artifice and *amour propre* (letter 34, pp.139-140). Yet instead of laying the blame at their feet—as the male characters Déterville and the Prince do—she claims that French women are this way for two reasons that lie beyond their control: the fact that their

[55] Notably, Zilia writes this letter (letter 34) with the expectation that Aza will read it. In letter 25, Déterville discovers that the exiled Sun King is living at the royal court of Spain and agrees to assist Zilia in sending her letters to him.

education is neglected throughout their lives, and the fact that men treat them with utter contempt. In this vein, she insists that French women are born with the qualities that would make them men's equals, were it not for the fact that "comme si [les hommes] en convenaient au fond de leur cœur, et que leur orgueil ne pût supporter cette égalité, ils contribuent en toute manière à […] rendre [les femmes] méprisables, soit en manquant de considération pour [leurs femmes], soit en séduisant celles des autres" (letter 34, p.143). Moreover, because of these social and cultural failings, the qualities that Zilia idolizes in Aza and Peru are wholly foreign to French women, whose moral sensibilities have atrophied and who cannot imagine a more just and enlightened society. This becomes all too apparent when Zilia tries to instruct them through serious conversation. Notably, as Zilia herself observes, this time their inability to understand her stems from a *figurative* language barrier rather than a literal one. As she later recalls, even though she spoke to them in French, her talk of moral ideals made them "suspect" that she was "speaking Peruvian" to them:

> Si j'essaye de leur expliquer ce que j'entends par la modération […]; si je parle de l'honnêteté des mœurs, de l'équité à l'égard des inferieurs, si peu pratiquée en France, et de la fermeté à mépriser et à fuir les vicieux de qualité, je remarque à leur embarras *qu'elles me soupçonnent de parler la langue péruvienne*, et que la seule politesse les engage à feindre de m'entendre.
>
> (letter 34, p.141; my emphasis)[56]

Zilia's frustration at these social injustices prompts her to close this letter by presenting Aza with a renewed pledge of mutual obligation: "N'oublions jamais, toi l'obligation où tu es d'être mon

[56] Zilia's line about speaking Peruvian is noticeably similar to a line that Silvia delivers in *La Double Inconstance,* when she claims that attempting to explain village ideals of constancy to the courtiers was like speaking to them in Greek: "ils ne savent ce que c'est que tout cela, c'est tout comme si je leur parlais grec" (Act II, scene 1, 214).

exemple, mon guide et mon soutien dans le chemin de la vertu; et moi, celle où je suis de conserver ton estime et ton amour en imitant mon modèle" (p.146).

Tragically for Zilia, however, the eternal union of loving souls that she believes she shares with Aza proves to be what Robin Howells describes as a "paradise lost" (*Regressive Fictions* 20)—if indeed it ever existed as she perceived it. The last letters of the novel, which Zilia writes to Déterville, reveal that Aza has remorselessly abandoned her for a Spanish woman. In other words, he reveals his present self to be much like the arrogant and selfish men of France whom Zilia condemns for treating women with injustice, callousness, and disrespect. Zilia categorically blames this development on Spain, writing to Déterville that Aza's conversion to Catholicism is surely responsible for his refusal to marry her (given that, as is his close blood relative, she is not suitable to marry in the eyes of the Church): "[C]e sont [les Espagnols] qui m'enlèvent le cœur d'Aza; c'est leur cruelle religion qui autorise le crime qu'il commet; elle approuve, elle ordonne l'infidélité, la perfidie, l'ingratitude; mais elle défend l'amour de ses proches. Si j'étais étrangère, inconnue, Aza pourrait m'aimer […]" (letter 38, p.159). Yet the novel leaves open another possibility. In letter 2, when the Spanish have only recently conquered Peru, Zilia notices that she has seen no sign that Aza has tried to rescue her: "On ne t'a point ravi la liberté, tu ne viens pas à mon secours; tu es instruit de mon sort […]. Je vois autant de signes d'esclavage dans les honneurs qu'ils te rendent que dans la captivité où ils me retiennent. Ta bonté te séduit […]" (letter 2, p.24). Thus, although Zilia routinely tries to excuse Aza's abandonment of her by blaming his actions on the Spanish, the novel also invites us to ask if he has simply never been the upright, devoted, and respectful lover whom Zilia imagined him to be.

Whatever the cause of Aza's desertion of her may be, Zilia initially retreats to a house that Déterville bought for her with Incan gold, intending to renounce the world. Ultimately, however,

she manages to find a form of solace: having lost Aza as her "guide" and as the center of her Peruvian identity and worldview, she decides to assume the role of guide herself. To preserve her values as much as possible, she refuses to be unfaithful to Aza, but she invites Déterville to be her partner in a shared, platonic cultivation of virtue. In her new vision of an idyllic future—which has replaced her dream of returning to her idyllic past—her French companion will instruct her in the arts and sciences, whereas she will help him to cultivate his moral character (letter 41). No longer limited to Peru or France and unable to trust in romantic love, she finds a new pleasure in simply existing: "Le plaisir d'être; ce plaisir oublié, ignoré même de tant d'aveugles humains; cette pensée si douce, ce bonheur si pur, *je suis, je vis, j'existe*, pourrait seul rendre heureux, si l'on s'en souvenait, si l'on en jouissait, si l'on en connaissait le prix" (letter 41, p.168). Yet it is also telling that this place of virtue, peace, and friendship between a man and a woman can only be realized at a distance from the worlds of modern France and despoiled Peru. Zilia's retreat from both worlds may bring her personal solace, but it ultimately suggests that presently existing societies—and especially the men who inhabit them—would be hard pressed to ever live up to her ideals of mutual devotion, respect, and sympathetic understanding.

For many of de Graffigny's contemporaries, her heroine's choice to remain independent and unmarried was distressing. In 1751, her friend Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot sent her detailed suggestions for changing Zilia's story: he felt it should include (among other things) some sort of reconciliation with Aza (Kavanagh, *Esthetics* 63-67).[57] Others endeavored to "correct" the problem by writing revisions or sequels in which Zilia consented to marry Aza or Déterville.[58]

[57] On de Graffigny's refusal to give her readers the type of closure that they would customarily expect—that is, a marriage—see also Elizabeth MacArthur, "Devious Narratives: Refusals of Closure in Two Eighteenth-Century Epistolary Novels," in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 21:1 (1987): 1-20.

[58] Ignace Hugary de Lamarche-Courmont wrote *Lettres d'Aza, ou d'un Péruvien* (1749), in which Aza becomes Zilia's husband and returns to Peru with her. One 1797 edition of *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* included an add-on ending in which Zilia marries Déterville, who helps her see the need to conform to society's expectations. This Zilia declares herself "now in her husband's home" and assimilates her house by redecorating it in the French style. Julia

Despite these authors' misgivings, however, the novel was a smash hit on its second printing in 1752, when the rise of the sentimental mode in art and literature was also helping to popularize ingénues.[59] Although de Graffigny's novel does not definitively belong to the sentimental mode, it does anticipate some of that mode's key aspects. Most obviously, artists and authors of sentimental texts devote themselves to uncovering the innermost feelings of human beings, much as de Graffigny uncovers Zilia's deepest emotions for her novel's readers. Artists and authors of sentimental works also favor characters who, like Zilia, elicit sympathy from their audiences through suffering. Yet the sentimental mode also specifically focuses on the body to a greater extent than de Graffigny's novel: the people represented in sentimental novels, paintings, and—in the theater—the *drame bourgeois* tend to express themselves through tears, gestures, and poses that directly convey their emotions to their readers or spectators. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the ingénue's candor, vulnerability, and versatility as a character lent themselves well to this mode. It is perhaps for this reason that Denis Diderot, who was fascinated by the sentimental aesthetic, wrote extensively about ingénues in his fictional writings and art criticism, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Douthwaite, *Exotic Women: Literary Heroines and Cultural Strategies in Ancien Régime France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 126.

[59] On the rise of sentimentalism and its cultural significance in France, see for example David Denby, *Sentimental Narrative and the Social Order in France 1760-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Emma Barker, *Greuze and the Painting of Sentiment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 8-18.

CHAPTER 3: Reading and Writing the Body: Ingénues as Aesthetic Objects in Diderot's *Salons* and *La Religieuse*

3.1 Ingénues and the Aesthetics of the Body

In the second half of the eighteenth century, no French author wrote about ingénues more prolifically than Denis Diderot. Over the course of his career, he produced several fictional and non-fictional texts in which he experimented with the character. Although these texts spanned a wide range of genres, most of Diderot's ingénues appear in one of two mediums: his art criticism—particularly his *Salon* writings of the 1760s—and his novel *La Religieuse* (1760/1780-1782), which features the ingénue Suzanne Simonin as its main character.[1] Notably, Diderot is also thought to be the author of the *Encyclopédie* article "Ingénuité" (1766): although the text is unsigned, its definition of the term's positive connotations closely aligns with the way that Diderot tended to depict ingénues in his (other) work. For our purposes, it is most noteworthy for the way in which it describes the experience of beholding ingénues—or more specifically, the experience of beholding their bodies. It begins by defining ingenuousness as the absence of artifice and guile, before going on to argue that ingénues naturally and involuntarily express their thoughts and feelings upon their physical features. Just as the ingénue's "soul" candidly expresses itself in her spoken language, it "paints" itself across her face and form in a way that is thoroughly pleasing to behold:

> INGÉNUITÉ, s. f. (*Gram.*): […] L'*ingénuité* est la qualité d'une ame innocente qui se montre telle qu'elle est, parce qu'il n'y a rien en elle qui l'oblige à se cacher. […] Que [le] commerce [des personnes *ingénues*] est agréable! Si elles ont parlé, on sent qu'elles

[1] Ingénues also featured in Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (1772; published in 1796). In this text, they are portrayed as Tahitian noble savages who are governed by nature and enjoy a life of sexual freedom.

devoient dire ce qu'elles ont dit. Leur ame vient se peindre sur leurs levres, dans leurs yeux, & dans leur expression.[2]

This portrait of the ingénue's body as naturally and candidly expressive touches on an important change that was taking place in the French art world in the mid-eighteenth century. This change, which sparked a decisive shift in the ways that bodies and emotions were depicted in art, had a powerful and lasting influence on Diderot's ideas about aesthetics. In the rococo aesthetic that had dominated the arts in the early century—and which authors like Marivaux had helped to popularize in literature—the body was treated as a locus of carnivalesque play with appearances. By displaying or mimicking the clothing and mannerisms that were associated with people of different classes and genders, characters who featured in rococo art and literature underscored the theatrical aspects of identity.[3] In the mid-eighteenth century, artists and authors began to direct their attention inward, towards an aesthetics of sentiment that celebrated the innermost feelings of human beings. Reacting against rococo-style artifice, which they came to perceive as a cause and symptom of France's (supposed) cultural decline, they favored characters who expressed emotions through heartfelt tears, impulsive gestures, and dramatic poses. Their object was to make striking impressions that produced profound, lasting effects in their readers or beholders. In turn, as Emma Barker explains, this was intended to serve a broader project of moral reform: by sympathizing with fictional characters—particularly when beholding their suffering bodies—one was thought to awaken to sympathy for others in real life. As Barker puts it:

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[2] *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert (8:744), accessed via the ARTFL Project, http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu. For a more detailed analysis of this article, see Chapter 1.

[3] On this topic, see for example Sarah R. Cohen, "Body as "Character" in Early Eighteenth-Century French Art and Performance," in *The Art Bulletin*, 78:3 (September 1996): 454-466; and Elena Russo, *Styles of Enlightenment: Taste, Politics, and Authorship in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 59-84.

> In calling upon the beholder to identify with the members of a family group or to take pity on a suffering individual and to testify to his or her own humanity in doing so (typically by shedding tears), the [sentimental] tableau holds out the possibility that the entire human species can be united in virtue. It is directed towards the achievement of what Jean Starobinski terms 'transparency': a perfect communion of innocent hearts.[4]

Diderot was fascinated by this new aesthetics of sentiment, particularly with regard to how it revolutionized the ways in which the body was depicted in the arts. As Elena Russo explains, he believed that "good" art was always true to nature; that is, that it reflected the essential "truth" of whatever it aimed to represent. In Russo's words: "Whether nature is intended as an idea or as a phenomenon, for Diderot […] [good] art is the product of an intuitive knowledge that is akin to the scientific understanding of nature's laws. The workings of the imagination thus coincide with nature's hidden structure" (*Styles* 105). Given that the rococo aesthetic was famous for its ornateness, ostentatiousness, and celebration of artifice, Diderot also felt that French aesthetics were in dire need of reform: to his mind, the rococo was bad for the nation because it represented the height of bad taste and was antithetical to the simpler aesthetics of the previous century (*Styles* 105-112). In his eyes, therefore, the ingénue's natural and candid manner of expression was the perfect subject for the new aesthetic: when it came to how the essential "truth" of suffering bodies should be depicted in art, who could be more interesting and compelling to behold an innocent, naïve young girl?[5] Consequently, as Russo puts it, Diderot saw ingénues as "the salvation of

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[4] Emma Barker, *Greuze and the Painting of Sentiment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11. Barker is referring to Jean Starobinski's *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, tr. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 11-21, 92-97. As Barker and Amy S. Wyngaard have argued, artists and authors of sentimentalism sought to emotionally unite people on the basis of a common human nature; however, they stopped short of advocating for social and political egalitarianism. See Barker, *Painting of Sentiment*, 11-12; and Wyngaard, *From Savage to Citizen: The Invention of the Peasant in the French Enlightenment* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010), 13-34, 71-110.

[5] Diderot also regarded the *père de famille* as an ideal subject for art, particularly in the theater and in painting: he found the image of a grizzled old patriarch to be deeply moving, particularly when that patriarch made sacrifices to

modern art and of the nation: if only art were able to discard its stylistic theatricality in order to recover an untouched, unselfconscious grace; if only the nation were able to reform its lewd and mediocre taste in order to restore the *grand goût* [of the previous century]" (*Styles* 111).[6]

It is also important to note, however, that when it came to artistic representations of ingénues in paintings and in his own novel *La Religieuse*, Diderot tended not to concern himself with the project of moral reform that was often associated with sentimentalism: that is, for him, beholding ingénues in textual or visual mediums was not usually about seeking what Emma Barker calls the "perfect communion of innocent hearts" that the movement's authors and artists often sought to achieve through their work (*Painting of Sentiment* 11).[7] Instead, he was more interested in using ingénues to explore his ideas about art's power to excite strong emotions and stir the imagination of its readers and beholders, whether the work in question produced a morally edifying effect or not. In this vein, he was also intrigued by the erotic appeal that ingénues could hold for male readers and beholders in particular—provided that they were the "right kind" of readers and beholders.

In this chapter, I will examine three texts in which Diderot explores the aesthetic appeal that ingénues hold for him and for (male) readers or beholders of art in general. The first two texts are reviews of paintings that feature in Diderot's *Salon de 1761* and *Salon de 1765*, respectively: first, his review of Jean-Baptiste Greuze's 1761 painting, *Un mariage, et l'instant où le père de*

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fulfill his paternal duties or was forced into conflict with his adult children. He discusses this topic in detail in *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel* (1757) and *De la poésie dramatique* (1758). See Diderot, *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel, De la poésie dramatique, Paradoxe sur le comédien*, ed. Jean Goldzink (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 2005).

[6] In her analysis of Diderot's aesthetic theory, Russo also argues that he favored the ingénue because she was the antithesis of the coquette, a figure whom Diderot considered to be emblematic of the overly theatrical and ornate rococo aesthetic. Russo, *Styles*, 105-112. For an overview of Diderot's ideas about how bodies should be represented in the theater specifically, see Joseph R. Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985), 116-159.

[7] Conversely, Diderot *does* engage in the sentimentalist project of moral reform in his plays and writings on theater: his Rosalie character, an ingénue who features in his dramatic play *Le Fils naturel* (1757), is integral to the play's exploration of familial relationships and obligations.

l'Accordée délivre la dot à son gendre (which I will call *Village Bride*) (Figure 1); and second, his critique of Greuze's 1765 painting, *Une jeune fille qui pleure son oiseau mort* (which I will call *Weeping Girl*) (Figure 2).[8] In my analysis of Diderot's review of *Village Bride*, I will also explore how his ideas compare to those of his friend Friedrich Melchior, baron von Grimm, who wrote a critique of the same painting. Finally, I will devote the last section of this chapter to an analysis of Diderot's novel *La Religieuse* (1760/1780-1782), in which the ingénue Suzanne Simonin plays the role of narrator. For each of these texts, I will focus on the insights they can offer into Diderot's ideas about what constitutes good art, what sorts of qualities art critics and readers of novels should possess, and what makes ingénues a particularly good choice of subject matter for authors and artists to explore.

3.2 Competing Perspectives: Diderot, Grimm, and Jean-Baptiste Greuze's *Village Bride*

When Diderot wrote his review of Greuze's *Village Bride* for his *Salon de 1761*, most of his intended readers were unlikely to ever see the painting themselves. He originally composed his *Salons* as a series of letters to his friend, Friedrich Melchior, baron von Grimm, who commissioned them as a regular contribution to his newsletter, the *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique* (1748-1793). Grimm circulated the newsletter to only a handful of elite men and women, all of whom lived outside France and relied on it for news of French cultural affairs.[9] Because it was hand-copied, it allowed Grimm to avoid censorship and to give his readers the sense of sharing in his private correspondence with his contributors. By writing the *Salon* letters for the

[8] An earlier, condensed version of section 2 of this chapter appeared as an article in *Arts et savoirs* (2019) under the title "Irresistible Ingénues: Reading and Writing the Greuze Girl's Body in Diderot's *Salon de 1765*."

[9] See the list of subscribers (many of whom were royal) in Grimm, ed. *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique, et critique,* ed. Ulla Kölving et al (Ferney-Voltaire: Centre international d'étude du XVIIIe siècle, 2006), vol. 1, xxxii-xxxiv. The editors provide this information: Frederick of Prussia began his subscription to Grimm's newsletter in May 1763 (he paid nothing), and Catherine the Great started hers in January 1764 (she paid 1500 pounds until her death in 1796).

Correspondance, Diderot therefore assumed a dual role of art critic and proxy beholder: his reviews were at once a critical evaluation of the artists' exhibits and an account of his personal feelings on viewing them, so that his absent readers might imagine the experience for themselves.[10] In his critique of Greuze's *Village Bride* (1761), this dual role is particularly evident when he comments on the ingenuous young Bride depicted on the canvas: he at once describes the technical details of her composition and expresses his personal attraction to her, effectively setting her apart from the painting's other figures as he describes them in his review. Yet his interpretation of the attraction that the Bride holds for her (male) beholders is subtly undermined by Grimm, who, as we shall see, proposes a rather different interpretation of the effect she has (or should have) on the men who gaze upon her.

Although the painting's title is often abridged to *L'Accordée de village* in French (and to *Village Bride* in English), this produces a somewhat misleading effect because the Bride is actually not the painting's most prominent figure. The work's full title in French is in fact *Un mariage, et l'instant où le père de l'Accordée délivre la dot à son gendre*, which presents a much more accurate description of its subject matter. As the title indicates, the canvas depicts a peasant family that has gathered to watch its patriarch finalize his daughter's marriage contract. In this particular moment, the father has just handed a dowry to his new son-in-law while his daughter, the ingenuous "Accordée" mentioned in the title, waits meekly at the young man's side. The painting's large size and shallow backdrop draw the beholder into an intimate space in which, as Emma Barker observes, "the figures stand out with a forceful clarity" (*Painting of Sentiment* 49). Moreover, as

[10] Stéphane Lojkine traces the history of Diderot's contributions to the *Correspondance littéraire* and his partnership with Grimm in *L'œil révolté: les* Salons *de Diderot* (ACTES SUD, Éditions Jacqueline Chambon, 2007), 60-68 and 89. For a broad overview of Diderot's career as an art critic, see Else Marie Bukdahl, *Diderot, critique d'art*, ed. Jean-Paul Faucher (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde et Bagger, Copenhagen, 1980). On the emergence of art criticism as a genre in the eighteenth century and Diderot's role in its development, see Richard Wrigley, *The Origins of French Art Criticism: from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 232-267.

Barker further explains, the characters' gestures to each other express their close bonds of affection, but Greuze also positioned each person within the painting to make his or her proper place in the household "instantly legible": the men are handling the business of the dowry while the Bride and the other women look on from a respectful distance (*Painting of Sentiment* 49). These details, in Barker's words, come together to present a "utopian vision of an enlightened social order" that "foster[s] identification and desire on the part of the viewer" (46). That is, Greuze invites the painting's beholder to empathize with this family's tender sadness on the day of the Bride's marriage and impending departure from the household, thereby encouraging the beholder to feel compelled to model his or her own family according to the values of love and duty exemplified in the tableau.

Diderot's comments on the Bride appear in the middle of his review of the painting and produce a sudden shift in its style and content. Up until this point, he does not direct his critical commentary to readers of a particular sex, which makes sense: the *Correspondance littéraire*'s readership was comprised of both men and women, united by their elite social status and cultured tastes.[11] As is common in Diderot's *Salons*, he begins the review by addressing Grimm himself in a conversational tone and then shifts to a more formal style as he commences describing the work in question.[12] Yet in his review of *Village Bride*, he provides an unusually detailed description of the painting and initially favors impersonal pronouns when describing its effects on the beholder: "Le sujet est pathétique, et l'on se sent gagner d'une émotion douce en le regardant."[13] He uses similarly impersonal language to critique several of the painting's individual characters. As he

[11] Grimm never disclosed his full list of subscribers but is known to have had about fifteen in 1759, all of noble birth and living outside France. On this topic, see Else Marie Bukdahl, *Diderot, critique d'art*, 11-12.
[12] Diderot did not employ a consistent methodology for approaching his *Salon* critiques, so their style often varied considerably. He usually composed them as personal messages to Grimm—to be edited as desired—and frequently addressed Grimm himself in the texts as "mon ami." See Lojkine, *L'œil révolté*, 62-68.
[13] Denis Diderot, *Salon de 1761* in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Jean Varloot (Paris: Hermann, éditeurs des sciences et des arts, vol. XIII, 1980), 266.

admiringly sketches their features and expressions, he limits most of his comments to observations about the general impressions they make: the father speaks with "une effusion de cœur qui enchante" and has "un air de bonhomie qui plaît," while the son-in-law "est d'une figure tout à fait agréable," and so forth (*Village Bride* 268-269). Although he expresses enthusiasm for the painting, his tone at this point assures his readers of his critical objectivity and emphasizes the tableau's universally pleasing qualities. Consequently, all of his readers, whether male or female, are encouraged to expect that their reactions to the painting would be exactly the same if they were present to behold it themselves.

When Diderot turns his attention to the Bride, however, he steadily transitions to a more subjectively expressive style. As he describes the fine details of the Bride's clothing, its lifelike quality prompts him to exclaim at Greuze's artistic skill: "Le peintre a donné à la fiancée une figure charmante, décente et réservée. Elle est vêtue à merveille. […] Il y a un peu de luxe dans sa garniture, mais c'est un jour de fiançailles. Il faut voir comme les plis de tous les vêtements de cette figure et des autres sont vrais!" (*Village Bride* 269) His appreciative interest in the girl's betrothal attire—clothing which signals her cultural transition from childhood into womanhood—soon begins to highlight his own awareness of her nascent sexuality. That is, Diderot quickly transitions from admiring the Bride's clothing to imagining the youthful body underneath it and indulges his attraction to her by proposing a "wager" to Grimm about the girl's natural contours:

> Cette fille charmante n'est point droite, mais il y a une légère et molle inflexion dans toute sa figure et dans tous ses membres, qui la remplit de grâce et de vérité. Elle est jolie vraiment, et très jolie. Une gorge faite au tour qu'on ne voit point du tout. Mais je gage qu'il n'y a rien là qui la relève, et que cela se soutient tout seul.
>
> (*Village Bride* 269)

Diderot's use of the term "grâce" to describe the girl's seductive allure has an important aesthetic connotation: Watelet had recently defined *grâce* in a text called *L'art de peindre* (1760) as "[l']accord des mouvements simples de l'âme avec ceux du corps" that one commonly observes in children and in artless youths.[14] Although anyone of good taste could presumably appreciate the naturalness and simplicity of *grâce*, Watelet's contention that it is most seductive when found in young women clearly favors a male perspective:

> Le sexe, plus souple dans ses ressorts, plus sensible dans ses affections, dans lequel le désir de plaire est un sentiment en quelque façon indépendant de lui, parce qu'il est nécessaire au système de la Nature; ce sexe, […] lorsqu'il échappe à l'artifice et à l'affectation, [offre] les grâces dans l'aspect le plus séduisant.
>
> (*L'Art de peindre* 112)

As Emma Barker has observed, Diderot was quite familiar with *L'Art de peindre*, given that he had recently written a review of it himself. In fact, although his review of the text was largely negative, Barker notes that he reserved high praise for "the section on the 'innocent and naïve young girl'" in which Watelet presents his thoughts on *grâce* ("Greuze Girl" 98). It is therefore possible that Diderot had Watelet's theories in mind when he used the term "grâce" to describe the Bride in Greuze's painting. In any case, in the passage cited above, he uses the term to at once praise Greuze's talent for painting true to nature and to identify the Bride's innocent and artless manner—that is, her ingenuousness—as the source of his pleasure in looking at her. As he describes it, her body's transparent expression of her natural impulses creates an unaffected,

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[14] Claude-Henri Watelet, *L'art de peindre, poème avec des réflexions sur les différentes parties de la peinture*, éd. d'Amsterdam (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1969), 114. Elsewhere in the text, Watelet repeats his claim that "[L]'enfance et la jeunesse sont l'âge des grâces" (112). Emma Barker explains that Watelet was a supporter of Greuze "in the early years of his career [and that] the artist's portrait of him was […] exhibited in 1765." See Barker, "Reading the Greuze Girl: the Daughter's Seduction," in *Representations* 117, The Regents of the University of California (February 2012): 86-119, at 94.

vulnerable sensuality which seduces his masculine sensibilities, as we can discern from his suggestive wager about her anatomy: “Une gorge faite au tour qu’on ne voit point du tout. Mais je gage qu’il n’y a rien là qui la relève, et que cela se soutient tout seul.” Moreover, his use of the first person “je” here, in place of the impersonal “on” with which he had begun his critical commentary, breaks with his previously objective tone and replaces it with the banter of written correspondence between sophisticated elites. For this brief moment, his text reads like a man-to-man intimation to Grimm—and, by proxy, to the (male) subscribers to Grimm’s newsletter—in which knowledgeable appreciation of good art is bound up with a visceral appreciation of natural feminine beauty. Thus, while Diderot’s praise for the painting suggests that Greuze’s peasant family should be admired as a group, he also implies that the Bride presents the beholder with the voyeuristic spectacle of a girl on the cusp of sexual awakening, thereby appealing to a specifically masculine point of view.

Almost immediately after suggesting this idea, however, Diderot changes his tone again: after expressing his sexual attraction to the Bride, he follows up by assuring his readers of her modesty and propriety. In his subsequent comments about her, he contextualizes her burgeoning sexuality by stressing the fact that her marriage has localized and contained it to a wholesome domestic space. Making no further comment on his own erotic attraction to her, he argues that Greuze’s representation of the gestures she is making towards her husband and her mother have allowed the artist to strike a perfect balance between depicting the Bride’s natural desires and moral decency:

> Plus à son fiancé, et elle n’eût pas été assez décente; plus à sa mère ou à son père, et elle eût été fausse. Elle a le bras à demi passé sous celui de son futur époux, et le bout de ses

> doigts tombe et appuie doucement sur sa main; c'est la seule marque de tendresse qu'elle lui donne, et peut-être sans le savoir elle-même. C'est une idée délicate du peintre.
>
> (*Village Bride* 269-270)

Diderot's comments here also highlight an important detail of the composition's representation of eighteenth-century social mores and institutions: that is, in addition to serving as a testament to the girl's modesty, Greuze's choice to place her between her mother and husband reminds the beholder that, as a daughter and a wife, she is a dependent in need of guidance and protection. In this context, Diderot's suggestion that she may be reaching for her husband's hand "sans le savoir" emphasizes her innocence, and it also confirms that her parents have guided her natural desires to their proper course (that is, marriage). As Diderot explains to his readers, the painting's overall message is that the marriage contract has served to found the next generation of this household by channeling the bride's sexuality towards motherhood—a destiny that Greuze clearly foreshadows by depicting a mother hen and chicks at her feet. Thus, although Diderot permits himself to indulge in lustful contemplation of the Bride's body when composing his review of this painting—and, in doing so, to tantalize the imagination of his (male) reader(s)—he expresses no desire to transgress the moral system that binds this family together. His moment of fancy is, first and foremost, an illustration of the painting's absorbing aesthetic: although there would be no socially acceptable place for him within the scene itself, his response to the girl confirms its power to seduce him into feeling, in a truly physical sense, as though she is a living person.[15]

[15] Some of the painting's other characters also come to life in Diderot's critique: in particular, he imagines a few lines of what the father must be saying and thinking, given that the father is actually the painting's central figure. However, the Bride is the only character who draws Diderot into expressing a personal response to the image.

In Grimm's follow-up remarks to Diderot's critique, he also portrays the Bride as taking on a life of her own, but he imagines a very different relationship between the Bride as beheld object and himself as her beholder. Rather than focusing first and foremost on her sexual appeal, as Diderot does, Grimm imagines the inner turmoil she must be feeling upon awakening to love (that is, to the strange new emotions that her husband is surely stirring within her). Grimm also compares the Bride to the heroine of an English sentimental novel: namely, the ingenuous titular character of *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740) by Samuel Richardson.

Grimm begins his review with a statement that the Bride's innocent manner must endear her to her father, immediately suggesting that his own feelings toward her are paternal: "Ce bon père a raison. Quel père ne serait vain d'une telle fille?" Yet as Grimm goes on to speculate about the Bride's feelings over her upcoming marriage, he also takes evident pleasure in uncovering what he imagines are her intimate desires and fears for his readers:

> [C]'est en vérité une figure sublime dans son genre; c'est peu pour elle d'être la plus jolie créature du monde; ses grâces innocentes ne sont pas ce qu'il y a de plus séduisant en elle; mais comment vous peindre tout ce qui se passe dans son âme, au moment de cette révolution si désirable et si redoutée qui va se faire dans toute sa vie? On voit un doux affaissement répandu sur tout son corps; il n'y a qu'un homme de génie qui ait pu trouver cette attitude si délicate et si vraie. La tendresse pour son fiancé, le regret de quitter la maison paternelle, les mouvements de l'amour combattus par la modestie et par la pudeur dans une fille bien née; mille sentiments confus de tendresse, de volupté, de crainte, qui

> s'élèvent dans une âme innocente, au moment de ce changement d'état, vous lisez tout cela dans le visage et dans l'attitude de cette charmante créature.[16]

In some respects, the enjoyment that Grimm is clearly finding in gazing upon the Bride echoes the voyeuristic pleasure that Diderot expressed in his comments about the girl. Grimm's intimate observation of her vulnerability, her burgeoning desire, and the "doux affaissement répandu sur tout son corps" certainly carries an erotic overtone. However, whereas Diderot's interest in the Bride is unambiguously sexual at the outset (given that it centers upon the artlessness of the girl's physical graces), Grimm stops short of openly coveting her body. Even as he makes a spectacle of unveiling her intimate feelings to his readers, he draws a careful distinction between the physical beauty of her "grâces innocentes," which he considers only in passing, and the "mille sentiments confus […] [d']une âme innocente," which he deems far more "séduisant[s]" and "sublime[s]."[17] Moreover, his use of the term "affaissement" to describe her posture could imply a wish to console her as well as an erotic attraction: derived from *affaisser,* which the French Academy defined as "faire ployer, faire courber sous le faix," the term serves as a figurative expression for languishing under a burden.[18] Finally, unlike Diderot, Grimm describes the pleasing effects of beholding the Bride in inclusive terms: his conversational "vous" implies that all of his readers—whether male or female—would understand the girl's emotions in the same way. Thus, although Grimm's interpretation of the Bride's alluring qualities contains an erotic subtext, he stresses that the sympathetic interest one takes in her inner life offers a much deeper level of gratification. In his eyes, the Bride's ingenuous demeanor is seductive not because it nakedly

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[16] Friedrich Melchior, baron von Grimm, ed. *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique*, ed. Ulla Kölving, Else Marie Bukdahl, Mélinda Caron (Ferney-Voltaire: Centre international d'étude du XVIII[e] siècle, 2013), vol. 8, 374.

[17] On the sublime as an aesthetic concept, see Elena Russo, *Styles*, especially 214-220; and Baldine Saint Girons, *Le Sublime de l'Antiquité à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions Desjonquères, 2005).

[18] Dictionnaire de l'Académie française, 4[e] édition, (1762), accessed via The ARTFL Project, http://artflsrv02.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/dicos/pubdico1look.pl?strippedhw=affaisser.

reflects her sensuality, but because the purity and naturalness of her character strike an emotional chord in the beholder.

As Grimm turns his attention to the Bride's new husband (or to her "fiancé," as Grimm calls him), his effort to draw a distinction between his own physical and sympathetic attraction to the girl becomes even more significant. Although he does not openly express a desire to "possess" the girl himself, he shows himself to be acutely aware of the tempting allure she holds for men who *would* be willing to take advantage of her innocence. In that vein, Grimm's comments about her husband raise a hint of doubt about the young man's worthiness of her; in fact, Grimm goes so far as to wish that Greuze had chosen to depict the young man's merits with more clarity. After casting these shades of doubt upon the husband, Grimm provides a long description of the type of man he thinks the girl deserves: among other things, he argues that this man must have an honest, noble soul and be profoundly appreciative of his wife. In conjunction with this, Grimm refers to the Bride as "a Pamela" who possesses the endearing qualities of Richardson's heroine:

> La seule chose que j'aurais désiré peut-être, c'est que [Greuze] eût donné un peu plus de gentillesse au fiancé […] de cette gentillesse naïve, vraie et touchante […]. Son fiancé est un beau garçon; c'est sûrement encore, un honnête garçon; avec cela on ne voit pas qu'il soit digne d'une telle épouse. Mais qui en effet, pourrait être digne d'elle? Celui seul qui avec tous les avantages de la fortune, avec une âme simple, élevée et honnête, pourrait mettre toute sa gloire, et tout son bonheur à posséder, à respecter, à adorer la plus aimable créature de l'univers. Greuze a fait, sans s'en douter, une Paméla. C'est son portrait, trait pour trait.
>
> (*Correspondance littéraire* 1761, 374)

If we take a closer look at Richardson's novel *Pamela* (1740), the criteria that Grimm lays out for a worthy suitor to Greuze's Village Bride becomes particularly striking. The novel recounts the story of Pamela Andrews, an ingenuous, virtuous, fifteen-year-old maidservant who eventually marries her employer, the rakish young squire Mr. B. Although Mr. B. comes to cherish Pamela's virtue by the end of the novel's first half, he only does so *after* he reads her written account of the torment she has suffered at his own hands. At the novel's outset, she is employed as a servant in his household and finds herself at his mercy when his mother dies. Overcome with desire for Pamela, he makes several violent attempts to seduce and rape her before eventually imprisoning her at his country estate. As she struggles to resist him, her only solace comes from writing a series of unsent letters to her parents: in hopes that the story of her martyrdom will reach them one day, she presents a graphic account of the mental anguish, nervous collapse, and physical abuse she endures as Mr. B.'s prisoner.[19] Her choice to privately record her suffering in writing proves to be her salvation: whereas her verbal pleas with Mr. B. have no lasting effect on him (given that he claims to doubt her sincerity), he is finally moved to sympathy for her upon stealing and reading her letters. Pamela subsequently finds her virtue "rewarded" when her touching narrative of suffering for it prompts Mr. B. to redeem himself: the first half of the novel ends with his decision to renounce his rakish ways and to elevate Pamela's social status by marrying her.[20]

Grimm's use of *Pamela* as an interpretive framework for Greuze's *Village Bride* therefore infuses his critique with a rich combination of themes. For one, his reference to Richardson's heroine connects the bride to a narrative in which feminine innocence and virtue hold redemptive

[19] At several points, Pamela informs Mr. B. that she is willing to die to preserve her virtue if need be, a fact which proves to be true when she finds herself strongly tempted to save her innocence by drowning herself. Samuel Richardson, *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded*, Project Gutenberg, eBook #6124, April 23rd, 2009. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/6124/6124-h/6124-h.htm

[20] To modern eyes, the authenticity of Mr. B.'s reform seems questionable, given that most of his apologies deflect blame onto his accomplices. However, Pamela professes happiness at each of his improvements and closes her story in triumph when her virtue earns the respect of the local gentry.

power for men. There are, of course, some crucial differences between Richardson's novel and Greuze's tableau: whereas Pamela is the socially isolated victim of a rakish squire and narrates her suffering in her own voice, Greuze's Village Bride is surrounded by the protective presence of her family and does not appear threatened in any way. Despite these key differences, however, Mr. B.'s transformation upon reading Pamela's letters models a way of reading that resonates with Grimm's own comments on the Bride. As Mr. B. explains to Pamela upon their marriage, he has learned to value her virtue more highly than her physical beauty, thanks to the fact that reading her candid and intimate account of her suffering has taught him to truly appreciate it: "[…] [A]fter having been long tossed by the boisterous winds of a more culpable passion, I have now conquered it, and am not so much the victim of your beauty, all charming as you are, as of your virtue […]."[21]

In the same vein, although Grimm himself is no Mr. B., his claim that he prefers to contemplate the Bride's "innocent soul" rather than her physical charms is in keeping with Richardson's moral lesson about the value of virtue in *Pamela*. That is, Grimm's interpretation of Greuze's painting demonstrates what he believes men "should" feel when beholding it: although physical attraction to the Bride is acceptable, male beholders should leave it by the wayside as they learn to morally appreciate the value of her modesty and purity. In this respect, Grimm's review of the painting also stands as a counterexample to the overtly covetous gaze that Diderot initially directs at the Bride. Ultimately, therefore, Grimm reads Greuze's wholesome family scene as a seductive call to virtue in the model of *Pamela*, in which virtue is "rewarded" and marriage restores unity and happiness. In a similar vein, Emma Barker interprets Greuze's *Village Bride* as a triumph

[21] Text accessed via Project Gutenberg, eBook #6124, 2009. Most of Richardson's contemporaries seem to have regarded Pamela as a touching and virtuous heroine, just as Grimm portrays her in his review of *Village Bride*, but not everyone perceived her this way. Some of Richardson's compatriots, like Henry Fielding, were quick to point out the novel's rather licentious sexual content and felt that Pamela—a lowborn girl—must surely have tricked Mr. B. into marriage. Fielding eventually produced a satirical novel, *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* (1741), in which the sly and lascivious "Shamela" conducts a scheme to entrap her master, the witless Squire Booby, into marriage.

of didactic art which borrows its moral objectives from sentimental fiction. She contends that, for men specifically, the Bride engenders a "seduction into virtue," just as literary heroines like Pamela or Rousseau's Julie "seduce" their readers:

> Like Rousseau, Greuze endows didactic art with a new persuasive force by focusing (male) desires on a lovely young woman whose physical attractions and her own desires are balanced by her inner moral sense, thereby staging a seduction into virtue; in this respect, the fiancé in the center of the composition serves as a proxy for the spectator. […] The underlying message […] is that happiness should be sought through submission to the common good.
>
> (*Painting of Sentiment* 53)[22]

At the same time, Grimm's choice to identify Greuze's Village Bride with Pamela, who spends much of her story being victimized by an unscrupulous rake, suggests that Greuze's painting has practical implications for the parents of young women that go beyond its general call to virtue. By connecting Pamela, a literary figure, to the Bride, who (although fictional) is depicted as a member of a thoroughly ordinary household, Grimm is making an important connection between fiction and the concerns of everyday life. More precisely, he is using the long-suffering and innocent Pamela to underscore the very real dangers that men pose to girls like the Bride: although Pamela manages to convert Mr. B. to virtue on her own, her near-fatal mistreatment at his hands should serve as a warning against leaving one's daughters unprotected.[23] Thus, Grimm's choice to punctuate his review of Greuze's painting with rhetorical queries, like "Quel père ne

[22] Nicholas Paige makes a similar argument about the aesthetic pleasure of "renunciation" in his article "Rousseau's Readers Revisited: The Aesthetics of La Nouvelle Héloïse," in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42:1 (2008): 131-54.
[23] Richardson himself apparently came to suspect that stories of young women who convert rakes to virtue could be dangerous rather than edifying. In the Preface to *Clarissa* (1748) (which he published eight years after *Pamela*), he claimed that one of his objectives in writing the novel was "to warn children against […] that dangerous but too-commonly-received notion, that a reformed rake makes the best husband […]." Cited in Richardson, *Clarissa, Volume 1 (of 9)*, Project Gutenberg, eBook #9296, August 1st 2009.

serait vain d'une telle fille?" and "Mais qui en effet, pourrait être digne [de cette fille]?" (*Correspondance littéraire* 1761, 374), suggests that viewers of the painting should ask themselves those questions. Whereas young men ought to question their worthiness of girls who are models of innocence and virtue, parents—and fathers especially—must fulfill their duty to protect their daughters from unsuitable men. Ultimately, therefore, it is the painting's efficacy as a tool of instruction, coupled with its pleasing subject matter and absorbing aesthetic, which prompts Grimm to praise it as "le plus agréable et le plus intéressant de tout le Salon" (*Correspondance littéraire* 1761, 369).

Although it is impossible to know what Diderot thought of Grimm's critique of Greuze's *Village Bride*, he continued to explore his own interest in ingénues in the *Salon* writings he produced for the *Correspondance littéraire* over the course of the 1760s. One of his most interesting reviews from this period concerns another of Greuze's paintings: *Une jeune fille qui pleure son oiseau mort* (colloquially known as *Weeping Girl*), which featured in the Salon of 1765. As its full title suggests, the painting is another example of Greuze's own fascination with ingénues (or "Greuze girls"): it depicts a young woman weeping over her dead pet bird. However, although this girl's physical features closely resemble those of Greuze's Village Bride, the painting is much different from that earlier tableau: the Weeping Girl is not surrounded by family members, as the Bride is, but is instead seated alone.[24] As Diderot makes clear in his review, her solitude sets up a much different relationship between herself and her beholder: given that no other people are present on the canvas, the beholder is given the sense of observing this girl in a profoundly intimate setting. Moreover, because the Weeping Girl is depicted alone—that is, outside of a clearly defined social milieu—the painting does not set up explicit social barriers between the Girl and her

[24] *Weeping Girl* is therefore part of Greuze's long-running series of paintings in which young girls appear alone on canvas. Other examples from his corpus include *Le Miroir cassé* (1763) and *La Cruche cassée* (1777).

beholder. In his review, Diderot explores this relationship between spectator and spectacle in a strikingly innovative way: he imagines a scenario in which he enters the painting himself and—rather like *Pamela's* Mr. B.—pressures the Weeping Girl to divulge her secrets to him. Yet rather than seeking a written account of her story (as Mr. B. does with Pamela), Diderot imagines "reading" the details of her past by interpreting her body's ingenuous signs of distress. Moreover, although he claims to feel a mix of sympathy and erotic attraction to the girl (as was the case with Greuze's Village Bride), he does not concern himself with this painting's moral or social implications. Instead, he uses it to explore the aesthetic connotations of gazing upon a suffering female body, to play with the seductive power of the fictional world, and to experiment with his own ideas about what an art critic should be. Moreover, as he draws Grimm into his fantasy of interacting with the girl on canvas, he pushes his friend to ask himself if his interest in Greuze's ingénues is really as platonic as Grimm might have us believe.

3.3 Breaking and Entering: A Thrilling Conversation with Greuze's *Weeping Girl*

By the time that Diderot began work on his reviews of the 1765 Salon's exhibits, his methodology, philosophy, and versatility as an art critic had evolved considerably in comparison with his earlier work. One of the most illustrative examples of this is his critique of Jean-Baptiste Greuze's *Weeping Girl*, a small painting that Diderot revisited several times during his visits to the Salon. His fascination with the image is clearly expressed in his review, in which he endeavors to convey its absorbing effect upon him. However, rather than simply describing this effect to his readers, he strives to *replicate* it for them by using a technique that Bernadette Fort has referred to as "critical ekphrasis": more precisely, Diderot reimagines the image on canvas as a dramatic scene in which he is taking part, and, in so doing, creates a "reconstruction and interpretation of the

painter's representational strategies, goals, and effects."[25] In other words, just as Diderot found himself drawn into Greuze's painting, he contrives to lure Grimm and his other readers into the fantasy that he felt compelled to construct around it.

To those who were able to visit the 1765 Salon in person, *Weeping Girl* must have made a striking visual impression. It depicts a girl somewhere in early adolescence, seated alone with head in hand and crying over her dead canary. Her bowed head, her hand across her brow, and her downcast eyes partially obscure her face, shifting much of the burden of expression to her body and to the painting's composition. The pale tones in the girl's skin and hair contrast with a dark, empty background, creating a sense of loneliness and vulnerability. White cloth around her shoulders, pink flowers at her breast, and her careless posture also lend her an air of naturalness and innocence. Moreover, the painting's oval frame constricts her world into the space around the bird's cage, further emphasizing her preoccupation with her grief. The overall effect upon the viewer, as Emma Barker argues, is a conflicting sense of closeness to and remoteness from the girl: the fine details of her body make her appear "vividly palpable," as though one could reach out and touch her, yet "the immediacy of her presence is counteracted by [her] emotional withdrawal…" ("Greuze Girl" 89, 94). The painting's frame therefore serves the additional purpose of underscoring the beholder's voyeurism: its oval shape evokes the act of looking through a spyhole at this girl's private moment of despair. Diderot expresses awareness of this distance—and of his desire to overcome it—in the opening paragraph of his review. Specifically, he explains that the beholder is tempted to reach into the painting to kiss the girl's hand but claims that such

[25] Bernadette Fort, "Ekphrasis as Art Criticism: Diderot and Fragonard's "Coresus and Callirhoe," in "Icons, Texts, Iconotexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality," ed. Peter Wagner, *European Cultures: Studies in Literature and the Arts* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 62.

an action strikes him as transgressive: "On s'approcherait de cette main pour la baiser, si on ne respectait cette enfant et sa douleur."[26]

Diderot's attraction to the girl's candid display of suffering and his professed wish to interact with her as though she were real are rooted in his conception of *naïveté* and its related concepts *ingénuité* and *grâce*. Of the three qualities, *naïveté* is the most fundamental to the theories of aesthetics that he explores with *Weeping Girl*. In fact, by the 1760s, he had come to perceive *naïveté* as a key element of "good" art (in visual *and* textual mediums) and of the "good" beholder's or reader's reaction to it. When he uses the term to describe works of art, the meaning that he imparts to it aligns with the 1762 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*'s definition of the term, which is—after "Ingénuité […] d'une personne qui n'use point de déguisement"—"[C]ette grâce et cette simplicité naturelle avec laquelle une chose est exprimée, ou représentée selon la vérité et la vraisemblance."[27] In this sense, *naïveté* characterizes art that is neither an ornate display of artifice, nor a flatly literal representation of its subject. Rather, it describes art that captures its subject's "true" essence in a way that transcends the artist's means of expression: in the eyes of the viewer or reader, the work *becomes* the object by skillfully evoking its deeper nature and bringing it to life. In so doing, it erases the line between reality and fiction altogether, leading the beholder or reader, in Elena Russo's words, "to repress the awareness that he is contemplating a work of art […] and to feel as if he were responding to the thing itself" (*Styles* 93).[28]

However, as Diderot underscores in his *Éloge de Richardson* (1762)—a text that he produced in memoriam of Samuel Richardson—an artist's or author's skill alone is not enough to

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[26] Denis Diderot, *Salon de 1765* in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Else Marie Bukdahl, Annette Lorenceau, and Gita May (Paris: Hermann, éditeurs des sciences et des arts, vol. XIV, 1984), 180.
[27] Text accessed via The ARTFL Project.
[28] On Diderot's ideas of "uncovering" nature through the creation and contemplation of art, see also Jacques Chouillet, *La Formation des idées esthétiques de Diderot (1745-1763)* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, Paris, 1973), 324-45.

produce this effect. It is also necessary to strike a particular chord within the artwork's reader or beholder, which means that not everyone possesses the necessary qualities to experience art as though it has come to life. The best type of reader (or beholder) of good art, as Diderot describes him in *Éloge*, is "[L]'homme tranquille et solitaire, qui a connu la vanité du bruit et des amusements du monde, et qui aime à habiter l'ombre d'une retraite, et à s'attendrir utilement dans le silence."[29] In short, as Anne Vila explains, it is an experienced male who naturally possesses the right kind of sensibility: that is, the type of mental, passional, and physical disposition that lets him enter the artist's vision of nature "to the fullest degree possible," and to "feel" its truth via the "subtle physiognomy of the passions."[30] In these ideal circumstances, good art permits its reader or beholder to experience an existential communion with nature which inspires a "childlike naïveté" in him (Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology* 155): that is, it has the effect of drawing the beholder or reader into taking part in the artwork by feeling—and behaving—as though its characters or scenery are real. In the *Éloge*, Diderot recalls losing himself in sympathy for Richardsonian heroines like Pamela and Clarissa in precisely this way. As he explains, he found himself calling out warnings to the women as though they could hear him: "Combien de fois ne me suis-je pas surpris, comme il est arrivé à des enfants qu'on avait menés aux spectacles pour la première fois, criant: *Ne le croyez pas, il vous trompe…si vous allez là, vous êtes perdu*" (*Éloge* 193).[31]

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[29] Denis Diderot, *Éloge de Richardson* in *Œuvres complètes*, éd. Jean Varloot, vol. XIII, 197.

[30] Anne C. Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1998, 156, 158. I discuss the topic of sensibility in further detail in Chapters 2 and 4.

[31] Of course, the concept of *naïveté* is also present in Diderot's review of *Village Bride*: on occasion, he describes the people represented on canvas as though they are real and even imagines some lines of dialogue for a few of them. However, given that he spends most of this review evaluating the painting's technical merits in strictly objective language, he does not explore *naïveté* to a significant degree in this instance. Conversely, his ideas about *naïveté* and his methods of exploring the concept are much more intricate and advanced in the *Salon de 1765*.

In short, Diderot's more fully developed idea of *naïveté*, insofar as it engenders intense emotions that cause the reader or beholder to lose sight of reality, closely parallels his theories on the sublime as they have been interpreted by Brian Elkner. Elkner argues that, although Diderot's definition of "the sublime" is not always consistent in every detail, the "idea of suspension" underlies every instance of Diderot's use of the term. In Elkner's words:

> In the sublime response to art, the imagination is carried beyond the normal operations of the understanding and the memory, which are suspended in favour of the freedom of the subjective reaction. The accessory ideas which flood into the mind as a result of this subjective freedom have the further effect of suspending the spectator in time and space, giving him a profound sense of his own littleness without exposing him to complete despair."[32]

Elkner's hypothesis finds further support when one examines Diderot's remarks on *naïveté* (or rather the "naïf") in his *Pensées détachées sur la peinture* (1776), in which he explicitly describes the quality as "tout voisin du sublime." In his words:

> Outre la simplicité que [le terme "naïf"] exprimait, il faut y joindre l'innocence, la vérité et l'originalité d'une enfance heureuse qui n'a point été contrainte […] le naïf sera essentiel à toute production des beaux-arts […] sera tout voisin du sublime […] se retrouvera dans tout ce qui sera très beau; dans une attitude, dans un mouvement, dans une draperie, dans une expression. C'est la chose, mais la chose pure, sans la moindre altération. L'art n'y est plus.[33]

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[32] Brian Elkner, "Diderot and the Sublime: Artist as Hero," *Studies in the Eighteenth Century II*, papers presented at the Second David Nichol Smith Memorial Seminar (Canberra 1970), ed. R.F. Brissenden, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1973, 160.

[33] Diderot, *Pensées détachées sur la peinture* in *Œuvres Esthétiques*, éd. Paul Vernière (Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1968), 824.

There is another layer of nuance to consider here, however. Although Diderot appears both awed and amused upon finding himself shouting warnings to fictional characters, the fact that he feels the need to cry out to Richardson's Pamela and Clarissa is a reminder that the reader's sympathy for these women is largely inspired by the acts of sexual violence that they are forced to endure. That is, Richardson highlights Pamela and Clarissa's moral innocence by graphically depicting the brutal assaults they suffer at the hands of unscrupulous rakes. This brings us back to the concepts of *ingénuité* and *grâce*, and to the crux of Diderot's interest in Greuze's *Weeping Girl*. As I have previously discussed, Diderot's conception of *grâce* closely aligns with Claude-Henri Watelet's description of the quality in *L'art de peindre* (1760), in which he examines the trope of the artless young girl—or "jeune fille," as he calls her. He defines *grâce* as the effect of "cet accord des mouvements simples de l'âme avec ceux du corps [que l'on trouve chez les jeunes]" and argues that it is most "seductive" in the female sex:

> Le sexe, plus souple dans ses ressorts, plus sensible dans ses affections, dans lequel le désir de plaire est un sentiment en quelque façon indépendant de lui, parce qu'il est nécessaire au système de la Nature; ce sexe […] lorsqu'il échappe à l'artifice et à l'affectation, [offre] les grâces dans l'aspect le plus séduisant.
>
> (*L'art de peindre* 112, 114)

Furthermore, and most importantly for our purposes, Watelet claims that "les plaintes et les larmes […] qu'occasionne la perte d'un objet chéri" (112)—such as the Weeping Girl's bird, or, on a far darker note, Clarissa's loss of her virginity to rape—offer a particularly moving show of *grâce*. When it comes to instances of suffering, therefore, the question of what type of attraction young girls should hold for men becomes especially relevant. In theory, the spectacle of a crying girl could simply be taken as the epitome of *naïf* art as Diderot describes it: that is, it could be read

as a pure display of innocence which appeals to the (male) beholder's moral sensibilities. Yet as Watelet's admiring comment on natural feminine sensuality reminds us, both he and Diderot see eroticism as a key element of the relationship between male beholders and suffering young women: indeed, as Emma Barker argues, Greuze's work often explicitly promotes the idea that artless femininity is interesting to male beholders because it signals sexual vulnerability as well as emotional vulnerability. With *Weeping Girl* (and with his other paintings of ingénues), Greuze therefore presents his male viewers with what Barker describes as a challenge: in her words, they must "negotiate the tension between the ease of access to the girl's body that [the painting] offers and the ethical prohibition against taking advantage of her youth, innocence, and distress" ("Greuze Girl" 97).

In light of Diderot's praise for Richardson's novels and Watelet's "De la grâce," his remark that one would reach for the Weeping Girl's hand to kiss it "si on ne respectait cette enfant et sa douleur" (*Weeping Girl* 180) is significant. It is preceded by an outburst of emotion in the opening lines of his review, in which he attests to Greuze's mastery of the *naïf* aesthetic and—ostensibly—portrays himself as the ideal type of beholder. In fact, although he typically begins a *Salon* review by describing the artwork in question or by making some personal remark to Grimm, the opening lines of his review of *Weeping Girl* suggest that he is too overwhelmed to form coherent thoughts at first. His attention flies back to the Girl each time he starts to comment on a different aspect of the painting:

> La jolie élégie! le joli poème! la belle idylle que Gessner en ferait! […] Elle est de face, sa tête est appuyée sur sa main gauche. L'oiseau mort est posé sur le bord supérieur de la cage, la tête pendante, les ailes traînantes, les pattes en l'air. Comme elle est naturellement placée! Que sa tête est belle! qu'elle est élégamment coiffée! Que son visage a

> d'expression! Sa douleur est profonde, elle est à son malheur, elle y est toute entière. Le joli catafalque que cette cage! que cette guirlande de verdure qui serpente autour a de grâce! Ô la belle main! la belle main! le beau bras!
>
> (*Weeping Girl* 179-80)[34]

In these lines, Diderot conflates his cultured appreciation of good art with his visceral appreciation of natural feminine beauty, much as he did when he beheld the innocent ingénue depicted in Greuze's *Village Bride*. As his language devolves into fragmented, repetitive exclamations about the Weeping Girl's features, it illustrates the fact that she has struck a chord within him and suggests that he finds his gaze increasingly drawn to her body. On the heels of this, his remark about refraining from kissing her hand reads as a show of self-restraint: although he makes his desire for physical closeness apparent to Grimm and his other readers, he appears prepared to content himself with sympathy for the girl and to "negotiate" the erotic tension by accepting his place outside the painting. In this respect, he seems poised to draw the same conclusion that Grimm drew about Greuze's Village Bride in 1761. As I have previously discussed, Grimm's review of that painting for the *Correspondance littéraire* downplayed the Bride's sexual appeal and held that the innocence of her soul was far more interesting. In Grimm's words:

> [C]'est peu pour elle d'être la plus jolie créature du monde; ses grâces innocentes ne sont pas ce qu'il y a de plus séduisant en elle; mais comment vous peindre tout ce qui se passe dans son âme, au moment de cette révolution si désirable et si redoutée qui va se faire dans toute sa vie?
>
> (*Correspondance littéraire* 1761, 374)

[34] Salomon Gessner (1730-1788) was a Swiss author of pastoral poetry, best known for his idealized depictions of familial love, piety, and virtue.

Grimm's insinuation, which Diderot seems to reaffirm in 1765 by not reaching for the Weeping Girl's hand, is that the ultimate mark of a "good" Greuzian beholder is that he prefers the ingénue's soul to her body and comes to recognize its superior aesthetic and moral value.

As Diderot continues his review of *Weeping Girl*, however, it quickly becomes clear that his choice to make a show of exercising self-restraint has a different purpose. More precisely, he draws attention to his (supposed) hesitancy to reach for the Girl's hand in order to make a spectacle of abandoning his qualms altogether. That is, the language of the review's first paragraph—which is almost comically exaggerated—proves to be part of a rhetorical strategy that culminates in a fantasy of invading the painting. Immediately after his remark about keeping his distance from the Girl out of "respect," Diderot resumes his wild exclaiming and recalls being swept away by his desire for closeness with her. More precisely, he tells Grimm of finding himself fervently chanting "Délicieux!" as though he was falling into a trance—or perhaps, as though he was casting a spell. He then claims that his enthusiasm literally drew him into the painting before he realized what had happened, as if by magic:

> Tout enchante en elle jusqu'à son ajustement; ce mouchoir de cou est jeté d'une manière! il est d'une souplesse et d'une légèreté! Quand on aperçoit ce morceau, on dit: Délicieux! Si l'on s'y arrête ou qu'on y revienne, on s'écrie: Délicieux! délicieux! Bientôt on se surprend conversant avec cette enfant et la consolant. Cela est si vrai, que voici ce que je me souviens de lui avoir dit à différentes reprises.
>
> (*Weeping Girl* 180)[35]

These lines clearly express a *naïf* response of the kind that Diderot described in his *Éloge de Richardson*: much as he had called out to Richardson's suffering heroines Pamela and Clarissa,

[35] For another reading of Diderot's fantasy of entering into this painting, see Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 55-61.

he claims to have unwittingly entered the painting to console the Weeping Girl. Yet in the conversation that he subsequently imagines having with her, his sympathy for her is largely disingenuous, in that his real purpose is not to make her stop crying but to indulge in a voyeuristic fantasy about her body. More precisely, he chooses to interpret her dead bird as an allegory of her lost virginity and "reads" the story of her seduction upon her body's involuntary signs of distress. As he delights in unveiling what he perceives to be her intimate secret, he makes Grimm's presence a part of the text by pausing at times to address him personally. In doing so, he pulls Grimm into sharing in the role of voyeur and adds a layer of complexity to his ekphrastic technique: he not only replicates the painting's seductive effect upon himself, but pushes Grimm—and by proxy, any (male) reader of the *Correspondance*—to scrutinize the true nature of his own interest in suffering ingénues.

Let us examine this more closely. Diderot begins his imagined conversation with the Weeping Girl by entreating her to confide in him about why she is crying (even though, as he says to Grimm, he believes that he has already deduced the truth: that she is weeping over her lost virginity rather than over the loss of her pet bird). As he delves more deeply into his fantasy, Diderot also imagines that the Weeping Girl is struggling to resist his penetrating gaze: she refuses to speak at all for most of their conversation but is unable to hide her thoughts or feelings from him, given that her silence, eyes, tears, and her body's other natural signs of distress all express what she is thinking and feeling. Indeed, the Girl's refusal to speak only serves to make the pursuit more enjoyable for Diderot and to draw him further into the painting. In his words:

> Çà, petite, ouvrez-moi votre cœur, parlez-moi vrai, est-ce bien la mort de cet oiseau qui vous retire si fortement et si tristement en vous-même?... Vous baissez les yeux, vous ne me répondez pas. Vos pleurs sont prêts à couler. Je ne suis pas père, je ne suis ni indiscret,

> ni sévère. Eh bien, je le conçois, il vous aimait, il vous le jurait et le jurait depuis si longtemps! Il souffrait tant! le moyen de voir souffrir ce qu'on aime!... Et laissez-moi continuer; pourquoi me fermer la bouche de votre main?
>
> (*Weeping Girl* 180)

The interaction that Diderot imagines here is strikingly similar to what he would write a year later in his *Encyclopédie* article on "Ingénuité" (1766), in which he described what he considered to be the typical experience of beholding ingénues. In this article, he begins by arguing that looking at ingénues is pleasing because, thanks to their guilelessness and lack of sophistication, their souls naturally and transparently "paint themselves" upon their physical features. He then claims that it is especially pleasant to observe ingénues when they confess to indiscretions, given that their innocent demeanor lends an endearing quality to their youthful mistakes. Although he makes no reference to Greuze's *Weeping Girl*—or to any of Greuze's work—in "Ingénuité," it seems possible that he had his experience with the Weeping Girl in mind when he wrote the article. As he puts it in the *Encyclopédie*:

> Que leur commerce est agréable! Si elles ont parlé, on sent qu'elles devoient dire ce qu'elles ont dit. Leur ame vient se peindre sur leurs levres, dans leurs yeux, & dans leur expression. On leur découvre son cœur avec d'autant plus de liberté, qu'on voit le leur tout entier. Ont-elles fait une faute, elles l'avouent d'une maniere qui feroit presque regretter qu'elles ne l'eussent pas commise.[36]

Diderot's choice to portray the Weeping Girl as aware of and resistant to his presence also raises the question of what his role is as a *naïf* beholder. His cajoling remark that he is "not a

[36] *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert (8:744), accessed via the ARTFL Project, http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu. For a more detailed reading of this article, see Chapter 1.

father" ("Je ne suis pas père, je ne suis ni indiscret, ni sévère" [180]) is a striking means of claiming a place within the painting: it absolves him from acting as a moral authority and entreats the girl to welcome him in as a confidant. It also sets up an interesting contrast with Watelet's *L'art de peindre*, which names "the father" and "the lover" as the ingénue's archetypical admirers. More precisely, Watelet claims that compared to "un homme indifférent," the father is "plus clairvoyant cent fois et plus sensible aux grâces de sa fille," while the "jeune homme amoureux" expresses the purest love of all (*L'art de peindre* 115). Watelet's broader argument in delineating these roles, as Emma Barker explains, is that "for a mature male spectator who takes more than a detached interest in the *jeune fille*, the only available, certainly the only legitimate, subject position was that of a father figure" ("Greuze Girl" 98). In contrast, the role that Diderot creates for himself as a beholder of *Weeping Girl* lies somewhere *between* father and lover. When he imagines her impulsively reaching out to press her hand over his mouth, he portrays himself to Grimm and his other readers as something like a Pygmalion: that is, not merely a father or lover, but a creator who has brought a coveted artistic vision to life in his own mind and in writing.[37] Thus, he claims to have been seduced into seeing the girl on canvas as real while simultaneously presenting himself as the author of a fantasy in which he effectively seduces her into initiating physical contact with him.

Diderot's self-appointed role as both creator and seducer extends to the way in which he narrates the Weeping Girl's loss of virginity. The events of the story he writes for her are extremely cliché in themselves: her admirer came to her when her mother was out and appealed to her pity with tearful pleas of love. As Diderot feigns guessing at the intimate details of this encounter while the Girl listens in silence, he amuses himself by coming progressively closer to articulating the crucial moment without overtly stating it:

[37] As we have seen in Chapters 1 and 2, and as we will see in Chapter 4, the myth of Pygmalion was a common motif in narratives that featured ingénues, so Diderot's implicit use of it here seems quite apt.

> Ce matin-là, par malheur votre mère était absente; il vint, vous étiez seule; il était beau, si passionné, si tendre, si charmant, il avait tant d'amour dans les yeux, tant de vérité dans les expressions! il disait de ces mots qui vont si droit à l'âme! et en les disant il était à vos genoux; cela se conçoit encore […] il tenait une de vos mains, de temps en temps vous y sentiez la chaleur de quelques larmes qui tombaient de ses yeux et qui coulaient le long de vos bras. Votre mère ne revenait toujours point; ce n'est pas votre faute, c'est la faute de votre mère… Mais voilà-t-il pas que vous pleurez!
>
> (*Weeping Girl* 180-181)

As the banality of Diderot's words suggests, the details of the Girl's seduction are not truly important in themselves: what is essential is the pleasure that Diderot finds in drawing them out of her with his skillful eye. Much in the way he imagines her seducer overcame her shy reluctance, Diderot's cajoling makes a game of uncovering the Girl's secret despite her resistance. The erotic overtones of his language only become more pronounced as he continues: he punctuates his text with teasing questions like "Continuerai-je?" and "Vous le voulez?," which mimic things one might expect her lover to have said. He also describes her lover's departure with a facetious double entendre: namely, as repeatedly "going out and coming back in": "Qu'il eut de peine à s'arracher d'auprès de vous!... Comme vous me regardez! Je sais tout cela. Combien il se leva et se rassit de fois! combien il vous dit, redit adieu sans s'en aller! combien de fois il sortit et rentra!" (*Weeping Girl* 180) This could also be a reference to Diderot's own experience with the painting at the Salon, given that he claims to have spoken to the girl "à différentes reprises" (180). In a sense, therefore, despite the strong element of humor in all of these passages, they illustrate Diderot's usurpation of the seducer's place *within* the painting. Indeed, his flattering assurance to the girl of her lover's fidelity—which finally earns him a spoken reply from her—is a cliché worthy of a libertine:

"Quand on a été assez heureux pour rencontrer une enfant charmante comme vous, pour s'y attacher, pour lui plaire, c'est pour toute la vie… Et mon oiseau?... Vous souriez..." (*Weeping Girl* 181).

Since the Girl as Diderot imagines her is blind to the playful and mocking aspects of his language, his use of rakish clichés, literary tropes, and tongue-in-cheek wordplay is ultimately for Grimm's benefit (and by extension, the benefit of the readers of the *Correspondance littéraire*). Throughout his text, Diderot seems to enjoy making a spectacle of the Girl for Grimm as much as he enjoys creating this fantasy for himself. Even as he experiments with the role of a *naïf* beholder and exclaims about the Girl's absorbing effect on him, he teases Grimm about the pleasure that Grimm himself could have had, had he only been present to see her. For example, at one point he states: "Quand on a été assez heureux pour rencontrer une enfant charmante comme vous, pour s'y attacher, pour lui plaire, c'est pour toute la vie… Et mon oiseau?... Vous souriez... (Ah mon ami, qu'elle était belle! si vous l'aviez vue sourire et pleurer!) Je continuai […]" (*Weeping Girl* 181). Moreover, Diderot's choice to describe the sensual details of the Girl's scene with her lover, only to break off his discourse before arriving at the climactic moment, also reminds the absent Grimm of the distance that separates *him* from the painting even as Diderot enjoys his own fantasy "within" it.

Diderot's rhetorical questions, like "Vous le voulez?" and "Continuerai-je?," could therefore be read as asides to Grimm as well as queries to the Girl: they seem to ask him how much more he would like to read about the girl's seduction and push him to recognize the fact that he wants Diderot to reveal every detail of it. Consequently, much as Diderot began his experience with the painting as a voyeur, gazing in upon the Girl from outside the frame, it is now Grimm who gazes in upon her though the lens of Diderot's text. It is also up to Grimm to contend with

this distance by using his imagination to fill in the story's gaps, just as Diderot has done for himself by constructing a fantasy around the painting.[38] Yet doing so requires him—and by extension, any male subscriber to the *Correspondance*—to accept what Diderot believes to be the "truth" behind *Weeping Girl*: not only that it is an allegory of lost virginity, but that it interests men *primarily* because of what Diderot perceives as its sexual subtext. In other words, it is interesting to men as art that stimulates their imagination and invites them to project their banal male desires upon a vulnerable, ingenuous female body. By challenging Grimm with this truth, Diderot acts out the ultimate challenge that Greuze's paintings of ingénues pose to the beholder: as Janie Vanpée argues, the beholder "can either welcome the call and pleasure to participate in the making of the fantasy, or […] can feel unease at [his] complicity with fantasies that usually remain hidden and unarticulated."[39] On the one hand, should Grimm choose to accept this call and to admit his own ordinary male desires, creating a *naïf* fantasy ought to be easy for him as a *philosophe* and man of the world. On the other, should he reject that call, he is left to contemplate his own discomfort. Either way, Diderot's text achieves the same objective that Vanpée pinpoints as an essential element of Greuze's work: it "redirects the viewer's gaze inward," and forces him to reflect upon his personal response to this kind of art ("Drama of Looking" 66).[40]

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[38] In this respect, the text echoes Diderot's critical writings on sketches, in which he also explores the role of the viewer's imagination in completing an unfinished image. See Caroline Jacot Grapa, "Diderot et l'esquisse: La danse de l'esprit," *L'esprit (dé)réglé: Literature, Science, and the Life of the Mind in France, 1700-1900*, in *L'esprit créateur*, 56:4 (Winter 2016): 22-34.

[39] Janie Vanpée, "Jean-Baptiste Greuze: the Drama of Looking," in *L'esprit créateur*, 28:4 (Winter 1988): 46-68, at 66.

[40] Vanpée's assertion that Greuze encouraged his viewers to take an active role in interpreting his paintings and their own responses to them is intended in part as a refutation of the arguments Michael Fried puts forth in *Absorption and Theatricality*. Fried contends that because many of Greuze's paintings are composed to emphasize the figures' absorption in the activities they are carrying out, the beholder's presence outside the painting is effectively neutralized, insofar as he or she is relegated to regarding the work as a passive observer who is entirely excluded from the scene taking place on canvas. See Vanpée, "Drama of Looking," 51, and Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, especially 55-70.

There is one final point to be made about Diderot's use of humor to achieve this effect and the broader role that humor plays in his conception of the "good" reader or beholder. As he concludes his reading of *Weeping Girl*, he upholds it as evidence of his superiority as an art critic, scoffing that most of the other Salon critics missed the painting's subtext entirely:

> [B]eaucoup de personnes ne l'ont pas entendu […] Ne pensez-vous pas qu'il y aurait autant de bêtise à attribuer les pleurs de la jeune fille de ce Salon à la perte d'un oiseau, que la mélancolie de la jeune fille du Salon précédent à son miroir cassé? Cette enfant pleure autre chose, vous dis-je.
>
> (*Weeping Girl* 182-183)[41]

Crucially, however, Diderot makes this claim only *after* shattering the fantasy he had constructed around *Weeping Girl* and mocking himself for having become so absorbed in it. As he turns his gaze inward to contemplate his own willingness to be carried away, he invites Grimm to share a laugh with him (although he still stresses the attraction that the Girl holds for him):

> [M]on ami, ne riez-vous pas, vous d'entendre un grave personnage s'amuser à consoler une enfant en peinture de la perte de son oiseau, de la perte de tout ce qu'il vous plaira? Mais aussi voyez donc qu'elle est belle! qu'elle est intéressante! Je n'aime point à affliger, malgré cela, il ne me déplairait pas trop d'être la cause de sa peine.
>
> (*Weeping Girl* 182)

The point of this self-mockery is not to trivialize the experience he has just had; rather, it is to establish the importance of restoring his critical perspective afterward. In short, to laugh at himself

[41] In this passage, Diderot is comparing *Weeping Girl* to another of Greuze's paintings: *Le Miroir cassé* of 1763. Emma Barker argues that unlike *Weeping Girl*, *Le Miroir cassé* is an unequivocal allegory of lost virginity because "the young woman's disheveled state, the disorder of her surroundings, and such erotically charged details as a pearl necklace and an open letter all reinforce the sexual significance of the subject" ("Greuze Girl" 92).

for losing control is a means of regaining control; that is, it is the necessary final step which allows him to transition back from absorbed beholder into discerning observer and critic.

In Diderot's eyes, therefore, the good reader or beholder and ultimately, the superior art critic, is not merely someone who can lose himself in *naïf* art, or whose sympathy for suffering innocents leaves him feeling morally edified. Rather, he is someone who can critically evaluate his own susceptibility to the fictional world; who can enter a painting and come out of it again; who can recognize all the facets of his interest in a given image on canvas, including the dark, the amusing, and the banal. Above all, he is someone who can subsequently create a critical narrative that simulates the experience of beholding the artwork for his readers and challenges them to become "suspended" in its truth (even as he laughs at himself for having had the same experience as a beholder). He is someone, in short, who is able to be the type of person whom Diderot himself claims to be in the *Salon de 1765*.

Over the next few decades of Diderot's career, he continued to include ingénues as a major motif in his writing: they played significant roles in his experiments with the power of fiction and, in tandem with this, his exploration of the ways in which readers and beholders can and should respond to art. The most famous example of a Diderotian ingénue is not to be found in Diderot's *Salon* writings, but rather, in his narrative fiction: that is, in his novel *La Religieuse* (1760/1780-1782), a text which features an ingénue as its narrator. The young woman in question, Suzanne Simonin, ostensibly shares many traits with Greuzian ingénues as Diderot understands them: for example, she claims to express herself with candor and endures a great deal of suffering, which purportedly makes her worthy of the reader's interest and sympathy. The major difference between *La Religieuse* and Diderot's dramatic representations of Greuzian ingénues, however, is that he places Suzanne herself into the role of narrator. Furthermore, Suzanne's stated goal for narrating

her story is not simply to elicit the reader's pity. Rather, it is to persuade a specific reader, the marquis de Croismare—a fictionalized incarnation of one of Diderot's friends and the man to whom Suzanne addresses her narrative—to help her escape her plight by supporting her efforts to annul her monastic vows. As her story progresses, Croismare—and by extension, all of the novel's readers—are forced to question her real motives and to wonder if she is as ingenuous as she claims to be. This dynamic also provides Diderot with another opportunity to experiment with the power of fiction: yet in this case, he ends his narrative by deliberately leaving it up to his readers to draw their own conclusions about what they should think of Suzanne, and about the act of reading novels in general.

3.4 In the Confessional: Diderot's Reader Exposed

Although Diderot's novel *La Religieuse* was first published in installments in the *Correspondance littéraire* between 1780 and 1782, he first took up the idea for it in January 1760, just two years before composing his *Éloge de Richardson* (1762). The novel began as a practical joke on the sixty-six-year-old marquis de Croismare, a friend of Diderot's who had recently retired to a country estate. Hoping to lure the Marquis back into worldly Parisian society, Diderot and some of his friends wrote letters to the unsuspecting Croismare in which they assumed the identity of a fictional nun: a young woman who claimed to be on the run in Paris and in dire need of Croismare's aid. "Suzanne" and her tale of the miseries of convent life were based upon a real-life nun, Marguerite Delamarre, whose petition to win freedom from her vows had been denied by the courts just a few years before.[42] The ruse appears to have been partly successful, as the Marquis

[42] See the editors' Introduction to the *La Religieuse* in Denis Diderot, *Œuvres complètes*, éd. Jean Varloot et al. (Paris: Hermann, éditeurs des sciences et des arts, vol. XI, 1975), 3-12.

did reply to the fictitious Suzanne's letters. However, he seems to have quickly grown skeptical of their veracity: the conspirators, at any rate, soon chose to kill off Suzanne and abandon the endeavor.[43] Despite this, Diderot revisited Suzanne's tale often over the next two decades: he completed a first draft of *La Religieuse* by 1761 and, sometime later, edited "Suzanne's" letters to Croismare into a *Préface* that would accompany the novel.

Before delving into an analysis of the novel itself, it is worth taking a second look at Diderot's *Éloge de Richardson*. Many of the qualities that Diderot attributed to his friend Croismare—the first reader he chose for Suzanne and whose role as a reader is immortalized in the novel's *Préface*—echo the traits that he associates with the ideal reader of novels in *Éloge*. As I have previously mentioned, the "good" reader as Diderot imagines him is an even-tempered man who cares for others, but who has nonetheless come to prefer solitude after having lived in the world. As Diderot puts it in *Éloge*, it is "l'homme tranquille et solitaire, qui a connu la vanité du bruit et des amusements du monde, et qui aime à habiter l'ombre d'une retraite, et à s'attendrir utilement dans le silence."[44] This reader must also possess a delicate sensibility which allows him to deeply connect to the fictional world on a moral, emotional, and physical level (Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology* 156-158). In Diderot's opinion, men who possess these traits are capable of experiencing novel-reading as a communion with fictional people. That is, provided that the author has the skill to create believable and moving characters, the ideal reader can become absorbed enough in the text to not only identify with them, but to "feel" their suffering as a shared, lived experience.

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[43] The editors of the Hermann edition of Diderot's *La Religieuse* present extensive evidence of Croismare's increasing doubts about the letters, but they also argue that Diderot's choice to edit both sides of the correspondence to make it suitable to his *Préface* make it impossible to verify the true version of events. Refer to their notes in Denis Diderot, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. XI, 3-21, 69-72.

[44] Denis Diderot, *Éloge de Richardson* in *Œuvres complètes*, éd. Jean Varloot et al. (Paris: Hermann, éditeurs des sciences et des arts, vol. XIII, 1980), 197.

Some of the details of the marquis de Croismare's life suggest that he did possess a few of the qualities of Diderot's ideal reader: he was quite touched by Marguerite Delamarre's effort to win freedom from her vows in 1757, going so far as to (unsuccessfully) intercede on her behalf even though he never knew her personally.[45] However, contemporary accounts of his character also suggest that Diderot made concerted efforts to invent a half-fictionalized version of the man, which he then wove into his novel's *Préface* as an integral part of the text's reality. In 1770, Friedrich Melchior, baron von Grimm—who was one of the friends who collaborated with Diderot to play the "Suzanne" joke on Croismare—published an early draft of the *Préface* in the *Correspondance littéraire*. To introduce the text, Grimm added a lengthy comment about Croismare in which he portrayed the man as a charming, lively, cosmopolitan *bel esprit*. In fact, Grimm claimed that Croismare's *esprit* was the trait that one missed the most in his absence, given that, as Grimm put it, it was the special kind that could only be found in France:

> Il est à peu près de l'âge de M. de Voltaire; et il conserve comme cet homme immortel la jeunesse de l'esprit avec une grâce, une légèreté et des agréments dont le piquant ne s'est jamais émoussé pour moi. On peut dire qu'il est l'un de ces hommes aimables dont la tournure et le moule ne se trouvent qu'en France […]. Il ne s'agit pas ici des qualités du cœur, de l'élévation des sentiments, de la probité la plus stricte et la plus délicate, qui rendent M. de Croismare aussi respectable pour ses amis qu'il leur est cher; il n'est question que de son esprit. Une imagination vive et riante, un tour de tête original, des opinions qui ne sont arrêtées qu'à un certain point, et qu'il adopte ou qu'il proscrit alternativement, [...] une activité d'âme incroyable, qui, combinée avec une vie oisive et avec la multiplicité des ressources de Paris, le porte aux occupations les plus diverses et les plus disparates, lui fait

[45] See the editors' Introduction to *La Religieuse* in Diderot, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. XI, 3-12.

> créer des besoins que personne ne s'est imaginé avant lui, et des moyens tout aussi étranges pour les satisfaire, et par conséquent une infinité de jouissances qui se succèdent les unes aux autres […].[46]

Diderot crossed out every line of this passage at some point when he was editing the *Préface*. His reason for doing so appears to have been that he wanted to make Croismare conform more closely to his own vision of a good novel-reader. The description of the Marquis that he eventually settled on keeping—which focuses on Croismare's temperament and habits during his retirement in the country—was the following:

> Il nous avait promis de ne s'y arrêter que le temps nécessaire pour mettre ses affaires en ordre; mais son séjour s'y prolongea insensiblement; il y avait réuni ses enfants; il aimait beaucoup son curé; il s'était livré à la passion du jardinage; et comme il fallait à une imagination aussi vive que la sienne des objets d'attachement réels ou imaginaires, il s'était tout à coup jeté dans la plus grande dévotion.
>
> (*Préface* 27)

This portrait of Croismare is clearly a much better match for Diderot's vision of the ideal novel-reader than Grimm's portrait of the man as a jovial *bel esprit* would be: Diderot's Croismare is still a man of passion and vivid imagination, but he also enjoys tranquil and solitary hobbies in the countryside. Moreover, once again like Diderot's ideal reader, he shows no sign of missing his former life in the fast-paced world of Parisian society. This half-fictionalized portrait of Croismare as a delicately sensitive man of simple tastes was lent further credence when *La Religieuse* was republished in 1798. When making edits to the *Préface*, Diderot's editor and friend, Jacques-André

[46] Text cited in the Appendix to the *Préface* in Diderot, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. XI, 69-70. Elena Russo argues that the *bel esprit* and the *philosophe* were not always clearly distinguishable from one another, given that many Enlightenment thinkers can be linked to both groups (whether they would have wished to be or not). See Russo, *Styles*, 7.

Naigon, felt compelled to add the following lines to Diderot's description of Croismare: "[L]e marquis de Croismare [...], cet honnête homme, sensible et bienfaisant. Ceux qui l'ont connu, retrouveront partout [dans ses lettres] la candeur, et la simplicité de son âme" (*La Religieuse* 70).

Diderot's creation of a semi-fictional Croismare in the mold of his ideal reader suggests that (for the right sort of man) reading *La Religieuse* will be like reading Richardson's novels: the reader will find himself absorbed in Suzanne's tale of suffering and will come to intimately understand, share, and sympathize with her experiences. In doing so, he will be awoken to a greater level of compassion for his fellow human beings and will ultimately feel morally and emotionally edified by the experience. Yet if we look closely at the ways in which Suzanne attempts to excite her reader's interest in her story, it becomes hard to determine precisely how we are supposed to react to her. The techniques she employs as a narrator initially appear to be straightforward: she begins by naming Croismare as her intended reader and ostensibly settles the question of what "type" of reader he should (and will) be. More precisely, she presents a description of him that echoes Grimm's portrait of him as an experienced man of the world. She also claims that other people have assured her that he, as an *homme sensible*, is worthy of her trust. Furthermore, and quite strikingly, she pledges to repay his kindness and win his trust in turn by telling him her tale of woe with "la naïveté d'un enfant de mon âge," even though (as she puts it) she feels that doing so will make her uncomfortable. Speaking to Croismare of himself in third person, she explains:

> Il a de la naissance; des lumières; de l'esprit, de la gaieté, du goût pour les beaux-arts, et surtout de l'originalité. On m'a fait l'éloge de sa sensibilité, de son honneur et de sa probité, et j'ai jugé par le vif intérêt qu'il a pris à mon affaire, et par tout ce qu'on m'en a dit que je ne m'étais point compromise en m'adressant à lui; mais il n'est pas à présumer qu'il se détermine à changer mon sort sans savoir qui je suis; et c'est ce motif qui me résout à

> vaincre mon amour-propre et ma répugnance, en entreprenant ces Mémoires où je peins une partie de mes malheurs sans talent et sans art, avec la naïveté d'un enfant de mon âge et la franchise de mon caractère.
>
> (*La Religieuse* 81-82)

Suzanne soon modifies this purportedly straightforward approach into something more complex, however: as her narrative unfolds, she makes a point of addressing Croismare directly at regular intervals, thereby reminding him—and by proxy, any reader of the text—that she is deserving of his sympathy and expects to receive it. In support of this, she frequently claims to hold a natural appeal for people who appreciate guilelessness and truth. However, this self-described ingénue also drops several coy hints that her physical attractiveness may play a role in her appeal as well. She most often does this after recounting a story of some mistreatment she has endured at the hands of the other nuns in her convent, who physically and emotionally abuse her at every opportunity. For example, after one such instance, she makes the following claim about her compelling physical attributes: "J'ai la figure intéressante, la profonde douleur l'avait altérée, mais ne lui avait rien ôté de son caractère; j'ai un son de voix qui touche, on sent que mon expression est celle de la vérité" (*La Religieuse* 174). Instead of settling the question of how her sensitive Marquis de Croismare should read her story, these actions, in their repetitiveness, raise that question to Croismare himself with increasing urgency over the course of the narrative. Indeed, Suzanne's habit of constantly appealing to her reader's emotions obliges him to wonder if her intentions are as pure as she claims. Her choice to graphically depict her suffering body through her written language—coupled with her choice to punctuate these remarks with mentions of the attraction she purportedly holds for people with sensitive souls—suggests that she has two objectives in mind: to make her reader desirous of helping her, and perhaps, to nurture his desire

to have her for himself. The reader must therefore spend the novel asking himself if this ingénue's self-proclaimed habit of expressing herself with candor is a simple statement of truth, or a manipulative ploy.

Nowhere are these questions more relevant than in the moments when Suzanne recounts her salacious misadventures with Mme.***, the lecherous lesbian Mother Superior of the Saint-Eutrope convent. At several intervals, Suzanne meticulously describes their sexual encounters to her reader, naïvely relating every titillating detail of Mme.***'s attentions to her body. She also portrays herself as a passive, accommodating, and somewhat bewildered participant in these scenes, as in the following infamous example:

> [E]lle avait levé son linge de cou et elle avait mis une de mes mains sur sa gorge, elle se taisait, je me taisais aussi; elle paraissait goûter le plus grand plaisir; elle m'invitait à lui baiser le front, les joues, les yeux et la bouche, et je lui obéissais, je ne crois pas qu'il y eût du mal à cela. Cependant son plaisir s'accroissait, et comme je ne demandais pas mieux que d'ajouter à son bonheur d'une manière aussi innocente, je lui baisais encore le front, les joues, les yeux et la bouche. La main qu'elle avait posée sur mon genou se promenait sur tous mes vêtements depuis l'extrémité de mes pieds jusqu'à ma ceinture, me pressant tantôt dans un endroit, tantôt en un autre; elle m'exhortait en bégayant et d'une voix altérée et basse à redoubler mes caresses, je les redoublais; enfin, il vint un moment, je ne sais si ce fut de plaisir ou de peine, où elle devint pâle comme la mort, ses yeux se fermèrent […] et elle me parut mourir en poussant un grand soupir.
>
> (*La Religieuse* 227)

Despite the fact that these words leave Suzanne's reader in no doubt about the sexual nature of her relationship with Mme.***, Suzanne always claims that she did not truly understand what

was transpiring in moments such as this one. She informs Croismare that upon returning to her room after the scene described above took place, she found that her conscience "ne [lui] reprochât rien" (*La Religieuse* 229), adding that she nonetheless felt unable to explain her lingering sense of agitation and disorientation after the incident. At several points, her words suggest that she is tantalizingly close to realizing that the encounter was sexual—but at the very moment when she seems on the point of understanding this, she retreats from articulating the idea. When she reflects on the sexual scene described above, for example, she settles (or claims to settle) on the theory that Mme.*** must have some sort of malady:

> Rentrée chez moi, je me trouvai rêveuse. Je voulus prier et je ne le pus pas […] [J]e commençai un ouvrage que je quittai pour un autre que je quittai pour un autre encore, mes mains s'arrêtaient d'elles-mêmes et j'étais comme imbécile. Jamais je n'avais éprouvé rien de pareil; mes yeux se fermèrent d'eux-mêmes, je fis un petit sommeil, quoique je ne dorme jamais de jour. Réveillée, je m'interrogeai sur ce qui s'était passé entre la supérieure et moi; je m'examinai, je crus entrevoir en m'examinant encore… mais c'étaient des idées si vagues, si folles, si ridicules, que je les rejetai loin de moi; le résultat de mes réflexions, c'est que c'était peut-être une maladie à laquelle elle était sujette; puis il m'en vint une autre, c'est que peut-être cette maladie se gagnait […] et que je la prendrais aussi.
>
> (*La Religieuse* 230)[47]

Suzanne's failure—or perhaps, refusal—to recognize the true nature of her encounters with Mme.*** places her reader in a thoroughly disquieting position. In a marked contrast with the readers of Richardson's novels as Diderot describes them in *Éloge*—and indeed, with Diderot

[47] Suzanne's (purported) confusion in this passage also stems from a brief conversation she has with the nun Sainte Thérèse after her latest sexual encounter with Mme.***. Sainte Thérèse is Mme.***'s ex-lover and is implied to be suffering upon having been abandoned, but Suzanne reports their conversation to Croismare as though she has noticed none of this. Instead, she claims to only feel a vague sense of unease.

himself when he recounts his fantasy of Greuze's *Weeping Girl*—Suzanne's reader cannot easily lose himself in her narrative. Instead, he is uncomfortably caught between its discordant elements. Suzanne's alternately pathetic and erotic tale of abuse can appeal to the self-serving voyeur as much as to the sympathetic reader. Indeed, her naïve account of sexual exploitation underscores both her desperate need for rescue and her potential to become the helpless victim of the reader himself (should he choose). Yet, even as the reader contemplates this, he must also pause to wonder if he is being shrewdly manipulated, as Suzanne has a vested interest in winning his help.

Critics have proposed a range of theories about the implications of Suzanne's narrative strategies and about the reader's intended role(s) in the novel. For example, Anne Vila has observed that Suzanne's precise descriptions of her body and those of the nuns around her often mimic the rhetoric of a mid-eighteenth-century medical philosopher. Noting Suzanne's penchant for thinking in medical terms when describing the damage that convent life is inflicting upon the bodies of the women who live in it, Vila argues that Suzanne is not "a bewildered ingénue" when bearing witness to herself and to the women around her (*Enlightenment and Pathology* 167). Rather, in Vila's view, she is "a detached observer who exhibits an uncanny clinical acumen at precisely those moments when she is supposed to be least aware of what is going on" (167). Vila therefore contends that the dynamic between Suzanne and her reader is, at its most fundamental level, a dialogical process which invites the reader to "diagnose" the ill-effects of convent life. More precisely, because Suzanne routinely presents herself as unable to reach conclusions about what she observes (as is the case when she recounts her sexual exploits with Mme.***), her reader is obliged to assume the role of active interpreter for her. Indeed, Vila argues that the reader is *drawn* into this role whether he wants to be or not, given that Suzanne's style of narration is designed to arouse his sensibilities while leaving her own unaffected. In Vila's words:

> [Diderot] deprives Suzanne, as narrator, of her own knowing enjoyment [...] to make it impossible for the reader to maintain the insensibility that Suzanne consciously assumes. In the process, the reader becomes suspended between intellectual insight into the causality that links together Suzanne's impersonal and incomplete observations, and a sensual response to the sensibility of the fictional bodies he is beholding.
>
> (*Enlightenment and Pathology* 175)

In this respect, Suzanne's ingenuousness (that is, her candor and supposed naïveté about the true nature of the people and events she observes) can be understood as a device that grants the reader a "rare glimpse" into the damaging effects of convent life, thereby leaving him "positioned, by virtue of the incompleteness of Suzanne's observations, to reach his own active judgments as to the causes and repercussions of those effects" (Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology* 179). Ultimately, provided that the reader reads her text correctly, he will reach the conclusion that monastic life should be categorically condemned as unhealthy (179).

Herbert Josephs also proposes an intriguing theory about Suzanne's ambiguous use of rhetoric: rather than regarding it as a reflection of her role as a largely detached observer, he interprets it as a sly strategy that she implements in order to maintain her pretense to innocence. In Josephs's view, Suzanne's sole motivation for writing her story is to secure her reader's support of her efforts to escape her life as a nun. As Josephs puts it:

> [I]t is her compelling urge for freedom and clearly not the desire to understand or reflect upon her experiences that has motivated Suzanne to write her autobiographical appeal. Only the urgency of her plight, she assures us at the start, could induce her to overcome her shyness and to tell her story.[48]

[48] Herbert Josephs, "Diderot's *La Religieuse:* Libertinism and the Dark Cave of the Soul," in *MLN*, vol. 91, no. 4, French Issue (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, May 1976): 734-755, at 745. Josephs is referring here

In this vein, Josephs goes on to argue that Suzanne's primary objective—to assure the success of her appeal to Croismare—depends not only on presenting herself to him in the best possible light, but on transferring what Josephs sees as her secret feelings of anger, indignation, and desire onto him. Croismare (and by extension, the novel's other readers), will then feel these emotions on her behalf. In Josephs's view, Suzanne also does this to other characters in the novel in the moments when she opts to make a bid for their sympathy:

> Suzanne's purity of mind seems actually to increase in proportion to the degree that her disturbing effects upon others remain unconscious within herself. [...] She transfers to the singularly sympathetic superior of Saint-Eutrope her own anger towards those who have sacrificed and tortured her, always refraining from casting blame upon her tormentors. And while she observes the ravages of violent feelings upon her sensitive interlocutor who dissolves in her own pleasurable urges, Suzanne herself never experiences the demeaning sentiments of hatred and vindictiveness.
>
> ("Dark Cave of the Soul" 747-748)

In Josephs's eyes, therefore, Suzanne seeks to win sympathy by telling her story as unsentimentally as possible, thereby allowing her own feelings to become the listener's while never being forced to recognize or take responsibility for them herself. In doing so, according to Josephs, she is also attempting to avoid compromising her innocent persona—that is, to avoid expressing violent feelings of anger and hatred—while permitting her interlocutors to experience her unexpressed emotions, thereby leading them to *feel* the indignities of her suffering and to become indignant at the injustice of her plight.

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to the claim that Suzanne makes at the text's outset, when she makes the following statement to Croismare: "[I]l n'est pas à présumer qu'il se détermine à changer mon sort sans savoir qui je suis; et c'est ce motif qui me résout à vaincre mon amour-propre et ma répugnance, en entreprenant ces Mémoires où je peins une partie de mes malheurs sans talent et sans art, avec la naïveté d'un enfant de mon âge et la franchise de mon caractère" (81-82).

Be that as it may, however, Josephs also argues that Suzanne's strategy for winning her reader's sympathy is flawed. In his view, her self-conscious claims of being guileless are "the antipodes of ingenuousness" ("Dark Cave of the Soul" 752), in that they ironically make her innocence seem more improbable as the novel progresses. His skepticism is largely based on his rather sexist assumption that a girl Suzanne's age is unlikely to be as indifferent to sex as she claims ("Dark Cave of the Soul" 745), but he does point to a compelling piece of evidence to justify his doubts about her: the novel's climactic scene, in which Suzanne admits to having spied on Mme.*** in confession and thus to having finally learned the truth about their sexual encounters. Given that Suzanne had previously claimed ignorance of anything untoward in her relationship with Mme.***, this scene in the confessional sets up an impossible chronology: if she made this discovery *before* writing her story for Croismare (as she must have done in order to be able to include it in her tale), then she must have been feigning ignorance when she naïvely described her sexual experiences to him. Of course, this inconsistency could be explained by the fact that Diderot edited the text several times over a period of two decades, but his choice to include this scene in the confessional to begin with merits further examination.[49] Moreover, as Josephs points out, the scene compromises Suzanne's innocence in more ways than one: in addition to imposing an incongruous timeline upon her own story, Suzanne is also confessing to having engaged in eavesdropping by spying on Mme.*** ("Dark Cave of the Soul" 747). Notably, she initially claims to feel no guilt about her actions when she relates them to Croismare: "Je prévois, Monsieur le marquis, que vous allez prendre mauvaise opinion de moi, mais puisque je n'ai point eu de honte de ce que j'ai fait, pourquoi rougirais-je de l'avouer?" (*La Religieuse* 273) Yet shortly

[49] For a detailed history of *La Religieuse* and Diderot's countless modifications of the text, see the Hermann edition's Introduction to *La Religieuse*, 3-21.

afterward, she expresses concern for how Croismare will judge her, thereby belying her claim of feeling secure in her innocence. She also attempts to stave off his judgment by making a preemptive appeal to his sympathy and his role as her confidant:

> [L]orsque les choses peuvent exciter votre estime ou accroître votre commisération, j'écris bien ou mal, mais avec une vitesse et une facilité incroyables; mon âme est gaie; l'expression me vient sans peine; mes larmes coulent avec douceur; il me semble que vous êtes présent, que je vous vois et que vous m'écoutez. Si je suis forcée au contraire de me montrer à vos yeux sous un aspect défavorable, je pense avec difficulté, l'expression se refuse, la plume va mal, le caractère même de mon écriture s'en ressent, et je ne continue que parce que je me flatte secrètement que vous ne lirez pas ces endroits.
>
> (*La Religieuse* 273)

Although Josephs dismisses Suzanne's professed hope that Croismare will skip the unflattering sections of her narrative as "patently absurd" ("Dark Cave of the Soul" 747), I would argue that this is actually the most important line in the passage cited above. If we approach the confessional scene through the lens of Josephs's remarks on Suzanne's strategic transference of her emotions to her reader, in tandem with Anne Vila's theory of the reader's diagnostic role in the novel, another way of interpreting Croismare's relationship to the text emerges. Let us examine the episode closely. To begin with, Suzanne punctuates the first line of this story with a moment of hesitation; she then suddenly imagines that Croismare himself is prompting her to go on: "Lorsque toutes nos sœurs furent retirées... —Eh bien, que fîtes-vous ?—Vous ne devinez pas ?... Non, vous êtes trop honnête pour cela" (*La Religieuse* 273). This prodding question is strikingly reminiscent of Diderot's imagined conversation with Greuze's *Weeping Girl* (and by proxy, with Grimm and the other readers of the *Correspondance littéraire*), in that it postpones the revelation

of the story's climax in order to infuse it with an element of suspense. Yet Suzanne's query to Croismare also represents a role reversal when compared with the spectator-spectacle relationship that Diderot sets up with *Weeping Girl*, as it is now the ingénue—that is, Suzanne—who is guiding the narrative for her reader rather than the other way around. Indeed, it is Suzanne, as the novel's narrator, who actively pulls Croismare into her text, unexpectedly drawing him in more closely than ever so that he may listen to her scandalous confession. Moreover, although this action ostensibly bestows Croismare with a new level of authority by placing him in the role of confessor, what follows has the opposite effect.

As Suzanne narrates her approach to the door of the room where Mme.*** is confessing, she continues to do her utmost to excite her reader's anticipation. Once again, she pauses her narration in order to make a conjecture about how Croismare will react to what he reads next; but this time, she anticipates his reaction in order to usurp his position as a moral authority. More precisely, she preemptively acknowledges the fact that he is likely to find fault in her actions by admitting to her guilt herself. Then, having made her own "confession," she implicitly absolves herself for the fault she has committed. As she puts it to Croismare:

> Je descendis sur la pointe du pied et je vins me placer doucement à la porte du parloir et écouter ce qui se disait là… Cela est fort mal, direz-vous... Oh pour cela oui, cela est fort mal; je me le dis à moi-même, et mon trouble, les précautions que je pris pour n'être pas aperçue, les fois que je m'arrêtai, la voix de ma conscience qui me pressait à chaque pas de m'en retourner ne me permettaient pas d'en douter; cependant la curiosité fut la plus forte et j'allai.
>
> (*La Religieuse* 273-274)

Although Croismare nominally plays the role of confessor in this dialogue, it is not he who absolves Suzanne here. Rather, she absolves herself by articulating the words she expects him to say—and then takes things a step further by turning the tables on him:

> Mais s'il est mal d'avoir été surprendre les discours de deux personnes qui se croyaient seules, n'est-il pas plus mal encore de vous les rendre? Voilà encore un de ces endroits que j'écris parce que *je me flatte que vous ne le lirez pas; cependant cela n'est pas vrai, mais il faut que je me le persuade*.
>
> (*La Religieuse* 274; my emphasis)

The nuances of this passage are striking: although Suzanne initially appears to be placing an additional layer of guilt upon herself by posing her rhetorical question about the evils of revealing someone else's private conversation, she is in fact transferring her guilt to Croismare. Her choice to tell him about this incident in the confessional may be wrong, but it is also a purportedly honest admission of her fault: that is, by admitting to committing a transgression, she is able to acknowledge it and to forgive herself for it. Conversely, she implies that Croismare's choice to read the passages that will follow—despite the fact that Suzanne has already warned him about their salacious and private content—makes him guilty of something as well. Here professed hope that he will choose not to continue reading ("je me flatte que vous ne le lirez pas") is therefore not borne simply of a fear that he will think less of her: rather, it expresses her supposed wish to think better of *him*, even as she stokes his anticipation of what will occur in the confessional and thereby pushes him to read on.

Croismare certainly will read on, as Suzanne knows he will: "je me flatte que vous ne le lirez pas; cependant cela n'est pas vrai, mais il faut que je me le persuade" (274). Her words imply that, much in the way that Diderot was seduced by Greuze's *Weeping Girl*, Croismare has been

seduced into Suzanne's narrative over the course of the novel: unsuspectingly at first, perhaps, but he willingly continued to read her candid accounts of her erotic encounters with Mme.***, and now he must come to the text's final pages. In a sense therefore, Croismare—and by extension, the novel's reader—finds himself suddenly exposed through the act of having read Suzanne's salacious narrative and is now being pushed to interrogate his motives for having done so. Furthermore, in the closing lines of the confessional scene, Suzanne recalls (or claims to recall) having felt a mix of terror and excitement upon hearing Mme.*** confess to the sexual nature of their relationship, which ostensibly forced Suzanne to realize that her own innocence has been compromised as well. She refers to Mme.***'s unspeakable revelation in faltering, evasive language, obliging Croismare to fill in the gaps with his imagination—or rather, with his memory, as he has already read Suzanne's own account of her interactions with Mme.***:

> Le premier mot que j'entendis après un assez long silence me fit frémir, ce fut: Mon Père, je suis damnée… Je me rassurai. J'écoutais, le voile qui jusqu'alors m'avait dérobé le péril que j'avais couru se déchirait, lorsqu'on m'appela. Il fallut aller, j'allai donc; mais, hélas! je n'en avais que trop entendu. Quelle femme, M. le marquis! quelle abominable femme!...
>
> (*La Religieuse* 274)

In short, Suzanne's act of spying upon Mme.*** and of reminding her reader how much he already knows about the true nature of her relationship with the woman has the effect of forcing Croismare to question himself. It also encourages him to examine the true nature of his own relationship with Suzanne, given the fact that reading her story is proof of her power to seduce and enthrall him. That power may have seemed subtle at first, but here Suzanne explicitly brandishes it to remind him that he has willfully surrendered it to her: he clearly finds her as irresistible as Mme.*** does,

whether it be due to his sympathy for her, his sexual attraction to her, the absorbing effects of reading novels, or, most likely, a combination of all three.

For all that, I do not believe that Diderot's purpose in "exposing" Suzanne's reader is to morally condemn the man. Rather, his intent is simply to encourage the reader to reflect on the experience of reading the novel, now that he has come to its conclusion. Suzanne's unanswered query ("Mais s'il est mal d'avoir été surprendre les discours de deux personnes qui se croyaient seules, n'est-il pas plus mal encore de vous les rendre?"), which is purportedly followed by her reader's choice to keep reading, implicitly invites him to conduct a self-diagnosis about his reading habits. Why did he continue to read this particular story, and, more broadly, what sort of attraction do stories like this one truly hold for him? Does he read out of sympathy for vulnerable, abused, and (supposedly) innocent female characters like Suzanne, or to indulge in the amoral pleasure he finds in beholding suffering heroines? How willing is he to lose himself in fiction in general? In short: precisely what sort of reader is he or should he be? Perhaps these questions are unanswerable, but one thing seems clear: namely, that Diderot's own self-satisfied declaration in the *Éloge de Richardson*, in which he exclaims at his own goodness upon finding himself sympathizing with Richardson's cruelly mistreated heroines ("Combien j'étais bon! combien j'étais juste! que j'étais satisfait de moi!" [*Éloge* 193]) is too simple and straightforward to describe his own reader's experience while reading *La Religieuse*.

Whatever we are ultimately meant to think of Suzanne and of ourselves as her readers, there is one final point to make here about how Diderot portrays *ingénuité* in *La Religieuse*. Given that Suzanne self-consciously presents herself to us as a candid and naïve young woman—a declaration that we find ourselves questioning more and more as her story unfolds—she draws attention to the idea that ingenuousness is something that can be feigned. Indeed, the genesis of

the novel itself explicitly reminds us that this is possible: Diderot and his friends created Suzanne for the express purpose of convincing the marquis de Croismare that she was a real person, and they appear to have succeeded in deceiving him—albeit for a short period of time.

In the early 1780s, when *La Religieuse* was published in the *Correspondance littéraire*, the question of how effectively one can mimic ingenuousness was also taken up by another author: Pierre-Ambroise-François Choderlos de Laclos, who wrote the masterful epistolary novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782). In this text, we meet the Marquise de Merteuil, a woman who entered society as a youth and learned how to feign ingenuousness to conceal her quest to teach herself the art of libertinism. Conversely, we also meet Cécile de Volanges, a girl whose ingenuousness is not feigned but nonetheless proves to be quite different from that of the other heroines featured in this study. More precisely, Cécile's ingenuousness is not a sign of innocence, tender-heartedness, or guilelessness: rather, it is revealed to be a sign of her profound ignorance and *sottise*. Her foolishness also makes it quite easy for the novel's libertines to lure her into debauchery, and by the text's conclusion, she has even begun to allow one of them to speak on her behalf: the Vicomte de Valmont dictates all of her letters to her admirer, the Chevalier Danceny, and succeeds for quite a while in convincing the young man that they are genuine. Ultimately, Valmont and Merteuil not only make it clear that ingenuousness can be mimicked (by debauched libertines, no less): they also help to prove that, in the world as Laclos perceives it, the innocent, guileless, and tenderhearted sort of ingénue we have come to know and expect simply does not exist.

CHAPTER 4: Pathological Ingenuousness, Radical Libertinism, and Principled Candor: Women's Modes of Life in Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*

4.1 Rethinking *Ingénuité*: Laclos, Sensibility, and Natural Philosophy

The most noteworthy ingénue of the late Enlightenment is undoubtedly Cécile de Volanges, the minor heroine of Pierre-Ambroise-François Choderlos de Laclos's epistolary novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782). In composing Cécile's story, Laclos drew upon several tropes that had helped to define the ingénue as a character over the course of the preceding century. For one, like Agnès of Molière's *L'École des femmes* (1662), Silvia of Marivaux's *La Double Inconstance* (1723), and Zilia of de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747), Cécile has a male admirer who loves her for her ingenuous manner (as well as her beauty). For another, as is again the case with the heroines listed above, we meet Cécile as she is entering an unfamiliar world: as a convent-educated girl, she has no knowledge of the nuances of high society and often struggles to navigate the pitfalls of her new surroundings. Her ignorance also culminates in her sexual exploitation at the hands of the novel's libertine anti-heroes—the Marquise de Merteuil and the Vicomte de Valmont—a fate that makes her somewhat comparable to the sexually abused Suzanne Simonin of Diderot's *La Religieuse* (1760/1780-1782). Although Cécile's character and sexual proclivities are quite different from Suzanne's (as we shall see in this chapter), both girls make easy prey for their seducers and remain largely blind to the true nature of what is happening to them—at least for a while.[1]

[1] The theme of the inexperienced young girl was of course a longstanding trope of erotic fiction as well, as one can see for example in l'abbé Du Prat's *Vénus dans le cloître* (1672) and Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, marquis d'Argens's *Thérèse philosophe, ou mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Père Dirrag et de Mademoiselle Éradice* (1748).

However, Laclos was also writing at a time when ideas about human nature were undergoing a radical shift. New theories in a range of fields, including medicine, natural history, and pedagogy, piqued his interest in exploring the constitutional underpinnings of human capabilities, relationships, and moral character. As a result, he portrays Cécile's ingenuousness in a way that sets her apart from her literary predecessors in one key respect: he depicts it not only as a product of her educational background and the social mores of the world in which she lives, but also as a symptom of the particular kind of mental-physical constitution with which she was born.

In Laclos's eyes, the key to understanding human nature was the concept of sensibility, a medical-moral theory that was a central tenet of eighteenth-century natural philosophy. In simple terms, "la sensibilité" referred to the human capacity for feeling—at once physical, moral, and emotional—and it was believed to be the essential link that bound the mind and body together within a holistic physiological system. As Anne Vila has shown, Laclos owed much of his thinking on this topic to the work of the moral anthropologists, a philosophically inclined group of biomedical theorists (mainly trained at the vitalist-leaning Montpellier medical school) who reconceptualized the relationship between sensibility and sex in the 1770s. According to these theorists, members of the human race fell into two separate camps on the basis of their sex-specific "types" of sensible constitutions: whereas men had a robust, cerebrally-centered sensibility that bestowed them with the means of achieving intellectual and physical greatness, women possessed a delicate, womb-based sensibility that underpinned their weakness, fickleness, quick-witted charm, and emotional sensitivity.[2] Although Laclos's portrayal of sensibility in the *Liaisons* does

[2] See Anne C. Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 225-259. For other historical overviews of eighteenth-century moral anthropology, see for example Ludmilla Jordanova, "Sex and Gender," in *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth-Century Domains*, ed. Christopher Fox, Roy Porter, and Robert Wokler (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 152-183; and Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

not always align with the sexual oppositions proposed by the moral anthropologists, his characters are divided into camps on the basis of similar criteria: they each possess different kinds of sensibility which predispose them to certain worldviews, desires, behavior, and intellectual talents or deficiencies. Even more importantly, their sensibility dictates the degree to which they are able—or unable—to exert control over their minds, senses, and emotions (Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology* 259). In the *Liaisons*, therefore, sensibility acts as one of the text's most important structuring principles. As Vila explains, it serves as the defining characteristic of each major character, and thereby plays a decisive role in determining each person's fate over the course of the novel; it also effectively places all of the characters into distinct categories of persona:

> All of Laclos's characters are [...] constructed in terms of a *constitutional* determinism which follows a rigorously systematic logic similar to that seen in contemporary moral anthropology. That is, the *type* of sensible constitution with which the novel's characters are endowed is what determines how they function in the world: they either resist the moral and physical stimuli that surround them, or they give in to them.
>
> (*Enlightenment and Pathology* 270; her emphasis)

Within this conceptual framework, Cécile's *ingénuité* takes on some troubling implications. As an ingénue, she is by definition inclined to "give in" to moral and physical stimuli: that is, she is a naïve young girl on the cusp of sexual awakening, and as such, she spends much of the novel being exposed to new feelings and sensations that she is ill-equipped to handle with discernment. To her admirer, the Chevalier Danceny, these qualities are endearing: in the manner of Molière's Horace and other lovers of ingénues I have discussed, he takes Cécile's impetuous discourse and demeanor as signs that she is guileless and kind-hearted. But as her actions lead her into danger over the course of the novel, it becomes increasingly clear to the reader that her

ingenuousness signifies something else: namely, the fact that she tends to give in to stimuli not only because she lacks knowledge and experience, but because she lacks the wits and the fortitude to *learn* to exert control over her senses. In other words, she possesses a type of sensible constitution that naturally predisposes her to follow her base inclinations without thinking too deeply about them. This is especially problematic in her dealings with Merteuil and Valmont, who count themselves as consummately cerebral libertines on the basis of two things: their determination to exercise willful control over their own sensibility, and their ability to skillfully manipulate that of their victims, including the hapless Cécile.

When read in tandem with the texts I have discussed in this study's previous chapters, therefore, Laclos's portrayal of Cécile represents an intriguing blend of old and new ideas. On the one hand, her foolishness harkens back to the conceptual link between ingenuousness and intelligence that was seminal to the ingénue's development as a character. More precisely, she possesses the childlike *sottise* most famously embodied by the first ingénue, Agnès of Molière's *L'École des femmes* (1662), who was herself an adaptation of the *sotte* stock character of premodern French literature.[3] As is the case with Agnès, Cécile's *sottise*—or "sotte ingénuité," as Merteuil comes to call it—reflects her poor education and sets her up to be manipulated and deceived by other people. In fact, as René Démoris points out, that destiny is inscribed in Cécile's given name, which traces its roots to the Latin word for "blind" (i.e. "caecus," which engendered the name "Caecilia").[4] Yet on the other hand, because she is endowed with a type of sensibility that compels her to mindlessly give in to stimuli, her ingenuousness is also portrayed as distinctly pathological: as the novel unfolds, it proves to be a sign that her mind is arrested in a state of stupor

[3] See Chapter 1.
[4] René Démoris, "La symbolique du nom de personne dans *Les Liaisons dangereuses*," in *Littérature*, no. 36 (1979): 104-119, at 113. Merteuil uses the expression "sotte ingénuité" in letter 106; see Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996), 349.

that resists being remedied by her exposure to the world and the sexual awakening she experiences there.[5]

Ultimately, therefore, taking a close look at how Cécile's fate unfolds over the course of the novel offers an intriguing means of approaching some of the text's major themes. At its most basic level, her characterization serves as a critique of the poor state of women's education in eighteenth-century France: her *sotte ingénuité* stems, in part, from the fact that she has never received proper guidance from anyone. At the same time, because her *ingénuité* is also a reflection of her naturally inferior constitution, she demonstrates what happens to high-society young girls who simply *cannot* learn how to master their sensibility or educate themselves. She is also a rather unusual ingénue in that she is paired with not one, but two female counterparts who (unlike her) attempt to seize control of their fates by living according to a set of principles. The first is the Marquise de Merteuil, who teaches herself the art of libertinism after entering the world as a young ingénue; and the second is the Présidente de Tourvel, a woman of virtue who possesses important qualities Cécile lacks: goodness, kindness, and sincerity. In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which each of these three characters either attempt or do not attempt to achieve self-mastery. Ultimately, I will explore how their fates lend insight into Laclos's ideas about the state of late-eighteenth-century society, particularly with regard to how it affected the lives of women.

4.2 Incurable Ingenuousness: The Downfall of Cécile de Volanges (and Merteuil as Counter-Model)

[5] Notably, Cécile's persistent failure to mentally awaken gives her a point in common with Laure of Paul Scarron's "La Précaution inutile" (1655), with the caveat that Laure's *sottise* has no basis in biology and is solely a product of her educational background (see Chapter 1). But to my knowledge, there is no substantial evidence that Laclos was familiar with Scarron's novella, so it seems unlikely that Laure was a direct source of inspiration for Cécile.

Although Cécile de Volanges is one of the most iconic ingénues of the eighteenth century, the words "ingénue" and "ingénuité" appear only a handful of times in Laclos's novel. In fact, the only characters who use these terms to describe Cécile are the ones who (apart from her mother) play the largest roles in shaping her fate: her lovesick admirer the Chevalier Danceny, and her cynical seducers the Marquise de Merteuil and the Vicomte de Valmont. In some respects, the meanings that these three characters impart to the term "ingénuité" are similar: they each perceive it as a quality of simplicity and naïveté that lends Cécile an innocent or childlike air. Yet as the novel progresses, Cécile's ingenuousness comes to hold a particular significance for each of them, and their perceptions of it often conflict with one another. On the one hand, Danceny sees it as an endearing form of candor: in his eyes, it signifies that Cécile is worthy of his love, and it also leads him to assume that she genuinely loves him in return. On the other, Valmont and Merteuil perceive it as a sign of Cécile's ignorance, foolishness, and inferior constitution: as they seek to exploit her to serve their own ends, the ways in which they use the word "ingénuité" reflect the differences between their personal motivations for practicing libertinism. As they lure Cécile into their intrigues over the course of the novel, they reveal that her ingenuousness—far from being the sign of tender-hearted sincerity that Danceny takes it to be—is actually a symptom of her dangerously and incurably stunted mental faculties.

Danceny's idealistic perception of Cécile, which persists throughout most of the novel, connects him to many of the young lovers of ingénues whom I have examined over the course of this study. In terms of the language that he uses to describe her, he bears a particularly striking resemblance to Horace of Molière's *L'École des femmes* (1662).[6] Like his predecessor, Danceny

[6] Laclos's novel does not include any explicit references to Molière's body of work, but Laurent Versini argues that its indebtedness to Molière is unmistakable. In Versini's view, the most obvious evidence of this is the fact that Laclos's libertines often engage in the kinds of behaviors and hypocrisies that one finds in the titular characters of

claims to love his ingénue for her guileless demeanor, and he speaks of it in effusively sentimental terms. One finds an example of this in letter 157 (written to Valmont, his ill-chosen confidant) in which he explains his attachment to Cécile in the following terms: "son ingénuité, sa tendresse, ont un charme pour moi […]" (p.478). His choice to link the terms "ingénuité" and "tendresse" prompts Françoise Berlan-Lacourt to compare him to Horace, who, as Berlan-Lacourt points out, uses the same vocabulary to describe the love letter that Agnès sends him in the play's third Act. As Horace explains to Agnès's guardian Arnolphe, she writes "en termes touchants et tous pleins de bonté, / De *tendresse* innocente et *d'ingénuité*, / De la manière enfin que la pure nature / Exprime de l'amour la première blessure" (my emphasis).[7] The fact that Horace sees Agnès's ingenuousness as a touching manifestation of "la pure nature"—that is, as evidence of her natural innocence and goodness—also invites a comparison with Danceny. In letter 17 (the letter with which Danceny begins his correspondence with Cécile), he admires her "touchante candeur" and declares that it enhances all of her other qualities, from her physical beauty to her (supposedly) "pure" soul. He writes:

> Émané de vous, sans doute [mon amour] est digne de vous être offert; s'il est brûlant comme mon âme, il est pur comme la vôtre. Serait-ce un crime d'avoir su apprécier votre charmante figure, vos talents séducteurs, vos grâces enchanteresses, et cette touchante candeur qui ajoute un prix inestimable à des qualités déjà si précieuses?
>
> (letter 17, pp.111-112)[8]

Le Tartuffe (1664) and *Dom Juan* (1665). See Versini, *Laclos et la Tradition* (Paris: Librairie Klincksieck, 1968), 101.

[7] Molière, *L'École des femmes* in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, ed. Georges Couton (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, coll. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971), III.4, vv. 942-5. Berlan-Lacourt compares these two passages in *Le champ notionnel de l'ingénuité aux XVIIème et XVIIIème siècles*, thèse présentée à l'Université de Poitiers en vue de doctorat d'état, dir. Jean Pierre Seguin (le 27 juin 1994), 1013.

[8] The Prince of Marivaux's *La Double Inconstance* (1723) also uses the adjective "pur" to describe his beloved ingénue, Silvia. In a conversation with his servants, he marvels at the way that her "naïveté" (that is, her artlessness) allows her heart to show itself in its purest form each time she speaks: "c'est le cœur tout pur qui me parle, comme

Of course, given that Danceny compliments Cécile's candor when addressing her directly, he is not merely indulging in a heartfelt declaration of his feelings in letter 17. His words also serve a seductive purpose, in that they are meant to charm Cécile into sending him a frank avowal of love in return. Indeed, Danceny reveals the intended effect of his compliments in the letter's very next line. After dismissing the notion that his illicit passion for Cécile could in any way be offensive or improper, he warns her that a rejection from her would condemn him to misery: "Serait-ce un crime d'avoir su apprécier votre charmante figure […] et cette touchante candeur […]? non, sans doute: mais, sans être coupable, on peut être malheureux; et c'est le sort qui m'attend, si vous refusez d'agréer mon hommage" (letter 17, p.112). He employs similarly manipulative rhetoric in a later letter to Cécile, after her mother discovers her liaison with him and ensconces her in the home of Valmont's aunt, Madame de Rosemonde. Upon learning that Cécile is hesitant to comply with Valmont's (feigned) efforts to reunite her with him, Danceny goads her into cooperating by frantically accusing her of no longer being candid or loving: "Et c'est ainsi que vous m'aimez! Une si courte absence a bien changé vos sentiments. Mais pourquoi me tromper? pourquoi me dire que vous m'aimez toujours, que vous m'aimez davantage? Votre maman, en détruisant votre amour, a-t-elle aussi détruit votre candeur?" (letter 93, p.304)

The image of Danceny that emerges from these passages, therefore, is that of a young man who lies somewhere between idealistic lover and would-be seducer. His frequent recourse to the jargon of *galanterie* in his letters to Cécile (which contain clichés like "privations cruelles" [letter 31, p.140], "talisman de l'amour" and "désespoir éternel" [letter 46, p.177]), leads Laurent Versini to brand him as something of a hybrid character. In Versini's words, Danceny blends the

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ses sentiments viennent, il les montre, sa naïveté en fait tout l'art, et sa pudeur toute la décence." In contrast, he deems the women of his royal court to be off-putting because their social graces and coquetry "falsifie[nt] la nature." Marivaux, *La Double Inconstance* in *Théâtre complet*, ed. Henri Coulet and Michel Gilot (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, vol. 1, 1993), 235. See Chapter 2.

tenderness of fictional heroes like Saint-Preux (the sensitive protagonist of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's novel *La Nouvelle Héloïse* [1761]) with the eloquent and self-serving platitudes of a *petit maître*: "Dans toute sa correspondance avec Cécile, le style de Danceny est moqueusement calqué sur celui de Saint-Preux: hyperboles, exclamations, naïvetés; mais plus niaises et mêlées d'une galanterie un peu banale. Ce chevalier de Malte est un Saint-Preux qui serait un peu marquis" (*Tradition* 596).[9]

At the same time, Danceny's attraction to Cécile's ingenuousness stems from his desire to find the same kind of love that Horace comes to share with Agnès: namely, a sincere emotional bond with someone who shows him her true feelings. Despite Danceny's manipulative rhetoric, his notions of respectful courtship largely align with the ideals of chivalry: his early overtures to Cécile are chiefly aimed at demonstrating his devotion to her, rather than on pursuing her as a sexual conquest.[10] This prompts Valmont to deride him as "[un] beau héros de roman" in a letter to Merteuil, in which he recounts winning Danceny's trust by pretending to share the young man's sentimental worldview. Notably, Valmont also boasts that he managed to "enchant" Danceny with an account of his own feelings for Madame de Tourvel, the virtuous woman whom he is scheming to seduce. As Valmont sardonically explains, the Chevalier was quite taken with his supposed "candeur" when he claimed to love Tourvel as tenderly as Danceny loves Cécile:

> Enfin je le sais par cœur, ce beau héros de roman! il n'a plus de secret pour moi. Je lui ai tant dit que l'amour honnête était le bien suprême, qu'un sentiment valait mieux que dix intrigues, que j'étais moi-même, dans ce moment, amoureux et timide; il m'a trouvé enfin

[9] In light of Danceny's inexperience, sensitivity, and the fact that his pursuit of Cécile does not stem from dishonorable principles or cynical scheming, Versini also labels him as an "ingénu libertin"; that is, a young man who engages in morally questionable intrigues but retains a degree of innocence throughout (*Tradition* 102). But because Laclos imparts highly specific meanings to the word "ingénu(e)" and only refers to Cécile as such, I would argue that the term does not readily apply to Danceny (despite his naïveté).

[10] It seems quite likely that Laclos gave Danceny the title of "chevalier" in order to underscore his chivalrous mindset.

> une façon de penser si conforme à la sienne, que dans l'enchantement où il était de ma candeur, il m'a tout dit, et m'a juré une amitié sans réserve.
>
> (letter 57, pp.199-200)[11]

In Danceny's eyes, therefore, qualities like *ingénuité* and *candeur* are the lifeblood of heartfelt interpersonal connections: such traits at once compel him to love or to befriend individuals who seem to possess them and signify that these people's feelings for him are just as they appear to be. To the Chevalier, as Berlan-Lacourt observes, Cécile is endearing because "[la] 'candeur' [selon Danceny] [est] garante de confiance et d'ouverture entre les amants" (*Champ notionnel* 1479), and because "l'élan d'un cœur neuf est le garant de l'authenticité du sentiment. 'L'ingénuité' cautionne l'amour" (1013). In a similar vein, Valmont's feigned air of *candeur* in his tête-à-têtes with Danceny is all it takes to win the latter's unreserved friendship.

If Danceny can thus be seen as a parody of tender-hearted heroes like Horace and Saint-Preux, Cécile is in many ways a parody of Agnès, and arguably, a parody of the kind of ingenuousness that Agnès embodies.[12] For one, Cécile's characterization and storyline are strikingly rich in similarities to Agnès's—at least in the first half of Laclos's novel. Cécile's most obvious resemblance to Agnès is the fact that she is the object of a *précaution inutile*: her fiancé, the Comte de Gercourt, wants to marry her because he thinks that a convent-educated wife will

[11] Of course, the question of how Valmont truly feels about Tourvel is one of the novel's most enigmatic themes, so the degree to which he is deceiving Danceny here is difficult to ascertain. On occasion, Valmont also claims to see something of Danceny in himself when he reflects on the beguiling effect that Tourvel has on him. I will return to this topic in the next section of this chapter.

[12] Versini argues that Cécile and Agnès belong to the same broad category of stock characters, given that they are both subject to the whims of their awakening senses. He does not closely examine their points of commonality, however. Instead, he outlines the thematic similarities between the *Liaisons* and other texts that feature the *jeune fille* as a type character: "La peinture de l'être neuf livré à ses instincts, en qui les sens s'éveillent plus vite que la conscience du bien et du mal, remonte assurément à l'Agnès de Molière autant qu'à Manon [of the Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* (1731)]; la touche est seulement moins légère: les jeunes filles et les jeunes femmes sont tantôt des écervelées abandonnées aux caprices de leurs sens ou de leur imagination, tantôt des enfants ignorantes comme Cécile [de] Volanges, proies faciles promises aux roués […]" (*Tradition*, 101).

not be worldly enough to cuckold him. Madame de Merteuil scoffs at the absurdity of such a notion in letter 2, in which she entreats Valmont to seduce Cécile before her marriage. In Merteuil's view, this would serve as a fitting humiliation for Gercourt, who once abandoned the Marquise for another woman. She writes:

> Vous avez été ennuyé cent fois, ainsi que moi, de l'importance que met Gercourt à la femme qu'il aura, et de la sotte présomption qui lui fait croire qu'il évitera le sort inévitable. Vous connaissez ses ridicules préventions pour les éducations cloîtrées, et son préjugé, plus ridicule encore, en faveur de la retenue des blondes. [...] Prouvons-lui donc qu'il n'est qu'un sot.
>
> (letter 2, p. 82)[13]

Merteuil's shrewd cynicism also serves as a foil to Cécile's childlike *sottise*, which is another important trait that the girl shares with Agnès. The education that Cécile received in the convent of the Ursulines—an institution that had "une réputation très profane" in the eighteenth century, according to Laurent Versini—is immediately shown to be woefully inadequate for her new life in polite society.[14] In her first letter to her friend Sophie Carnay, which begins the novel, the depth of her social and sexual ignorance is all too obvious: she confesses to having mistaken a humble shoemaker for the nobleman to whom she is betrothed, adding that Sophie is sure to tease her for her foolishness. Her alarm when the man crouches at her feet renders the episode doubly humorous to the novel's reader, who can recognize it as a parody of a chivalric scene in which the man kneels to swear devotion to the woman he loves. Cécile, of course, completely misses the irony when she describes the embarrassing encounter to Sophie:

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[13] Merteuil is of course playing upon the double meaning of the word "sot" here. By making a "sot"—that is, a cuckold—of Gercourt, she will also brand him as a "sot," as in an idiot or a fool.

[14] Laurent Versini, *"Le Roman le plus intelligent": Les Liaisons dangereuses de Laclos* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 1998), 129.

> Comme tu vas te moquer de la pauvre Cécile! […] [J']étais à peine [assise], que voilà cet homme à mes genoux. Ta pauvre Cécile alors a perdu la tête; j'étais, comme a dit Maman, tout effarouchée. Je me suis levée en jetant un cri perçant; … tiens, comme ce jour du tonnerre. […] En effet, ma chère amie, le monsieur était un cordonnier.
>
> (letter 1, p.80)

Finally, Cécile's misunderstanding with the shoemaker also reveals that, like Agnès, she is not being guided by an attentive parent, particularly when it comes to her interactions with men. Madame de Volanges, upon observing her daughter's ridiculous *gaucherie*, merely laughs at it and shows no concern whatsoever about Cécile's inability to conduct herself sensibly (letter 1, p.81). Cécile's realization that she cannot depend on her mother for guidance soon leads her to grow self-conscious about her ignorance, much as Agnès does upon realizing the extent of the knowledge that has been kept from her. As David McCallam points out:

> [L]es premières missives [de Cécile] sont […] une litanie de plaintes et de craintes de ce qu'elle ne sait pas: "Je ne sais encore rien" [letter 3, p.83], "ce qui m'inquiétait le plus était de ne pas savoir [ce qu'on pensait sur mon compte]" [letter 3, p.83], […] "je ne suis pas plus instruite que le premier jour" [letter 7, p.93].[15]

Like Agnès, therefore, Cécile begins her story as a comical figure rather than as a sympathetic heroine, but her early letters also serve to draw the reader's attention to the dangers to which her *sottise* exposes her. As much as we may laugh at her social ineptitude, it is also central to the novel's serious purpose as a dark satire: her mother's disinterest in her education leaves her unable to anticipate the ways in which others might seek to manipulate or deceive her. Cécile herself unwittingly underscores this problem in letter 3, in which she recalls overhearing a

[15] David McCallam, *L'art de l'équivoque chez Laclos* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2008), 72.

conversation between two men who were talking about her. The fact that their predatory sexual banter goes over her head bodes well for Merteuil's plan to trick her into losing her virginity (a plan that Merteuil proposes to Valmont in the letter that immediately precedes this one). Cécile writes: "J'ai encore entendu, après souper, un homme que je suis sûre qui parlait de moi, et qui disait à un autre: 'Il faut laisser mûrir cela, nous verrons cet hiver.' C'est peut-être celui-là qui doit m'épouser […]. Je voudrais bien savoir ce qui en est" (letter 3, p.84).[16]

For all the similarities between Cécile and Agnès, important differences emerge if one compares the ways in which each girl expresses herself through language. In some ways, Cécile's manner of speech in the novel's first half does resemble Agnès's, especially in letters in which she tries to navigate her budding romance with Danceny. For Cécile, as for Agnès, language offers a means of exploring the unfamiliar sensations that her admirer stirs in her. For example, upon receiving Danceny's first letter, she describes the experience to Sophie with a sense of wonder: "Depuis que j'ai lu sa lettre, j'ai tant de plaisir, que je ne peux plus songer à autre chose. [...] Je l'ai emportée dans mon lit, et puis je l'ai baisée comme si… C'est peut-être mal fait de baiser une lettre comme ça, mais je n'ai pas pu m'en empêcher" (letter 16, p.110). She expresses the same amazement in her next letter to Sophie, in which she attempts to convey how she felt during a moment when Danceny clasped her hand: "il prit ma main qu'il serra… Mais d'une façon! … ce ne fut qu'un moment: mais je ne saurais te dire le plaisir que ça m'a fait" (letter 18, p.114). Her curiosity about these new pleasures and her struggle to articulate their effect on her are reminiscent of Agnès's efforts to put her burgeoning feelings for Horace into words. Consider for example Agnès's remark about him in the second Act of *L'École des femmes*: "[...] toutes les fois que je

[16] Cécile's obliviousness to the sexual subtext of this conversation sets up another notable parallel with *L'École des femmes*. When Agnès complains about her fleas in Act I, Arnolphe takes the opportunity to promise her that she will soon have "someone"—namely, himself—to "chase them away" at night. To his amusement, she takes him literally and naïvely replies, "Vous me ferez plaisir." See Molière, *LDF*, I.3, vv. 235-8.

l'entends parler, / La douceur me chatouille et là-dedans remue / *Certain je ne sais quoi* dont je suis toute émue" (*LDF*, II.5, vv. 562-4; my emphasis). Moreover, Cécile echoes Agnès when she declares her love to Danceny in letter 30, in that she assures him that her *aveu* was unavoidable and protests that she does not wish to do anything "bad": "pour toute chose au monde, je ne voudrais pas faire quelque chose qui fût mal; et même je ne serais sûrement pas convenue de mon amour, si j'avais pu m'en empêcher […]" (letter 30, p.138). Agnès says something similar in her letter to Horace:

> Comme je commence à connaître qu'on m'a toujours tenue dans l'ignorance, j'ai peur de mettre quelque chose qui ne soit pas bien, et d'en dire plus que je ne devrais. En vérité, […] je serais bien aise d'être à vous. Peut-être qu'il y a du mal à dire cela; mais enfin je ne puis m'en empêcher.
>
> (*LDF*, III.4, at v. 947)

If we examine each girl's words within their broader contexts, however, the differences between them become quite obvious. The comparison also highlights the fact that Danceny's infatuation with Cécile blinds him to troubling aspects of her character from the very beginning of their courtship. On the one hand, Agnès's concern about the possible implications of writing to Horace is genuine, given that it stems from her dawning sense of how ignorant and vulnerable she is ("Comme je commence à connaître qu'on m'a toujours tenue dans l'ignorance […]"). Letter 30 of the *Liaisons*, on the other hand, is just one of many in which Cécile claims to be averse to doing something "bad" (in this case, writing to Danceny), and then knowingly proceeds to behave badly anyway. She occasionally attempts to rationalize her actions by offering a semblance of moral justification for them, particularly when she senses that they would not meet with other people's approval. In letter 16, for example, she tries to convince Sophie (and herself) that answering

Danceny's letter would be an act of kindness, and that refusing to respond would therefore be more wrong than "consoling" him with a reply would be. The rhetoric that she adopts to make that argument gives us a sense of the pedantic jargon that she must have heard from the nuns in her convent—and shows us that the deeper meaning of the moral instruction she received from them had little impact upon her:

> Je sais bien que ça ne se doit pas, et pourtant il me le demande […]. Je voudrais bien le consoler; mais je ne voudrais rien faire qui fût mal. On nous recommande tant d'avoir bon cœur! et puis on nous défend de suivre ce qu'il inspire, quand c'est pour un homme! Ça n'est pas juste non plus. Est-ce qu'un homme n'est pas notre prochain comme une femme, et plus encore? car enfin n'a-t-on pas son père comme sa mère, son frère comme sa sœur? il reste toujours le mari de plus.
>
> (letter 16, pp.110-111)

In most instances, however, Cécile's justifications for doing as she pleases are limited to childish deflections and excuses. Rather than admitting her desire to pursue what she wants, she routinely denies responsibility for her choices altogether. For example, when Sophie scolds her for answering Danceny's first letter, Cécile concedes Sophie's point that it is wrong to write to men—but then she insists that the situation with Danceny is exceptional and absolves herself by claiming that she did not "want" to reply to him: "Sûrement, en général, on ne doit pas répondre; et tu as bien vu, par ma lettre d'hier, que je ne le voulais pas non plus: mais c'est que je ne crois pas que personne se soit jamais trouvé dans le cas où je suis" (letter 18, p.113). Moreover, Sophie's ability to advise Cécile wisely (despite having grown up in the same convent) is an early clue that the latter's choices stem not only from her poor education, but from her natural tendency to yield to her desires with minimal resistance. Her refusals to heed Sophie's warnings appear often in her

early letters, as in this example: "Il est clair, dis-tu, que je ne dois pas répondre. Tu en parles bien à ton aise; et d'ailleurs, tu ne sais pas au juste ce qui en est: tu n'es pas là pour voir. Je suis sûre que si tu étais à ma place, tu ferais comme moi" (letter 18, pp.112-113).[17] The degree to which Cécile is aware of her own hypocrisy at this point in the narrative is difficult to ascertain, but her correspondence throughout the novel is filled with claims of having been swept away by feelings and events that lie beyond her control. By Aurora Wolfgang's count, "In [Cécile's] [twenty-five] letters, ten times she protests 'je n'ai pas pu m'en empêcher' [...], five times she insists 'ce n'est pas ma faute' [...], five times she confesses 'c'est plus fort que moi' [...], [and] twice she admits 'malgré moi' [...]."[18]

In addition to refusing to accept responsibility for herself, Cécile is shown to be excessively self-centered. As Laurent Versini has observed, her writing style stands out for her constant use of "je" and "moi" (*Tradition* 320), which only accentuates her preoccupation with excusing her own misbehavior. She unwittingly reveals both of these character flaws in her first letter to Danceny, in which she entreats him not to judge her for writing to him or to get her into trouble for it. Danceny, blinded by love, is oblivious to the implications of her words, but the novel's reader can clearly see that her only misgiving about doing something "bad" is that it could negatively affect other people's opinions of her:

> Je n'en sens pas moins aujourd'hui que je ne dois pas [vous écrire]: pourtant, comme je l'ai promis, je ne veux pas manquer à ma parole, et cela doit bien vous prouver l'amitié que j'ai pour vous. […] J'espère aussi que vous ne direz à personne que je vous ai écrit;

[17] René Démoris argues that Sophie's given name is symbolic of her role as a voice of reason to Cécile, given that it is derived from the Greek name "Sophia," which signifies "wisdom." He also points out that "dans les romans, Sophie est le plus souvent une jeune fille vertueuse" ("Symbolique du nom" 113).
[18] Aurora Wolfgang, *Gender and Voice in the French Novel, 1730-1782* (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), 162.

> parce que sûrement on m'en blâmerait, et que cela pourrait me causer bien du chagrin. J'espère surtout que vous-même n'en prendrez pas mauvaise idée de moi, ce qui me ferait plus de peine que tout.
>
> (letter 19, p.115)

In short, for Cécile, pursuing pleasure and avoiding displeasure always take precedence over all other concerns. As Versini argues, "Elle pense plus à la contrariété que lui vaudra la mauvaise humeur d'autrui qu'aux peines qu'elle peut causer […]. Son égoïsme ne pense qu'à éviter l'ennui et les ennuis" (*Tradition* 318).

From Cécile's earliest letters, therefore, it is evident that she does not possess the kind of ingenuousness that Danceny thinks he sees in her: that is, her innocent demeanor has no basis in goodness, honesty, or emotional depth. Indeed, at times it would be accurate to describe her as *dis*ingenuous, given her efforts to disguise her amoral actions with untruths, like "je ne le voulais pas" (letter 18, p.113). Yet, rather than labeling her as a "fausse ingénue," as Versini does (*Tradition* 102), I believe that the point to be made is that Danceny's idea of her ingenuousness is overly sentimental. Although Cécile lacks the heartfelt candor that makes Agnès memorable, her flaws align with the pejorative connotations of the word "ingénuité" that I discussed in Chapter 1: namely, youthful imprudence, lack of discretion, and *niaiserie* (a term that denotes a type of simple-minded innocence that stems from inexperience). The second paragraph of the *Encyclopédie* article "Ingénuité" (1766) applies to her with remarkable exactitude: "L'*ingénuité* a peu pensé, n'est pas assez instruite; […]. [Elle] avoue, révele, manque au secret, à la prudence; […]. [Elle] semble exclure la réflexion; elle n'est point d'habitude sans un peu de bétise, la naïveté sans beaucoup de sentiment."[19]

[19] *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert (8:744), accessed via the ARTFL Project, http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu.

Furthermore, for all her disingenuous language, Cécile always writes with the simplicity and spontaneity that are typical of literary ingénues. Her writing style, as Aurora Wolfgang has noted, "emphasize[s] the moment of writing; nothing is corrected or revised." Consequently, "[It] epitomizes raw and unpolished prose; the [novel's] reader experiences her ideas seemingly before she does" (*Gender and Voice* 163). In light of that, the *Encyclopédie*'s definition of ingenuousness readily applies to Cécile's approach to letter writing, thanks to the inclusion of this line: "L'*ingénuité* […] avoue, révele, manque au secret, à la prudence" (8:744). Unlike Agnès, who grows wary of the power of her words early on (as she says to Horace, "Je veux vous écrire […] mais […] je me défie de mes paroles" [*LDF*, III.4, at v. 947]), Cécile worries only that her letters will get her into trouble with her mother. As a result, she never seriously considers the possibility that the things she writes or says could leave her vulnerable to anyone else, including Danceny and Merteuil. The Marquise doubtlessly has Cécile's letters to Danceny in mind when she philosophizes on that kind of heedlessness in letter 33 (written to Valmont), in which she comments that "les enfants [...] quand ils écrivent 'je vous aime,' ne savent pas qu'ils disent 'je me rends'" (letter 33, p.144).[20] In the same vein, Cécile also fails to realize that language can convey or conceal more than one says outright, and that she should therefore not take other people's words at face value. Thus, the ingenuousness that Danceny takes as a sign of her sincerity and kindness is, in reality, a sign that her mind is underdeveloped. In essence, it reflects her weakness of character, her superficial perception of the world, and her childlike lack of introspection.

[20] In fact, as Cécile divulges to Sophie in letter 29, it was Merteuil herself who granted Cécile permission to declare her love to Danceny. Cécile, of course, takes this as a sign of Merteuil's friendship for her; yet as the novel's reader is aware, her confidante's real motive is to get her to sleep with Danceny before her marriage to Gercourt.

Given that love and inexperience are the causes of Danceny's blindness to Cécile's shortcomings, it is no surprise that her flaws are readily apparent to worldly cynics like Merteuil and Valmont. As Anne Vila observes, both libertines deploy the rhetoric of natural philosophers to cast themselves as superior beings on the basis of their cerebrally oriented sensibility, and to define their victims (including Cécile) as unenlightened "types" who lack the fortitude to control their hearts and senses. In Vila's words:

> [S]ensibility is the key element in the reductive conception of self that Merteuil and Valmont apply to everyone else: being sensitive in a soft, "feminine," involuntary way means being utterly predictable in the eyes of these roués and virtually defenseless when subject to their manipulations of language, setting, and situation. The novel's libertines clearly use an entirely different conception of self in composing their self-portraits: they see themselves as beings who are matchlessly clever, invulnerable to easy sentiment, impervious to outside influence, and coolheaded in all of their adventures. What makes all that possible is the radically unconventional kind of sensibility that [they] claim to possess: they have cultivated an intense capacity for feeling that is evident in their relentless search for new modes of erotic pleasure, yet they exercise a rigorously willful control over their sensibility so as to ensure that it remains centered not in their hearts or senses but rather in their minds alone.
>
> (*Enlightenment and Pathology* 271)[21]

[21] Several critics have explored the additional ways in which Valmont and Merteuil use rhetoric to define others as types and to manipulate them accordingly. Their tactics include using literary jargon to seduce their victims, adapting scenes from plays and novels into their intrigues, and labeling their victims with monikers like "espèce," "héros de roman," "belle prude," and (in Cécile's case) "belle ingénue." On these topics, see for example Peter Brooks, *The Novel of Worldliness: Crébillon, Marivaux, Laclos, Stendhal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 177-179; Elizabeth J. MacArthur, "Trading Genres: Epistolarity and Theatricality in *Britannicus* and *Les Liaisons dangereuses*," in *Yale French Studies*, no. 76, *Autour de Racine: Studies in Intertextuality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989): 243-264, at 254-264; and Christine Roulston, *Virtue, Gender, and the Authentic Self in*

In keeping with these criteria, Merteuil describes Cécile to Valmont as a naïve, impressionable child after having spent a single evening in the girl's company (letter 2). Yet in contrast to Valmont, who dismisses Cécile as a boring target for sexual conquest (letter 4), Merteuil initially has high hopes for the girl's development and soon resolves to school her in the art of libertinism. One of the promising traits that the Marquise first notices in Cécile—apart from her intense curiosity about sex and heightened sensitivity to physical sensations—is what Merteuil describes as her "fausseté naturelle": that is, her instinctual tendency to lie about her improper actions and desires. Merteuil also predicts that this instinct will serve Cécile well because the girl has an "air" of *ingénuité*, in that her childlike demeanor makes her appear more guileless than she truly is. Merteuil provides an overview of these observations in letter 38, in which she sketches a verbal portrait of Cécile for Valmont. Her words are intended to persuade Valmont to seduce Cécile—and to thereby fulfill Merteuil's plan to humiliate Gercourt—but they also express Merteuil's sincere belief in the girl's potential as a protégée:

> [E]lle est vraiment délicieuse! cela n'a ni caractère ni principes; jugez combien sa société sera douce et facile. Je ne crois pas qu'elle brille jamais par le sentiment; mais tout annonce en elle les sensations les plus vives. Sans esprit et sans finesse, *elle a pourtant une certaine fausseté naturelle*, si l'on peut parler ainsi, qui quelquefois m'étonne moi-même, et *qui réussira d'autant mieux, que sa figure offre l'image de la candeur et de l'ingénuité*. Elle est naturellement très caressante, et je m'en amuse quelquefois: sa petite tête se monte avec une facilité incroyable; et elle est alors d'autant plus plaisante, qu'elle ne sait rien, absolument rien, de ce qu'elle désire tant de savoir. […] [E]lle me prie de l'instruire, avec

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Eighteenth-Century Fiction: Richardson, Rousseau, and Laclos (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 151-153.

> une bonne foi réellement séduisante. En vérité, je suis presque jalouse de celui à qui ce plaisir est réservé.
>
> (letter 38, p.156; my emphasis)[22]

In Merteuil's eyes, Cécile's active senses, sexual curiosity, and inclination to deceive seem promising for one simple reason: they are qualities that Merteuil strove to nurture in herself at Cécile's age, when she made her first foray into the perilous world of French high society. In fact, Merteuil's debut in that social setting as a young, largely ignorant ingénue was what compelled her to set out on her path to becoming a libertine. Although she (unlike Cécile) was never cloistered in a convent, she describes that as a hindrance to her early education, given that her lack of close friendships curtailed her means of learning about sex and other adult matters. As she puts it to Valmont in letter 81 (the epistle in which she reveals the origins of her libertine philosophy), her desire to understand the world sparked her determination to seek knowledge on her own. She also notes that her precociously active mind made her singularly well suited to this task:

> Vous jugez bien que, comme toutes les jeunes filles, je cherchais à deviner l'amour et ses plaisirs: mais n'ayant jamais été au couvent, n'ayant point de bonne amie, et surveillée par une mère vigilante, je n'avais que des idées très vagues et que je ne pouvais fixer; la nature même, dont assurément je n'ai eu qu'à me louer depuis, ne me donnait encore aucun indice. […] Ma tête seule fermentait; je ne désirais pas de jouir, je voulais savoir; le désir de m'instruire m'en suggéra les moyens.
>
> (letter 81, pp.264-265)

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[22] The Pléiade edition of the *Liaisons* notes that in an earlier draft of this letter, the first line of this passage reads as follows: "cela n'a *ni n'aura* caractère ni principes" (my emphasis). It seems likely that Laclos chose to cross out "n'aura" because at this point in the novel, Merteuil has an optimistic vision of how Cécile will respond to her tutoring. But as we shall see, Merteuil's original phrasing proves to be the more accurate assessment of Cécile. See Laclos, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Maurice Allem (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Librairie Gallimard, 1951), 761, n.1 to letter 38.

Thus left to her own devices, Merteuil devised a self-imposed educational regimen which, in Vila's words, centered on becoming "a discreetly self-taught, scientifically methodical student of human nature—including her own" (*Enlightenment and Pathology* 280). To that end, she cultivated her naturally sensitive constitution (in its mental and physical aspects) in order to achieve a strategic mastery of herself, and she complimented those efforts with careful observations of the world around her. In doing so, as Vila argues, she created "a *hygienic* regimen designed to act upon the particular sensible substrate with which she was born—that of a naïve and powerless fifteen-year-old girl" (279; her emphasis).[23] To prevent others from interfering in her quest to educate herself, Merteuil began by learning how to control her facial expressions; that is, how to avoid allowing her natural physical impulses to ingenuously betray her thoughts and feelings to others. As she reminds Valmont in letter 81, that ability continues to serve as one of her most essential weapons in the theatrical realm of polite society:

> [F]orcée souvent de cacher les objets de mon attention aux yeux de ceux qui m'entouraient, j'essayai de guider les miens à mon gré; j'obtins dès lors de prendre à volonté ce regard distrait que vous avez loué si souvent. Encouragée par ce premier succès, je tâchai de régler de même les divers mouvements de ma figure. Ressentais-je quelque chagrin, je m'étudiais à prendre l'air de la sérénité […]; j'ai porté le zèle jusqu'à me causer des douleurs volontaires, pour chercher pendant ce temps l'expression du plaisir. […] C'est ainsi que j'ai su prendre, sur ma physionomie, cette puissance dont je vous ai vu quelquefois si étonné.
>
> (letter 81, pp.263-264)

[23] Vila uses the term "born" here in reference to two things: Merteuil's inborn mental-physical constitution, and what Vila describes as her "symbolic birth" as an adolescent, when she entered society for the first time (279).

After perfecting her talent for manipulating appearances, Merteuil proceeded to experiment with the physical pleasures of sex, beginning with the loss of her virginity on her wedding night. As she explains to Valmont, the experience was enlightening because it sparked an awakening that was at once physical and intellectual, thanks to the fact that her intense sensitivity to feeling happens to be naturally centered in her mind: "Cette première nuit […] ne me présentait qu'une occasion d'expérience: douleur et plaisir, j'observai tout exactement, et ne voyais dans ces diverses sensations, que des faits à recueillir et à méditer" (letter 81, p.265). Her sexual awakening also presented a new opportunity to hone her theatrical skills: until her husband's death, she hid her extramarital affairs from him by feigning disinterest in sex and adopting what was by then a *false* air of ingenuousness. In other words, as she explains to Valmont, deceiving her husband was a simple matter of acting like the empty-headed child whom everyone (her husband included) assumed her to be: "[Ma] froideur apparente fut […] le fondement inébranlable de son aveugle confiance: j'y joignis […] l'air d'étourderie qu'autorisait mon âge; et jamais il ne me jugea plus enfant que dans les moments où je le jouais avec plus d'audace" (letter 81, pp.265-266). Thus, thanks to her efforts to develop her mind in secret, appearing innocent and naïve did not leave the young Merteuil vulnerable to the worldly adults around her: on the contrary, it became an asset because it led her potential enemies and lovers to underestimate her.

Merteuil's libertinism is therefore the product of her efforts to nurture her mind and senses to their full potential and, in support of that goal, to turn her social position to her advantage at every opportunity. As Vila explains, what made all this possible for Merteuil was the fact that she was "disposed from an early age to channel her sensibility or capacity for erotic pleasure to her head—without, for all that, evacuating it from her body" (*Enlightenment and Pathology* 281). Consequently, she possessed the necessary qualities to become "a *true* libertine—someone who is

constitutionally hardwired to embrace vice as a higher, more truthful, and more intensely satisfying mode of being" (283; Vila's emphasis). As an adult, her skill at theatrics and keen understanding of human nature allow her to thrive in society as an undetected *intrigante*, despite her numerous sexual conquests. She makes her pride in her ability to safeguard her reputation quite clear to Valmont in letter 81, in which she rebukes him for questioning her plan to seduce and disgrace a renowned *libertin* named Prévan: "[S]i, au milieu de ces révolutions fréquentes, ma réputation s'est pourtant conservée pure[,] n'avez-vous pas dû en conclure que, née pour venger mon sexe et maîtriser le vôtre, j'avais su me créer des moyens inconnus jusqu'à moi?" (letter 81, p.262)[24]

Merteuil's claim that her natural destiny is to "master" men and "avenge" her sex brings us to the driving force behind her philosophy, and to what she hopes to accomplish by taking Cécile on as a protégée. As Merteuil's boasts of her own uniqueness suggest, she has not undertaken her libertine crusade to pursue an agenda of altruistic feminism. Rather, her quest for self-transformation stems from two other motives: first, her resentment of the fact that French society places *her*, as a woman, in an inferior position in relation to men; and second, her desire to distinguish herself from conventional men and women, whom she regards as lesser beings.[25] She touches on the first point when recalling her realization that, because she was a young girl, she was not regarded as entitled to think independently or to keep her thoughts to herself: "J'étais bien jeune encore, et presque sans intérêt: mais je n'avais à moi que ma pensée, et je m'indignais qu'on

[24] Merteuil is responding here to letters 76 and 79. In these letters, Valmont informs her that Prévan intends to pursue her and warns her to be cautious. Merteuil, furious at his assumption that no woman could best a male libertine in direct combat, refutes his arguments by explaining her methodology to him in letter 81.

[25] Critics have offered a wide variety of perspectives on Merteuil's reasons for practicing libertinism. For a reading of her philosophy as an assertion of her right to seek pleasure, see Thomas M. Kavanagh, *Enlightened Pleasures: Eighteenth-Century France and the New Epicureanism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 128-129 and 143-148. For a reading of Merteuil as a *philosophe* who transforms herself to assert her uniqueness while pursing mental and physical enlightenment, see Anne Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology*, 278-280. On the topic of how social conventions may serve as motivating forces for Merteuil, see for example Susan Winnett, *Terrible Sociability: The Text of Manners in Laclos, Goethe, and James* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 55-60.

pût me la ravir ou me la surprendre contre ma volonté" (letter 81, p.264).[26] She also expounds on her contempt for male libertines (including Valmont) and for women who heedlessly follow the whims of their own hearts or senses. She mocks the former because their privileged status as men allows them to treat women in almost any way they please, with no need to worry about public condemnation or to refine their skills as seducers; and the latter, because they delude themselves into being seduced and disgraced by such men (letter 81, pp.261-263). For Merteuil, therefore, molding herself into a principled, cerebral libertine represents a twofold victory. First, it is an act of rebellion against the poor education traditionally given to girls of her social station (including Cécile), which leaves their minds to languish and predisposes them to sexual subjugation; and second, it grants her the glory of living on her own terms as a unique, enlightened being. As she boasts to Valmont: "[Q]u'avez-vous donc fait, que je n'aie surpassé mille fois? […] [Q]u'ai-je de commun avec ces femmes inconsidérées? quand m'avez-vous vue m'écarter des règles que je me suis prescrites, et manquer à mes principes? […] [J]e les ai créés, et je puis dire que je suis mon ouvrage" (letter 81, pp.261-263).

Within this context, Cécile initially appears to offer Merteuil a chance to break new ground in her philosophical pursuits. For one, Merteuil's efforts to mold Cécile evoke the myth of Pygmalion, which (as we have seen in previous chapters) is a common motif in narratives that feature ingénues.[27] By grooming Cécile to become a libertine like herself, Merteuil could enjoy the egocentric pleasure of having a disciple; that is, she could turn Cécile into a living embodiment

[26] Merteuil portrays her efforts to enrich and protect her mind as a battle between herself and the world more than once in this letter. In fact, she begins her account of her youth on that topic: "Entrée dans le monde dans le temps où, fille encore, j'étais vouée par état au silence et à l'inaction, j'ai su en profiter pour observer et réfléchir. Tandis qu'on me croyait étourdie ou distraite, écoutant peu à la vérité les discours qu'on s'empressait à me tenir, je recueillais avec soin ceux qu'on cherchait à me cacher" (letter 81, p.263).

[27] Among the characters and authors whom I discuss in this study, those who take on the role of a Pygmalion in some capacity include Arnolphe of *L'École des femmes* (Chapter 1), Déterville of *Lettres Péruviennes* (Chapter 2), and Denis Diderot in his position as an art critic and novelist (Chapter 3).

of her philosophical ideals, much in the way that Pygmalion fetishizes his beloved statue. Educating Cécile would also allow Merteuil to relive her own triumphant youth, given that the myth of Pygmalion is an apt metaphor for describing her self-transformation: as Thomas Kavanagh observes, she is "a Galatea who is her own Pygmalion," by which he means that she simultaneously played the roles of the artist (Pygmalion) and his statue-wife (Galatea) as she carried out her quest to become a libertine (*Enlightened Pleasures* 144). Furthermore, Cécile could become an accomplice to Merteuil's sexual intrigues, thereby opening up opportunities to invent new scenarios. In that vein, Merteuil begins to imagine her future partnership with her protégée as an appealing alternative to the one that she has with Valmont: although she values him as a friend, ally, and admirer, his worth becomes compromised in her eyes as he constantly underestimates her and grows attached to Tourvel over the course of the novel. To the Marquise, therefore, enlisting Cécile as a female and junior partner appears to present a means of acquiring a more amenable companion. In Anne Vila's words, "such an alliance could not be contaminated by the traditional male-female sexual dynamic that ultimately spoils [Merteuil's] friendship with Valmont" (*Enlightenment and Pathology* 283).[28]

With these ideas in mind, Merteuil sets out to fulfill what she comes to see as the most crucial part of Cécile's early education: namely, to cause the girl to lose her virginity not only in service of her tutor's vendetta against Gercourt, but to "awaken" her in much the same way as Merteuil was awoken on her wedding night. In other words, in light of Cécile's pronounced *sottise*,

[28] Merteuil's desire to conscript a protégée into a private, two-women army of libertines might also explain the thematic significance of her noble title. In his *Encyclopédie* article "Marquis" (10:143), Louis de Jaucourt notes that the title originally signified "un seigneur commandant sur la frontiere." That role is clearly analogous to Merteuil's militaristic campaign to secure the parameters of her own existence and her efforts to recruit Cécile to her cause. Jaucourt does add that by the eighteenth century, the traditional meaning of "marquis" had become obsolete in France (10:143); but it is interesting to speculate that Laclos, who served in the French army, might have had the title's original implications in mind when he chose it for Merteuil. Text accessed via the ARTFL Project, http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu.

the Marquise needs her to undergo the process of *déniaisement* so that her mind and senses will activate on a deeper level.[29] Merteuil stresses the importance of this moment to Valmont in letter 54 when recalling a recent conversation with her protégée: "Je lui ai promis de la former et je crois que je lui tiendrai parole. Je me suis souvent aperçue du besoin d'avoir une femme dans ma confidence, et j'aimerais mieux celle-là qu'une autre; mais je ne puis en rien faire, tant qu'elle ne sera pas… ce qu'il faut qu'elle soit" (by which she means "dépucelée") (letter 54, p.195). At first, Merteuil's efforts on this front seem promising: she easily persuades the neglectful Madame de Volanges to trust her to act as Cécile's guide, and is thereby able to encourage the girl to pursue a liaison with Danceny (letters 29 and 63). She also provides her pupil with some preliminary sexual education. In letter 63, for example, she recalls visiting Cécile after her separation from Danceny and "consoling" her by guiding her through some erotic roleplay: "'S[i] [Danceny] était là,' lui dis-je; puis brodant sur ce thème, je la reconduisis, de distraction en distraction, à ne plus se souvenir du tout qu'elle était affligée" (p.212).[30] But for the most part, Merteuil does not portray such moments as transformative: they serve to stoke Cécile's interest in sex and to give her tutor

[29] The idea that sexual pleasure serves to awaken the minds of young girls—that is, to produce the effect known as "déniaisement"—is a longstanding trope in French literature, as I discussed in Chapter 1. For further reading on this topic, see Christophe Martin, *Éducations négatives: Fictions d'expérimentation pédagogique au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris: Éditions Classiques Garnier, 2010), 209-291; and Alexandre Wenger, "Comment l'esprit vient aux filles… et comment les garçons le perdent: Maladie d'amour, médecine et fiction romanesque au XVIIIe siècle," in *L'Esprit créateur*, vol. 56, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 11-21.

[30] When recounting this scene to Valmont, Merteuil also expresses an erotic attraction to Cécile's weeping. As her remarks suggest, she found the girl's tears alluring because they enhanced her physical beauty and—more importantly—because they spoke to her potential as a seductress: "Pour peu qu'elle prenne de coquetterie, je vous garantis qu'elle pleurera souvent: pour cette fois, elle pleurait sans malice… Frappée de ce nouvel agrément que je ne lui connaissais pas, et que j'étais bien aise d'observer, je ne lui donnai d'abord que de ces consolations gauches, qui augmentent plus les peines qu'elles ne les soulagent; […]. [B]ientôt ses cheveux épars tombèrent sur ses épaules et sur sa gorge entièrement découvertes; je l'embrassai; elle se laissa aller dans mes bras, et ses larmes recommencèrent à couler sans effort. Dieu! qu'elle était belle! Ah! si Magdeleine [i.e. Mary Magdalene] était ainsi, elle dut être plus dangereuse pénitente que pécheresse" (letter 63, pp.211-212). It is interesting to note the thematic similarities between this scene and Diderot's remarks about feeling seduced by Greuze's *Weeping Girl* (1765). See Chapter 3.

a sense of her natural proclivities, but the Marquise is adamant that only a true deflowering can lay the foundation for serious instruction.

To Merteuil's disappointment, however, her faith in Cécile's potential as a libertine turns out to be as misplaced as Danceny's belief in the girl's tenderhearted guilelessness. Rather than awakening Cécile to a higher level of being, her sexual initiation reveals that her *sottise* is too ingrained to be overcome by Merteuil and Valmont's tutoring. The event occurs when Valmont enters Cécile's room on the pretext of delivering a letter from Danceny, and then proceeds to coerce her into sex through a combination of amorous caresses and intimidation (letter 96). Afterward, Cécile writes a frenzied letter to Merteuil in which her shame and despair are mixed with bewilderment over her failure to resist the pleasure she experienced during the encounter (letter 97). Merteuil, deducing that her pupil was mindlessly swept away by her intense physical response to Valmont, pinpoints the most revealing passages of Cécile's letter and throws them back at her in reply:

> Allons, un peu de bonne foi. Là, ce trouble qui vous empêchait de *faire comme vous disiez*, qui vous faisait trouver *si difficile de se défendre*, qui vous rendait *comme fâchée*, quand Valmont s'en est allé, était-ce bien la honte qui le causait? ou si c'était le plaisir? *et ses façons de dire auxquelles on ne sait comment répondre,* cela ne viendrait-il pas de *ses façons de faire?* Ah! petite fille, vous mentez, et vous mentez à votre amie!
>
> (letter 105, p.344; her emphasis)

The Marquise concludes by offering Cécile some words of advice, insisting that she ought to continue her liaison with Valmont and to learn to write less ingenuously: "Voyez donc à soigner davantage votre style. Vous écrivez toujours comme un enfant. […] [C]'est que vous dites tout ce que vous pensez, et rien de ce que vous ne pensez pas" (p.347). Yet she does not hold back on

expressing her frustration at her pupil's unrelenting *niaiserie*: "[S]i vous ne vous formez pas davantage, que voulez-vous qu'on fasse de vous? Que peut-on espérer, si ce qui fait venir l'esprit aux filles, semble au contraire vous l'ôter?" (p.344)

Cécile's failure to mentally awaken also prompts Merteuil to use the word "ingénuité" for the second time; yet in this instance, she invests the term with a medical connotation that links Cécile's ingenuousness to her biological makeup. In reply to Valmont's report of his night with Cécile, Merteuil deploys medical jargon to diagnose the cause of her pupil's poor performance: ultimately, she declares that the girl is afflicted with a condition that Merteuil describes as "une sotte ingénuité." By that, Merteuil means that Cécile's mind is arrested in a childlike (or even animal-like) developmental stage because her foolishness is pathological and ingrained: that is, it makes her a slave to her senses and does not respond to the "remedy" of being sexually deflowered. This kind of *sotte ingénuité*, in Merteuil's view, is the most dangerous "malady" that a woman can possess because it compels her to yield to anyone who gives her pleasure (in other words, to be one of the types of women whom Merteuil reviles in letter 81 for being easy prey for men). As the Marquise puts it to Valmont:

> Je me désintéresse entièrement sur son compte. J'avais eu quelque envie d'en faire au moins une intrigante subalterne […] mais je vois qu'il n'y a pas d'étoffe; elle a *une sotte ingénuité* qui n'a pas cédé même au spécifique que vous avez employé, lequel pourtant n'en manque guère; *et c'est selon moi, la maladie la plus dangereuse que femme puisse avoir. Elle dénote, surtout, une faiblesse de caractère presque toujours incurable et qui s'oppose à tout*; de sorte que, tandis que nous nous occuperions à former cette petite fille pour l'intrigue, nous n'en ferions qu'une femme facile. Or, je ne connais rien de si plat que cette facilité de bêtise, qui se rend sans savoir ni comment ni pourquoi, uniquement parce

> qu'on l'attaque et qu'elle ne sait pas résister. *Ces sortes de femmes ne sont absolument que des machines à plaisir*.
>
> (letter 106, p.349; my emphasis)

As Merteuil's use of the expression "machines à plaisir" suggests, her larger point here is that Cécile's ingenuousness is a symptom of a deeper affliction: namely, she is hard-wired with a type of sensibility that has set *insurmountable* limits on her ability to learn and to exert self-control. Merteuil concedes that Cécile might make some progress if, through further sexual relations with Valmont, "[son] ingénuité se corrige" (letter 106, p.350); but she nonetheless concludes that the girl does not have what it takes to truly master libertinism. Unlike Merteuil, who excels as a self-made libertine thanks to her cerebrally centered mode of sensibility, Cécile, in Anne Vila's words, turns out to have "only one, typically female center of sensible pleasure, and it isn't her head." Because of this, she is revealed to be what Merteuil regards as "the lowest species of female: the 'pleasure machine,' a being too dim-witted to resist or master the bodily sensibility that is naturally aroused during a seduction" (*Enlightenment and Pathology* 284). As such, in Merteuil's eyes, Cécile is doomed to remain an automaton who will never achieve self-mastery: indeed, the narrow range of functions she is capable of performing will not even be enough to jolt her mind out of its state of stupor.

Cécile's reply to Merteuil—which is the last letter that she actively contributes to the novel—does reveal that her tutor's exasperated words of advice have accomplished one thing: they have persuaded Cécile to consciously embrace deceitfulness and pleasure-seeking, the two vices that she had been inclined to indulge since receiving Danceny's first love letter.[31] Seizing on the

[31] Cécile is the ostensible author of two letters that appear later in the novel: letters 117 and 156, which are both addressed to Danceny. However, she does not compose either of these letters herself: she merely copies them at Valmont's dictation. Valmont is therefore the true author of the correspondence that appears under Cécile's name after letter 109 (i.e. Cécile's reply to Merteuil).

fact that she has Merteuil's permission to continue sleeping with Valmont, Cécile forgets her doubts and despair to give herself over to excitement. She also assures Merteuil that she will conceal her actions from Danceny and her mother:

> Je vois bien que ce que je croyais un si grand malheur, n'en est presque pas un; et il faut avouer qu'il y a bien du plaisir; de façon que je ne m'afflige presque plus. Il n'y a que l'idée de Danceny qui me tourmente toujours quelquefois. Mais il y a déjà tout plein de moments où je n'y songe pas du tout! […] Je n'ai pas trop entendu ce que vous me marquez au sujet de ma façon d'écrire. Il me semble que Danceny trouve mes lettres bien comme elles sont. Je sens pourtant bien que je ne dois rien lui dire de tout ce qui se passe avec M. de Valmont; ainsi vous n'avez que faire de craindre. Maman ne m'a point encore parlé de mon mariage: mais […] je vous promets que je saurai mentir.
>
> (letter 109, pp.357-359)

For all Merteuil's success in nurturing her pupil's base instincts, however, this letter confirms that her diagnosis of the girl's mental deficiency is quite correct: as the passage cited above illustrates, Cécile's thinking is still focused on fulfilling her desires in an immediate sense, and her writing remains as childish and insipid as it was before.[32]

Ultimately, therefore, Cécile's ingenuousness proves to hold no authentic value for anyone but Valmont: although she cannot be the tender lover or savvy intriguer whom Danceny and Merteuil respectively envision, she excels in her role as a "machine à plaisir" for the Vicomte.

[32] Laurent Versini points out that at one point in this letter, Cécile shows a faint spark of critical thinking: namely, she notices a contradiction between Merteuil's virtuous posturing in their early conversations and the libertine ideas about marriage that she expresses in letter 105. But as Versini argues, this moment serves to underscore Cécile's *inability* to think, because almost as soon as she has the idea, she abandons it. In Versini's words: "[Cécile] tente un début de raisonnement qui pourrait même être dangereux pour son institutrice: elle rapproche la leçon de l'Opéra ([lettre] 39) où la Marquise lui a assuré qu'une fois mariée elle ne devrait plus aimer Danceny, et celle de la lettre 105, où elle lui prouve que, mariée, elle n'en sera que plus libre. Le raisonnement n'aboutit pas: après cet effort, Cécile conclut: 'au reste, peut-être que j'avais mal entendu' ([lettre] 109)" (*Tradition,* 321).

Moreover, in an ironic twist, Valmont cites her *ingénuité* as the very thing that makes her a perfect student of debauchery. Initially, his decision to seduce Cécile himself is a response to the criticisms that Merteuil levels at him in letter 81: angered by her assertion that male libertines never face real challenges (and by her mockery of his slow progress with Tourvel), Valmont portrays his rapid conquest of Cécile as proof of his libertine mettle and, on a broader scale, as an affirmation of his right as a man to sexually subjugate women. As he puts it to the Marquise in letter 96:

> [V]ous cherchez par quel moyen j'ai supplanté si tôt l'amant chéri; quelle séduction convient à cet âge, à cette inexpérience. Épargnez-vous tant de peine, je n'en ai employé aucune. Tandis que maniant avec adresse les armes de votre sexe, vous triomphez par la finesse; moi, rendant à l'homme ses droits imprescriptibles, je subjuguais par l'autorité.
>
> (letter 96, pp.310-311)[33]

Yet after spending a few more nights with Cécile, Valmont writes another letter to Merteuil in which he marvels at the pleasure he has discovered in conducting the girl's sexual education. Most particularly, he expresses amusement at her "ingenuous" way of using the carnal vocabulary he has taught her:

> Je m'amuse à n'y rien nommer que par le mot technique; et je ris d'avance de l'intéressante conversation que cela doit fournir entre elle et Gercourt la première nuit de leur mariage. *Rien n'est plus plaisant que l'ingénuité avec laquelle elle se sert déjà du peu qu'elle sait de cette langue! elle n'imagine pas qu'on puisse parler autrement. Cette enfant est réellement séduisante!* Ce contraste de la candeur naïve avec le langage de l'effronterie ne laisse pas de faire de l'effet […].
>
> (letter 110, p.363; my emphasis)

[33] Valmont is also responding here to letter 85, in which Merteuil boasts of her recent triumph over Prévan and upholds his utter ruin as further proof of her superiority to Valmont (and to men in general).

As this passage illustrates, Cécile's *ingénuité*—a term that Valmont uses here to refer to her blithe manner of expression and intractable *sottise*—comes to hold an attraction for him simply because it reflects the extent of his power over her. Like a parrot, she repeats whatever words he feeds her with no thought to the possible implications of doing so. By the same token, she remains oblivious to the fact that he is corrupting her to begin with, which makes it easy for him to exploit her in any way he wishes. In that vein, Valmont also comes to see Cécile as a convenient instrument for exercising power over others. We see an early instance of this in his choice to teach her "le langage de l'effronterie," in hopes that she will thoughtlessly disclose her premarital sexual activity to Gercourt on their wedding night. In other words, thanks to Cécile's *sotte ingénuité*, Valmont can use her as a puppet to stage a mortifying scene for her future husband, down to the detail of scripting her dialogue.[34]

Valmont soon decides to appropriate Cécile's voice in full to play an even crueler joke upon Danceny, who still regards the libertine as a trusted ally in his efforts to reunite with the girl. Having grown jealous upon learning that Merteuil intends to make Danceny her next conquest (letter 113), Valmont persuades Cécile to let him dictate her correspondence with the young man in hopes of thwarting Merteuil's plans. Unfortunately for Valmont, his efforts on this front are not wholly successful, as the Chevalier becomes Merteuil's lover not long afterward; but Valmont does manage to keep Danceny enamored of Cécile until the young man discovers her treachery several weeks later (letters 162 and 174). As Valmont explains to the Marquise in letter 115, Cécile

[34] Aurora Wolfgang argues that Cécile's use of precise vocabulary in sexual matters is ironic, given that the language that she uses elsewhere in the novel is full of childishly vague terms like "ça" and "choses": "Ironically, the only precise vocabulary that Cécile acquires [in the novel] is the nomenclature of Valmont's 'catéchisme de débauche' [...]" (*Gender and Voice* 164). The novel's reader can only imagine this, however, because Cécile is never directly quoted in the text again after letter 109 (i.e. her final letter to Merteuil).

was quite happy to allow him to speak for her upon hearing his offer to make Danceny grow more enchanted with her:

> [J]e lui ai demandé […] de voir sa lettre [à Danceny]; et comme je l'ai trouvée froide et contrainte, je lui ai fait sentir que ce n'était pas ainsi qu'elle consolerait son amant, et je l'ai décidée à en écrire une autre sous ma dictée; où, en imitant du mieux que j'ai pu son petit radotage, j'ai tâché de nourrir l'amour du jeune homme […]. La petite personne était toute ravie, me disait-elle, de se trouver parler si bien; et dorénavant, je serai chargé de la correspondance. Que n'aurais-je pas fait pour ce Danceny? J'aurai été à la fois son ami, son confident, son rival et sa maîtresse!
>
> (letter 115, p.378)

With these lines, Valmont undermines Danceny's perception of Cécile to a greater extent than any previous event had done, although the Chevalier remains unaware of it until the novel's conclusion. By passing his own words off as Cécile's, Valmont proves that the trait that Danceny adores in her—namely, her seemingly guileless manner of expression—can be convincingly mimicked by a debauched libertine. It is, in fact, one of the letters that Valmont dictates for Cécile (letter 156) that prompts Danceny to exclaim that "son ingénuité, sa tendresse, ont un charme pour moi" in a subsequent letter to Valmont (letter 157, p.478). Thus, Valmont's cooptation of Cécile's pen underscores the fact that her admirer is not in love with authentic qualities of innocence and tenderness, but with the jargon that he wrongly assumes reflects those qualities. This allows Valmont to at once mock Danceny for permitting his feelings to blind him to Cécile's true nature, and to glorify his own philosophy of libertinism by poisoning the foundations of the young man's notions of love and friendship. Furthermore, by persuading Cécile to voluntarily surrender her pen to him, Valmont reduces her to a silent background figure in her own story: after beginning the

novel as a curious (albeit foolish) ingénue who struggles to articulate her first impressions of the world, she ends it as a confirmed *sotte* who has nothing further to say.

This leaves us to determine what Cécile's character arc contributes to the novel as a whole, and, more broadly, how she fits into the history of the ingénue as a literary figure. Despite Valmont's substantial role in Cécile's downfall, Laclos's earliest critics saw Merteuil as the novel's true villain: that is, the primary author of the events that destroy all of the major characters, including the Marquise herself. In many ways, this reading of Merteuil is valid: it is she who first sets out to corrupt Cécile (letter 2); she whose betrayal compels the girl to flee to a convent at the text's conclusion (letter 170); and she who reveals Valmont's treachery to Danceny, who kills the Vicomte in a duel and publicly exposes Merteuil as a libertine (letters 163 and 168).[35] Her wickedness drove the eighteenth-century novelist Madame Riccoboni to deem her a "monster" and led Charles Baudelaire to praise her as "une Ève satanique" whose talents far surpass Valmont's.[36] Friedrich Melchior, baron von Grimm made similar comments in his 1782 review of the novel for the *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique*, in which he described Merteuil as Valmont's taskmaster: "[T]out sublime qu'il est dans son genre, [Valmont] n'est encore que très-subordonné à […] la marquise de Merteuil, qui l'inspire, qui le guide, qui le surpasse à tous égards […]. [Il] n'est pour ainsi dire que le ministre secret de ses plaisirs, de ses haines et de sa

[35] Laclos makes it clear that Cécile's choice to run away stems from the pain she feels upon learning the truth about Merteuil. Shortly after Danceny kills Valmont, Madame de Volanges (who is unaware that Cécile was the object of the duel) informs Madame de Rosemonde that her daughter is "un peu indisposée" (letter 165, p.492); yet only two days later, she claims that Cécile's indisposition "n'a eu aucune suite," suggesting that the girl was not deeply affected by what occurred (letter 168, p.497). Conversely, when Cécile hears the rumors about Merteuil, her mother reports that "elle n'[a] fait que pleurer toute la soirée" (letter 170, p.501).

[36] Texts cited in Laclos, *Œuvres complètes*: see "Correspondance de Laclos et de Madame Riccoboni au sujet des *Liaisons dangereuses*" (first published in 1787), letter III, 689, and "Notes de Charles Baudelaire sur *Les Liaisons dangereuses*," 717.

vengeance."[37] Yet unlike Riccoboni, who dismissed Merteuil as a dreadful creation of fiction, Grimm perceived the character to be quite realistic.[38] In his review, he argued that the novel's primary purpose was to expose the vices of elite Parisian women: according to him, Laclos's female readers publicly reviled the text (even if they privately enjoyed it) because the depths of their own depravity were reflected in its female characters. Grimm then added that Merteuil's ruthlessness should come as no surprise, given that women seem "destined" to take their good and bad qualities to extremes:

> Il n'y a point d'ouvrage […] où le désordre des principes et des mœurs de ce qu'on appelle la bonne compagnie […] soit peint avec plus de naturel, de hardiesse et d'esprit: on ne s'étonnera donc point que peu de nouveautés aient été reçues avec autant d'empressement; il faut s'étonner encore moins de tout le mal que les femmes se croient obligées d'en dire; quelque plaisir que leur ait pu faire cette lecture, il n'a pas été exempt de chagrin: comment un homme qui les connaît si bien et qui garde si mal leur secret ne passerait-t-il pas pour un monstre? […] [E]t comme les femmes semblent destinées à exagérer toutes les qualités qu'elles prennent, bonnes ou mauvaises, [madame de Merteuil], pour ne point manquer à la vraisemblance, se montre aussi très-supérieure à [Valmont].
>
> (*Correspondance littéraire*, April 1782)

To a certain extent, Grimm's digs at Parisian *mondaines* may have been intended to amuse his readers: he produced the *Correspondance littéraire* for a small group of elites who lived outside France, so his pointed critiques of French society were apt to pique their curiosity about Laclos's

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[37] Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique de Grimm et de Diderot depuis 1753 jusqu'en 1790*, éds. Taschereau, Jules-Antoine; Chaudé, A. (Paris, Furne, 1829-1831), vol. 11. Text accessed via ARTFL: https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/grimm/navigate/11/3/.

[38] Riccoboni stresses Merteuil's implausibility at several points in her correspondence with Laclos, as in this example: "[O]n vous reprochera toujours, Monsieur, de présenter à vos lecteurs une vile créature […]. Tant de dépravation irrite et n'instruit pas. On s'écrie à chaque page: cela n'est point, cela ne saurait être! L'exagération ôte au précepte la force propre à corriger." Cited in Laclos, *Œuvres complètes*, letter V, 693.

work.[39] However, Grimm's remarks also resonate with some contemporary philosophical discourses that helped to shape Laclos's ideas about women and the *beau monde*. To begin with, the late Enlightenment was a period of generalized anxiety about the effects of living in civilized society. Among the intellectuals whom Laclos sought to emulate, there was a growing sense that modern life placed too much value on luxury, self-interest, and pleasure-seeking, which were in turn thought to be fueling an epidemic of bad health and moral degeneracy. Many of these theorists also believed that the people most impacted by this problem were elite urban women: as the thinking went, these women were prone to destructive habits—like vanity, licentiousness, and neglect of their maternal duties—because of their taste for extravagance, idle lifestyles, and overly delicate constitutions.[40] Thus, at the time Laclos was writing his novel, Parisian women were often thought to be harmful to the social body and in harm's way themselves: they were simultaneously seen as the chief perpetrators of society's moral failings and at risk of falling victim to them.

For Laclos, the most compelling proponent of these theories was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a thinker whom he often claimed to admire.[41] Rousseau was one of the period's harshest critics of elite urban women, whom he felt were largely responsible for what he saw as France's moral decline. His views on these women are most plainly expressed in book 5 of *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (1762), in which he openly accuses them of setting bad examples for their daughters. After scolding them for failing to get to know their children and to model the virtues of domestic life, he warns them that they are instead teaching their daughters to covet the pleasures they

[39] For an overview of Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire* and its readership, see Chapter 3.
[40] On the era's evolving perspectives on women's health, moral nature, and role in society, see for example Anne Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology*, 225-257; Ludmilla Jordanova, "Sex and Gender," 152-183; Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?*, 189-244; and Lieselotte Steinbrügge, *The Moral Sex: Woman's Nature in the French Enlightenment*, trans. Pamela E. Selwyn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
[41] On Laclos's complex relationship to Rousseau and his body of work, see for example Laurent Versini, *Tradition*, especially 521-617; and Joan DeJean, *Literary Fortifications: Rousseau, Laclos, Sade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 208-231.

themselves enjoy: decadent social gatherings, coquetry, and—worst of all—illicit sexual affairs. He then presents these mothers with a frightening portrait of their daughters as he imagines them to be: conniving young girls who conceal their wantonness by adopting an air of false modesty. As he puts it to his readers:

> [É]tudiez un moment ces jeunes personnes; sous un air contraint elles déguisent mal la convoitise qui les dévore et déjà on lit dans leurs yeux l'ardent désir d'imiter leurs mères. Ce qu'elles convoitent n'est pas un mari mais la licence du mariage. Qu'a-t-on besoin d'un mari avec tant de ressources pour s'en passer? Mais on a besoin d'un mari pour couvrir ces ressources. La modestie est sur leur visage et le libertinage est au fond de leur cœur; cette feinte modestie elle-même en est un signe. Elles ne l'affectent que pour pouvoir s'en débarrasser plus tôt. Femmes de Paris et de Londres, pardonnez-le-moi, je vous supplie. Nul séjour n'exclut les miracles, mais pour moi, je n'en connais point, et si une seule d'entre vous a l'âme vraiment honnête je n'entends rien à nos institutions.[42]

Notably, several of the behaviors that Rousseau is criticizing here are variously present in Merteuil, Cécile, and Madame de Volanges. As an adolescent, Merteuil's deceitfulness, libertine worldview, and cynical manipulation of her husband are reminiscent of Rousseau's description of corrupt young girls. Moreover, thanks in large part to Madame de Volanges's neglectful parenting, Merteuil manages to covertly nurture some of these qualities in Cécile: although the girl is

[42] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, ou de l'éducation*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1969), vol. 4, 739-740. Rousseau also claims that the culture of decadence is corrupting lower class women, whom he accuses of coveting the luxuries and attractions of large cities (740-741). He concludes by arguing that married women should retire from the world altogether to devote themselves to their duties as wives and mothers. On his vision of the ideal domestic sphere, see for example Steinbrügge, *The Moral Sex*, 56-82; Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology*, 196-224; and Susan Meld Shell, "*Émile*: Nature and the Education of Sophie," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau*, ed. Patrick Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 272-301.

incapable of becoming a cerebral libertine, she does learn to consciously embrace deceit as a means of pursuing illicit sexual pleasure.

If we apply Rousseau's theories to Laclos's novel, it is tempting to conclude that Cécile's story is intended to teach a simple moral lesson: that daughters need to be carefully surveilled and educated by their mothers, lest they fall under the influence of women like Merteuil. In this vein, Merteuil herself could be read as an allegory for the corrupting forces of society, which, in Rousseau's view, manifest themselves through women. This is, in fact, the interpretation that the novel explicitly puts forth to the reader: Madame de Volanges and Danceny each propose elements of it as they try to make sense of Cécile's downfall. After informing Madame de Rosemonde that Cécile has run away, Madame de Volanges expresses regret for letting Merteuil influence the girl (although she remains largely ignorant of Cécile's sexual exploits). She then bemoans the widespread immorality of the times: "Quelle mère pourrait, sans trembler, voir une autre personne qu'elle parler à sa fille? […] [L]'une des plus importantes vérités […] reste étouffée et sans usage dans le tourbillon de nos mœurs inconséquents" (letter 175, pp.512-513). With these words, she also echoes the novel's Préface, which informs the reader that the text will demonstrate the following lesson: "[Q]ue toute mère est au moins imprudente, qui souffre qu'un autre qu'elle ait la confiance de sa fille" (p.75).

Danceny heaps further blame upon Merteuil in his correspondence with Rosemonde: in his mind, she alone was responsible for morally corrupting Cécile, which led to everything that followed. He writes: "[P]eut-on se défendre de la plus vive indignation contre madame de Merteuil, quand on se rappelle avec quel affreux plaisir elle a mis tous ses soins à abuser de tant d'innocence et de candeur?" (letter 174, p.509) He then argues that people are helpless to resist

vice if they enter the world in ignorance of good and evil, adding that Cécile (whom he identifies as such a person) would surely have been inclined to goodness had it not been for Merteuil:

> [C]e cœur si simple, ce caractère si doux et si facile, ne se seraient-ils pas portés au bien, plus aisément encore qu'ils ne se sont laissés entraîner vers le mal? Quelle jeune personne, sortant de même du couvent, sans expérience et presque sans idées, et ne portant dans le monde, comme il arrive presque toujours alors, qu'une égale ignorance du bien et du mal; quelle jeune personne, dis-je, aurait pu résister davantage à de si coupables artifices?
>
> (letter 174, p.510)[43]

Finally, as if to underscore Merteuil's role as a source of corruption, the next letter in the narrative reveals that she has been horribly disfigured by smallpox. Madame de Volanges informs Rosemonde that Merteuil is now rumored to be "hideuse," adding that the public has found her ailment to be an apt reflection of her soul: "Le marquis de ***, qui ne perd pas l'occasion de dire une méchanceté, disait hier, en parlant d'elle, que la maladie l'avait retournée, et qu'à présent son âme était sur sa figure. Malheureusement tout le monde trouva que l'expression était juste" (letter 175, p.511).

As some critics have pointed out, however, there are several problems with accepting the novel's moralizing at face value. Thomas Kavanagh, for example, argues that agreeing with Madame de Volanges draws the reader into an uneasy alliance with her insipidly conformist mindset: "Morally indignant readers may well applaud the unmasking of the hypocrites at the novel's end, but in so doing they became doubles of Cécile's so easily duped mother, [...] the most

[43] Notably, Danceny's comments here recall the adage that often appears in "précaution inutile" narratives: namely, that *sottes* lack the knowledge to understand what virtue is and therefore cannot be virtuous. Words to that effect appear in Molière's *L'École des femmes* (1662) and Paul Scarron's "La Précaution inutile" (1655). See Chapter 1.

conventional and limited of all Laclos's characters" (*Enlightened Pleasures* 143).[44] Moreover, Irving Wohlfarth observes that the novel's Préface—which warns mothers not to entrust their daughters' care to others—is contradicted by its Avertissement, which states that the novel has no moral value.[45] But what is most important, in my view, is that Madame de Volanges and Danceny focus their ire on Merteuil in order to avoid scrutinizing their own roles in Cécile's ruin. Madame de Volanges correctly states that she should not have let Merteuil influence her daughter, which lends support to the Rousseauian moral presented in the Préface; yet she stops short of acknowledging the larger problem that Rousseau would certainly have criticized, which was her own *long-term* disinterest in her daughter's education. Her failure on this count is underscored in her final letters to Rosemonde, in which she recounts her visit to the convent where Cécile has taken refuge. For the first time—and far too late—she makes a serious attempt to converse with her daughter, only to be met with tearful silence: "[T]out ce que [j']ai pu tirer [de ma fille] au milieu de beaucoup de larmes, est qu'elle ne pouvait être heureuse qu'au couvent" (letter 170, pp.501-502). She also suggests that she could not have foreseen the consequences of her negligence, thereby implicitly excusing herself for it: "Quelle mère pourrait, sans trembler, voir une autre personne qu'elle parler à sa fille? Mais ces réflexions tardives n'arrivent jamais qu'après l'événement […]" (letter 175, p.512). Thus, rather than ending the novel as a moral authority, Madame de Volanges effectively adopts the problematic mantra that her daughter uses so often: "Ce n'est pas ma faute."[46]

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[44] Peter Brooks and Susan Winnett have also commented on the impotence of de Volanges's efforts to apply conventional thinking to the problems with which she is faced. See Brooks, *Novel of Worldliness*, 211-213, and Winnett, *Terrible Sociability*, 43-44.

[45] Irving Wohlfarth, "The Irony of Criticism and the Criticism of Irony," in *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 120 (1974): 269-317, at 294-297. Wohlfarth argues that the contradiction between the Préface and Avertissement allows Laclos to disavow responsibility for the novel, thereby abandoning the question of its moral significance to the reader.

[46] Intriguingly, Grimm felt that Merteuil would likely have been a better mother than Madame de Volanges, given that her intimate knowledge of vice would have placed her in a better position to safeguard her daughter. As he says

Danceny also fails to take full account of his role in Cécile's downfall. For one, as Rosemonde points out to him, it was he who first attempted to seduce the girl, and therefore he who set her on the path to licentiousness (however chaste his overtures may have been). It was also he who encouraged Cécile to trust Valmont, which made it that much easier for the libertine to prey upon her (letter 93). Given that Danceny leaves Rosemonde's reproaches unanswered, the novel strongly implies that he is reluctant to accept his culpability on these counts. As Rosemonde puts it to him:

> [Q]uelque illusion qu'on cherche à se faire par une prétendue délicatesse de sentiments, celui qui le premier tente de séduire un cœur encore honnête et simple se rend par là même le premier fauteur de sa corruption, et doit être à jamais comptable des excès et des égarements qui la suivent.
>
> (letter 171, p.504)[47]

Moreover, just as damningly, Danceny's hypocrisy extends to his mindset about social mores: his condemnations of Merteuil reveal him to be as insipidly conformist as Madame de Volanges in that regard. In the letter in which he informs Rosemonde that he has published Merteuil's correspondence (a task with which Valmont charged him), Danceny absolves the Vicomte of responsibility in their conflict and casts no blame on him for corrupting Cécile. Conversely, he claims to have unmasked the "truly dangerous" Merteuil as a public service: "J'ai cru […] que c'était rendre service à la société, que de démasquer une femme aussi réellement

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in his review of the novel: "On peut croire sans peine que la fille d'une madame de Merteuil serait à coup sûr mieux gardée que ne l'est la petite de Volange [*sic*]; l'expérience du vice a sur ce point de grands avantages sur les habitudes de la vertu" (*Correspondance littéraire*, text accessed via ARTFL).

[47] Much earlier in the novel, Valmont also comments on the Chevalier's hypocrisy. In a report to Merteuil about his efforts to help Danceny reunite with Cécile, Valmont writes: "[C]roiriez-vous que je n'ai jamais pu obtenir de lui qu'il promît à la mère de renoncer à son amour; comme s'il était bien gênant de promettre, quand on est décidé à ne pas tenir! Ce serait tromper, me répétait-il sans cesse: ce scrupule n'est-il pas édifiant, surtout en voulant séduire la fille? Voilà bien les hommes! tous également scélérats dans leurs projets, ce qu'ils mettent de faiblesse dans l'exécution, ils l'appellent probité" (letter 66, p.220).

dangereuse que l'est madame de Merteuil, et qui […] est la seule, la véritable cause de tout ce qui s'est passé entre M. de Valmont et moi" (letter 169, p.499). Only a few lines later, he explains that he was also motivated by a desire to "justify" Prévan, the *libertin* whom Merteuil publicly disgraced for attempting to destroy her reputation: "Un sentiment de justice m'a porté à publier la seconde [lettre] pour la justification de M. de Prévan, que je connais à peine, mais qui n'avait aucunement mérité le traitement rigoureux qu'il vient d'éprouver, ni la sévérité des jugements du public [...]" (p.499).[48] In taking these actions, Danceny shows no awareness that he is perpetuating the double standards that compelled Merteuil to become a libertine in the first place.[49] In total, he vindicates three men—himself, Valmont, and Prévan—who have preyed upon women to varying degrees over the course of the novel; and he restores the last of these three to his place in society, where he will undoubtedly resume his predatory exploits. Thus, Danceny ends the novel as an enabler of *future* abuses of women even as he laments Cécile's fate and claims moral superiority over Merteuil. His hypocrisy in denouncing Merteuil's libertinism is also shared by the broader public: at the very moment of Merteuil's disgrace, Prévan is welcomed back into society by men and women alike (letter 173).[50]

What emerges at the conclusion of Cécile's story, therefore, is not a Rousseauian moral lesson, but rather, a satirical portrayal of the surviving characters' efforts to produce one. As Madame de Volanges and Danceny duck responsibility for Cécile's ruin by deflecting blame onto

[48] The letters in question here are letters 81 (in which Merteuil presents her account of becoming a libertine) and 85 (in which she recounts her conquest of Prévan).
[49] After having read letters 81 and 85, Danceny would presumably be fully aware of Merteuil's motivations for practicing libertinism.
[50] In his analysis of this scene, David McCallam argues that the public does not reject Merteuil because of her immorality, but because she violated the norms of sociability: "Étant donné l'*a*moralité de la réhabilitation sociale de Prévan à la fin du roman, il est juste de dire que Merteuil est punie moins pour son *im*moralité personnelle que pour sa transgression sociale, ayant surtout enfreint les principes de la sociabilité ambiante. La marquise représente un danger pour la sociabilité précisément parce qu'elle dissimule si parfaitement les valeurs que cette dernière prétend chérir: la décence, la politesse, la sincérité. Et parce qu'elle les feint pour séduire et humilier autrui" (*L'art de l'équivoque* 88). McCallam's emphasis.

Merteuil, the only thing that they truly manage to achieve is to lend support to Merteuil's social criticisms and philosophy. Danceny's choice to condemn her in the very moment when he uplifts Valmont and Prévan reminds us that she is right about the sexist double standards that permit men to prey on women. In the same vein, the disastrous outcome of Madame de Volanges's neglect of Cécile's education goes a long way to vindicating Merteuil's decision to educate herself. I would argue, therefore, that Merteuil's ultimate function in the novel is to challenge its readers to contend with the fact that her choice to practice libertinism is justifiable. It may be tempting to judge her for her cruelty and immorality, but we must also recognize that her driving ambition is to be something more than "a Cécile": the type of empty-headed, uneducated woman whose fate lies at the mercy of others and who lives a life without glory. Merteuil's final scene in the novel, when she is publicly disgraced at the Paris Opera, leaves us with a defiant image of her commitment to her principles and independent frame of mind: as Madame de Volanges reports, "On assure [qu'elle] a conservé l'air de ne rien voir et de ne rien entendre, et qu'elle n'a pas changé de figure!" (letter 173, p.508) Perhaps this is why Laclos ends Merteuil's story by informing us that she has fled to Holland (letter 175), which, as Caroline Jacot Grapa points out, was considered to be the land of free thought in the eighteenth-century French popular imagination.[51]

Cécile presents an equally difficult challenge to the reader at the novel's conclusion: her silence, coupled with Madame de Volanges's and Danceny's hypocritical moralizing, leave it up to the reader to determine the significance of her fate. On the one hand, the novel's final events remind us that she has been ill-served by other people—and by her mother most of all. Her natural inclination to give into pleasure also sets her up to be easy prey her seducers, as Merteuil astutely points out to Valmont in letter 106. Yet on the other hand, as Cécile's early letters to Sophie

[51] Caroline Jacot Grapa, "Le mal est sans remède: le libertin et le lien," in *Littératures* 39 (automne 1998): 87-102, at 99.

underscore, she also spends much of the novel engaging in behavior she knows to be wrong and routinely invents excuses for doing so. When she flees to the convent and opts to conceal the truth from her mother at the novel's end, we might conclude that she has finally achieved some sort of mental awakening: Merteuil's public unmasking may have compelled her to reflect on her own depravity and to take responsibility for herself. Yet it is also possible that she has simply grown fearful of being similarly unmasked, without having come to a deeper understanding of herself or of the destructive consequences of her actions. By refusing to provide Cécile's story with a clear resolution, Laclos ultimately leaves it to his readers to weigh the importance of these factors and to decide where responsibility for the girl's downfall truly lies. He also pushes us to look more closely at our reasons for arriving at whatever conclusion we reach: whether we choose to condemn the libertines, Cécile, Danceny, or Madame de Volanges, we might catch ourselves espousing some of the same excuses, prejudices, or hypocrisies that helped to create the conditions for Cécile's ruin in the first place.

In any case, one of the few things that Laclos does make clear at the novel's end is that *ingénuité* (as he sees it) should not be idealized. In place of the innocent, sincere, and kind-hearted ingénues that we often find in Enlightenment literature, we find Cécile: a girl whose ingenuousness is a sign of profound ignorance and *sottise,* and whose only real talent is to serve as a "machine à plaisir." We also find Merteuil, who, as a young woman, learned to feign *ingénuité* in order to disguise her efforts to develop her mind in secret, which allowed her to transform herself into a dangerous and destructive player in the theatrical game of French high society. Through both characters, Laclos turns ingenuousness into an indictment of French society's disinterest in women's education, which, as we have seen, is a major factor in the novel's disastrous events. It is important to add, however, that qualities like kindness, tenderness, and sincerity are not absent

from the novel. Rather, Laclos simply bestows them onto a character who is not herself an ingénue, but who has much in common with Cécile, Merteuil, and the ingenuous heroines I have discussed in previous chapters: the virtuous Présidente de Tourvel.

4.3 Principled Candor: The Strength and Weakness of Madame de Tourvel

In many ways, Laclos portrays Madame de Tourvel as a foil to Cécile. For one, like Cécile, Tourvel first appears in the novel's Préface, which claims that her fate at the hands of the novel's libertines will demonstrate the following moral lesson: "que toute femme qui consent à recevoir dans sa société un homme sans mœurs, finit par en devenir la victime" (p.75). For another, Cécile and Tourvel's letters are often paired together, both narratively and thematically: for example, at the close of the novel's Part 1, both women break off their correspondence with their respective admirers, Danceny and Valmont (letters 49 and 50), only to relent shortly afterward (letters 55 and 56) (Versini, *Tradition* 227). Cécile and Tourvel also begin the novel by regarding Madame de Volanges as their primary mother figure, only to seek guidance from other female mentors (Merteuil and Rosemonde, respectively) when they find themselves falling in love (letters 8, 27, and 102). More strikingly still, they each fall victim to Valmont because they fail to master their sensibility: Tourvel's mental-physical makeup is quite different from Cécile's (as we shall see), but she is similarly swept away by feelings that she is unable to resist. Finally, although Tourvel is not an ingénue, she, like Cécile, was raised in a convent and is linked to the terms "naïveté" and "candeur": Valmont routinely uses both of those words to describe Tourvel over the course of his campaign to seduce her.

Despite these similarities, however, Tourvel's characterization sets her apart from her young counterpart even as it links the two women together. Unlike Cécile, whose *ingénuité* is a

sign of ignorance and *sottise*, Tourvel's *candeur* signifies that she possesses qualities Cécile lacks: goodness, kindness, and sincerity. Moreover, Tourvel's *candeur* is an integral part of the principles that she strives to live by: more precisely, it reflects her unwillingness to engage in the theatrical game of seduction that governs high society, and at which the novel's libertines excel. Over the course of the novel, Valmont's efforts to seduce her upend his partnership with Merteuil in a way that his liaison with Cécile does not: as he finds himself charmed by Tourvel's tender-hearted candor and virtue, he comes to see her as a serious threat to his ability to maintain his *sang-froid* as a libertine. Yet even as Tourvel becomes an unwitting rival to Merteuil, who goes to extremes to maintain control over Valmont, the novel also reveals some intriguing parallels between these two women. Ultimately, despite the fact that Tourvel (like Cécile) ends the novel as the libertines' victim, her attempts to live by principles allow her to define the meaning of her life in a way that sets her apart from most of the other characters—with the notable exception of Merteuil.

Valmont's ambiguous attraction to Tourvel is made apparent in the first letters he contributes to the novel: he discusses her at length in letters 4 and 6, in which he boasts to Merteuil of his plan to seduce her. In his eyes, one of the qualities that makes Tourvel an ideal target is her reputation as a "prude": that is, a woman who exhibits an austere commitment to virtue, modesty, and chastity. In reply to Merteuil's disdainful quips about Tourvel's religious devotion, marital fidelity, and conservative style of dress (letter 5), Valmont insists that Tourvel's prudishness only adds to the glory to be had in seducing her:

> Loin de moi l'idée de détruire les préjugés qui l'assiègent! ils ajouteront à mon bonheur et à ma gloire. Qu'elle croie à la vertu, mais qu'elle me la sacrifie; que ses fautes l'épouvantent sans pouvoir l'arrêter; et qu'agitée de mille terreurs, elle ne puisse les oublier, les vaincre que dans mes bras. Qu'alors j'y consens, elle me dise: « Je t'adore »,

> elle seule, entre toutes les femmes, sera digne de prononcer ce mot. Je serai vraiment le Dieu qu'elle aura préféré.
>
> (letter 6, p.91)

To eighteenth-century readers, Valmont's desire to conquer a "prude" would have been immediately recognizable as a leitmotif of the *roman libertin*. In these texts, prudes typically function as a philosophical challenge to their libertine counterparts: their ideals of morality are antithetical to libertinism, and they put up a strong resistance to seduction in defense of those ideals.[52] To Valmont, therefore, convincing Tourvel to sacrifice her principles to him would be a far greater victory than his usual conquests. As he puts it in the passage above, he hopes to supplant God in Tourvel's eyes as the figure to be worshipped and adored, and to thereby affirm that his power as a libertine is stronger than hers as a woman of virtue. He is also aspiring to gain a godlike control over her fate: that is, to ruin her reputation, thereby boosting his own status as a master seducer in the eyes of the public. He reiterates these cynical desires several times over the course of the narrative, as when he spies on the despairing Tourvel shortly after making his first declaration of love to her: "[J'ai vu] cette femme adorable à genoux, baignée de larmes, et priant avec ferveur. Quel Dieu osait-elle invoquer? en est-il d'assez puissant contre l'amour? En vain cherche-t-elle à présent des secours étrangers: c'est moi qui réglerai son sort" (letter 23, p.126).

For all Valmont's pride in his quest for glory, his early letters also express a sentimental attraction to Tourvel: as he describes her to Merteuil in letter 6, he devotes as much attention to

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[52] For overviews of the prude's role in eighteenth-century fiction, see James Fowler, *The Libertine's Nemesis: The Prude in Clarissa and the Roman Libertin* (New York: LEGENDA, 2011), 1-9; and Laurent Versini, *Tradition*, 104-115. In eighteenth-century French, the term "prude" was often used to signify a woman who was *not* virtuous but only pretended to be so out of vanity, so Versini argues that Tourvel can more accurately be described as an "honnête femme." Nonetheless, as Fowler and Versini observe, she clearly belongs in the category of truly virtuous prudes who appear in literature, like Clarissa Harlowe of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748). Merteuil herself makes this distinction in letter 5, in which she identifies Tourvel as a "true" prude: "[N]'espérez aucun plaisir [de votre succès avec madame de Tourvel]. En est-il avec les prudes? j'entends celles de bonne foi" (letter 5, p.88).

Tourvel's touching qualities as he does to insisting on her worthiness as a conquest. One of the traits that draws him to her is her "naïve" (that is, her artless) demeanor, which allows her true feelings to freely express themselves upon her face. As he remarks on this to Merteuil, he compares Tourvel favorably to the coquettes of his social circle, whose studied airs are (as he puts it) a poor substitute for sincere and "pure" emotion:

> [S]ans doute, [madame de Tourvel] n'a point, comme nos femmes coquettes, ce regard menteur qui séduit quelquefois et nous trompe toujours. Elle ne sait pas couvrir le vide d'une phrase par un sourire étudié; et quoiqu'elle ait les plus belles dents du monde, elle ne rit que de ce qui l'amuse. Mais il faut voir comme, dans les folâtres jeux, elle offre l'image d'une gaieté naïve et franche! comme, auprès d'un malheureux qu'elle s'empresse de secourir, son regard annonce la joie pure et la bonté compatissante! Il faut voir, surtout au moindre mot d'éloge ou de cajolerie, se peindre, sur sa figure céleste, ce touchant embarras d'une modestie qui n'est point jouée!
>
> (letter 6, p.90)

As Valmont's emphasis on Tourvel's compassion indicates, the other quality that draws him to her is her kind-hearted sensibility: that is, her natural predisposition to feel intense sympathy for others, which underpins her tendency to candidly express her emotions. As he explains to Merteuil, he believes that these qualities will make Tourvel a pleasing mistress. When Merteuil argues that Tourvel will be a cold and reserved lover (letter 5), Valmont insists that her sensibility suggests otherwise, given that (as he sardonically observes) she is even sensitive enough to bestow her warmth upon her husband: "Elle est prude et dévote, et de là vous la jugez froide et inanimée? Je pense bien différemment. Quelle étonnante sensibilité ne faut-il pas avoir pour la répandre jusque sur son mari, et pour aimer toujours un être toujours absent" (letter 6, pp.90-91). Moreover,

despite the undercurrent of mockery in this passage, Valmont goes on to reveal that Tourvel's sensibility has struck a chord within him. Specifically, he claims that she has reawakened his heart, thereby reconnecting him to "les charmantes illusions de la jeunesse" (although he also insists that these feelings are not a threat to his self-control):

> Soyons de bonne foi; dans nos arrangements, aussi froids que faciles, ce que nous appelons bonheur est à peine un plaisir. Vous le dirai-je? Je croyais mon cœur flétri, et ne me trouvant plus que des sens, je me plaignais d'une vieillesse prématurée. Madame de Tourvel m'a rendu les charmantes illusions de la jeunesse. Auprès d'elle, je n'ai pas besoin de jouir pour être heureux. La seule chose qui m'effraie, est le temps que va me prendre cette aventure; car je n'ose rien donner au hasard.
>
> (letter 6, pp.91-92)

What emerges from Valmont's earliest letters, therefore, is a set of conflicting desires: even as he boasts of the glory he expects to achieve by conquering Tourvel, he also confesses to a lingering sense of dissatisfaction with libertinism. Indeed, his attraction to Tourvel and the rhetoric that he uses to describe her give him some odd points in common with Danceny, a man whom he often derides as a sentimental fool. Just as Valmont finds himself touched by Tourvel's *candeur*, Danceny idealizes Cécile's ingenuousness (or at least, his own deeply mistaken conception of it). Valmont even compares himself to Danceny in letter 57 (written to Merteuil), in which he claims to sympathize with the young man's pleasure in experiencing love for the first time:

> [S]i les premiers amours paraissent […] plus honnêtes, et comme on dit plus purs; s'ils sont au moins plus lents dans leur marche, […] c'est que le cœur, étonné par un sentiment inconnu, s'arrête pour ainsi dire à chaque pas, pour jouir du charme qu'il éprouve, et que ce charme est si puissant sur un cœur neuf, qu'il l'occupe au point de lui faire oublier tout

> autre plaisir. Cela est si vrai, qu'un libertin amoureux, si un libertin peut l'être, devient de ce moment même moins pressé de jouir; et qu'enfin, entre la conduite de Danceny avec la petite Volanges, et la mienne avec la prude madame de Tourvel, il n'y a que la différence du plus au moins.
>
> (letter 57, p.200)

Furthermore, by claiming that Tourvel has drawn him back to "les charmantes illusions de la jeunesse," Valmont invests his feelings for her with a sense of nostalgia. As his comment about "nos femmes coquettes" in letter 6 suggests, he finds contemporary society to be full of vain and deceitful women, which makes Tourvel's candor, authenticity, and virtue stand out to him as attractive and outmoded qualities.[53] In his eyes, therefore, she embodies an ideal that Françoise Berlan-Lacourt has called "le paradis perdu de la transparence" (*Champ notionnel* 622): that is, a young man's dream of finding a pure, uncalculating woman who expresses her true feelings and loves deeply. Yet the fact that Valmont refers to that dream as an "illusion" brings us back to the darker side of his interest in Tourvel: although he finds pleasure in his feelings for her, his ultimate purpose in seducing her (apart from achieving glory) is to purge himself of those feelings. That is, he believes that by destroying her virtue, he will be able to see her as ordinary, thereby ending her power to enthrall him and reaffirming his commitment to libertinism. He touches on this idea in the first letter he contributes to the novel, in which he tells Merteuil: "J'ai bien besoin d'avoir cette femme, pour me sauver du ridicule d'en être amoureux: car où ne mène pas un désir contrarié?" (letter 4, p.86) Much later in the novel, when his plan to seduce Tourvel seems to be on the brink

[53] Notably, this gives Valmont a point in common with the Prince of Marivaux's *La Double Inconstance* (1723) and Déterville of Françoise de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747). As I discussed in Chapter 2, these men fall in love with artless women because they represent the antithesis of coquettishness, a quality that both men regard as all too common among the women of their respective worlds. This comparison only goes so far, however, as neither man shares Valmont's philosophy of libertinism.

of succeeding, he even laments his impending disillusionment with her: "[L]e temps ne viendra que trop tôt, où, dégradée par sa chute, elle ne sera plus pour moi qu'une femme ordinaire" (letter 96, p.310).

Given the ruinous implications of becoming a "femme ordinaire" in Valmont's eyes, it is no surprise that that fate is precisely what Tourvel wants to avoid: as she struggles to resist his advances, she often expresses her fear of suffering the same disgrace as his other conquests. Yet if we look closely at her letters, it becomes clear that her efforts to defend her virtue stem from more than an abstract sense of morality: in fact, her stated motives for adhering to her principles give her some striking points in common with Merteuil. We see the first hint of this in letter 11, in which Tourvel shares her first impressions of Valmont with Madame de Volanges. As she describes their interactions at Rosemonde's estate, where they are both staying as guests, she admits to feeling grateful to Valmont for not "confusing" her with other women:

> Jamais il n'oblige à cette réserve, dans laquelle toute femme qui se respecte est forcée de se tenir aujourd'hui, pour contenir les hommes qui l'entourent. […] Il est peut-être un peu louangeur; mais c'est avec tant de délicatesse qu'il accoutumerait la modestie même à l'éloge. […] Peut-être beaucoup de femmes lui désireraient une galanterie plus marquée; et j'avoue que je lui sais un gré infini d'avoir su me juger assez bien pour ne pas me confondre avec elles.
>
> (letter 11, p.103)

Although Tourvel is clearly deceived about Valmont's true intentions at this early stage, her words also reveal an important facet of her character: she takes personal pride in *not* being ordinary; that is, in not being one of the "many women" ("beaucoup de femmes") who are known in society for welcoming illicit sexual advances from men. She often expresses this to Valmont

himself after he makes his declaration of love to her. For example, in a letter to him the following day, she reproaches him for inflicting her with "l'idée révoltante de me voir confondue avec les femmes que vous méprisez, et traitée aussi légèrement qu'elles" (letter 26, p.131). She insists on her difference from other women again in a subsequent letter to him, in which she indignantly informs him that she had wrongly defended his integrity to her friends: "[J]'ai négligé, j'ai même combattu [l']avis [de mes amis] tant que votre conduite à mon égard avait pu me faire croire que vous aviez bien voulu ne pas me confondre avec cette foule de femmes qui toutes ont eu à se plaindre de vous" (letter 41, p.162). Her rhetoric in these letters is noticeably similar to Merteuil's in letters 81 and 85, in which the Marquise repeatedly demands that Valmont not take her to be ordinary: "Écoutez, et ne me confondez plus avec les autres femmes" (letter 85, p.279). Thus, as Laurent Versini argues, Tourvel and Merteuil share a desire to be recognized as exceptional women who command respect from men. In Versini's words, "[L]a marquise et la présidente sont rapprochées par le prix qu'elles s'accordent à elles-mêmes et par la condescendance que leur inspire ces hommes toujours un peu lourds […]. [Madame] de Tourvel revendique pour les femmes un respect, un culte […]" (*Roman* 133).[54]

Tourvel's ruminations on what she stands to lose by having an affair also give her some points in common with Merteuil. She expresses her thoughts to Valmont himself quite candidly in letters 50 and 56, in which she attempts to deflect his efforts to seduce her. In reply to his (disingenuous) claims that love is a source of happiness (letter 48), Tourvel expresses distaste for its tendency to cause those who feel it to lose their self-control.[55] In letter 50, she refers to love

[54] In fact, Merteuil compliments Tourvel's fortitude in letter 33, in which she commiserates with Valmont on the defense that Tourvel has put up thus far: "Savez-vous que cette femme a plus de force que je ne croyais? Sa défense est bonne […]" (letter 33, p.145).

[55] Valmont's veneration of love in letter 48 is especially hypocritical, given that he writes it while using the back of the prostitute Émilie as a writing table. His ostensible reason for doing so is to amuse himself (and Merteuil) at Tourvel's expense, but he may also be attempting to reassure himself that his feelings for Tourvel are not serious.

with disparaging monikers like “ce délire dangereux” and “[ce] trouble involontaire” (p.183). Then, in letter 56, she insists that she has a profound need for “tranquillité” and presents an image of the life that she wants (or claims to want) to live: a peaceful existence in which she maintains control over her fate and herself. That is, she seeks a life in which her fate is not dependent upon the whims of a lover and in which she never finds herself subjugated to involuntary, tumultuous passions. She also describes the wider world as “une mer couverte des débris de mille et mille naufrages,” which underscores her awareness and fear of the calamities that have befallen the women who have allowed themselves to be seduced by men like Valmont. As she puts it to him:

> [E]st-il de plus doux [plaisirs] que d’être en paix avec soi-même, de n’avoir que des jours sereins, de s’endormir sans trouble, et de s’éveiller sans remords? Ce que vous appelez le bonheur, n’est qu’un tumulte des sens, un orage des passions dont le spectacle est effrayant, même à le regarder du rivage. Eh! comment affronter ces tempêtes? comment oser s’embarquer sur une mer couverte des débris de mille et mille naufrages? Et avec qui? Non, Monsieur, je reste à terre; je chéris les liens qui m’y attachent. Je pourrais les rompre, que je ne le voudrais pas; si je ne les avais, je me hâterais de les prendre.
>
> (letter 56, p.198)

In a sense, therefore, even though Tourvel’s withdrawal from the game of seduction is antithetical to Merteuil’s campaign to master it, both women have chosen their principles in support of the same basic goal. As Caroline Jacot Grapa argues, they are each seeking to enjoy a sense of liberty: that is, to carve out a private space in which they can live in the way that they wish to, without interference from others. In Jacot Grapa’s words:

> Ce que [madame de Tourvel] a à sacrifier, c’est sa « tranquillité », la plénitude paisible d’une liberté solitaire, à l’image de la princesse de Clèves [of Madame de Lafayette’s *La*

> *Princesse de Clèves* (1678)]. C'est moins sa réputation qu'elle protège que ce qui fait le prix de sa vie, cette espèce de retrait de la mondanité que lui permettent les apparences de la dévotion. Pour elle comme pour la marquise [de Merteuil], la personne sociale protège une liberté indivise.[56]

As Jacot Grapa's reference to de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* suggests, Tourvel's wariness of love also has roots in seventeenth-century literary traditions. For one, as Laurent Versini observes, she is one of a long line of heroines who fear love as an unruly passion that leads to heartbreak: Versini cites the Princesse de Clèves as a prime example of this trope and notes that the tradition was carried into the eighteenth century by authors like Madame Riccoboni and Crébillon (*Tradition* 111).[57] For another, Tourvel often borrows from the seventeenth-century language of *préciosité* when talking about love, whether consciously or unconsciously. As Aurora Wolfgang has pointed out, the "shipwrecks" metaphor that she uses in letter 56 is borrowed from Madeleine de Scudéry:

> Tourvel's metaphorical image of uncontrollable passion as 'une mer couverte des débris de mille et mille naufrages' […] evokes Scudéry's famous *Carte du Tendre* […] in which inclination leads to 'la mer dangereuse' […] on whose other side lay the lands of unknown pleasures or pain: 'les terres inconnues' […].
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> (*Gender and Voice* 170)[58]

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[56] Caroline Jacot Grapa, *Les Liaisons dangereuses de Choderlos de Laclos* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1997), 148. Susan Winnett proposes a similar argument in her analysis of Tourvel: "Tourvel knows that the word *amour* names a plot that cannot bring her *bonheur*; her understanding of the incompatibility of masculine and feminine desire and of the inevitable victory of the former is as responsible for her resistance to Valmont as is her concern for her reputation" (*Terrible Sociability* 60-61).

[57] Versini cites Crébillon's *Lettres de la marquise de M*** au comte de R**** (1734) and Riccoboni's *Lettres de Mistress Fanni Butlerd* (1757) as examples.

[58] For another detailed analysis of Tourvel's richly varied use of rhetoric, see Versini, *Tradition*, 325-335.

In short, like her virtuous literary predecessors and like Merteuil, Tourvel seeks to secure the parameters of her own existence. Her defensive letters to Valmont can thus be read, in part, as strategic attempts to stiffen her resolve and to remind herself of what is at stake.

Unfortunately for Tourvel, however, the very fact that she needs to shore up her resistance is a clear sign that she harbors dangerous feelings for Valmont: in fact, the Vicomte finds proof of her love within days of declaring his own feelings to her, when he discovers that she has been carefully saving his letters.[59] As they continue their correspondence, Tourvel's letters to him become increasingly revelatory: although she, like Merteuil, knows the importance of discretion, her *candeur* often causes her to share Cécile's habit of revealing more than she realizes. For example, in letter 50, she remarks to Valmont that talking about love is having a troubling effect on her: "Quel ravage effrayant [l'amour] ne ferait-il donc pas sur un cœur neuf et sensible […]? […] Il me semble que d'en parler seulement altère la tranquillité […]" (p.183). In light of this, one can infer that she has chosen the phrase "ravage effrayant" to reflect her own experience, and that love is already undermining her self-control by getting the best of her "cœur neuf et sensible." Consequently, Valmont can easily surmise that her claims of finding happiness in "tranquillité" are as much for herself as they are for him: even as she insists that her purpose is to persuade him to stop pursuing her, she is attempting to persuade herself that her present life of austerity is what she wants. Her language becomes even more equivocal in letter 56, suggesting that her doubts

[59] Valmont gleefully reports this discovery to Merteuil in letter 44, in which he recounts how he managed to steal Tourvel's correspondence: "Jugez de ma joie, en […] apercevant [sur ma lettre] les traces, bien distinctes, des larmes de mon adorable dévote. Je l'avoue, je cédai à un mouvement de jeune homme, et baisai cette lettre avec un transport dont je ne me croyais plus susceptible. Je continuai l'heureux examen; je retrouvai toutes mes lettres de suite, et par ordre de dates; et ce qui me surprit plus agréablement encore, fut de retrouver la première de toutes, celle que je croyais m'avoir été rendue par une ingrate, fidèlement copiée de sa main; et d'une écriture altérée et tremblante, qui témoignait assez la douce agitation de son cœur pendant cette occupation" (p.172).

about her happiness are increasing: "Chérie et estimée d'un mari que j'aime et respecte, mes devoirs et mes plaisirs se rassemblent dans le même objet. Je suis heureuse, je dois l'être" (p.198).[60]

Finally, and perhaps most tellingly of all, Tourvel reveals that she's (rightly) afraid that Valmont would be unfaithful to her, suggesting that she harbors a wistful desire to be proven wrong. In letter 50, she confronts him with his history of abandoning women, indicating that she is rather lucid about his character but also presenting him with a chance to address the issue: "[P]ouvez-vous faire un pas [à Paris] sans y rencontrer un exemple de votre facilité à changer […]? […] [J]e me connais bien peu de moyens de plaire: je les aurais tous, que je ne les croirais pas suffisants pour vous fixer" (p.183). As David McCallam has observed, Valmont plays upon all of this in his replies to Tourvel, in which he often gives her the assurances of love and fidelity that she appears to be half-consciously seeking:

> Or le message sous-jacent quant aux promesses du libertin est que l'interlocuteur (Tourvel) sollicite ses promesses plus que le locuteur (Valmont) ne les fait de sa propre initiative. […] [C]'est aussi un stratagème pour contraindre Mme de Tourvel à faire face à la réalité de ses sentiments pour Valmont.
>
> (*L'art de l'équivoque* 47)

In short, as Aurora Wolfgang puts it, "The reader's attention is drawn to Tourvel's desire by her denials and rationalizations" (*Gender and Voice* 168). At the same time, the very act of writing letters grows steadily more dangerous for her: not only because of what she unwittingly reveals to Valmont, but because she dwells at length on the very sentiments she is struggling to resist.

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[60] In a similar vein, Aurora Wolfgang argues that Tourvel often uses hypothetical conjectures in her letters to hint at and process what she is really thinking: "As often occurs in Tourvel's letters, what she first expresses as a hypothetical conjecture, 'si je désirais le savoir,' she later acknowledges as reality" (*Gender and Voice* 167).

For all Tourvel's indiscretions in her correspondence with Valmont, she remains quite lucid about herself: as her efforts to deter him drag on, her letters trace her keen awareness of her faltering resolve. In fact, when she realizes that she can no longer resist her love for him, she attempts to use her *candeur* as a last-ditch means of remaining virtuous in her actions. In letter 90, for example, she openly confesses her feelings to Valmont in hopes that this will move him to prove his love by taking pity on her:

> Vous devez me connaître assez à présent pour être bien sûr que ma volonté n'est pas de vous affliger; mais vous, sans doute, vous ne voudriez pas non plus me plonger dans un désespoir éternel. Je vous conjure donc, au nom de l'amitié tendre que je vous ai promise, au nom même des sentiments peut-être plus vifs, mais à coup sûr pas plus sincères, que vous avez pour moi, ne nous voyons plus […]. Ne craignez pas que mon absence altère jamais mes sentiments pour vous: comment parviendrais-je à les vaincre, quand je n'ai plus le courage de les combattre? Vous le voyez, je vous dis tout […].
>
> (letter 90, p.298)

More strikingly still, Tourvel's candid expressions of love do succeed in winning Valmont's sympathy at times: as he confesses to Merteuil in letter 99, Tourvel's intense crisis of feeling in their most recent tête-à-tête was so moving that he agreed not to take advantage of the moment. As he puts it: "Je l'entendais prête à suffoquer. […] J'étais, je l'avoue, vivement ému […]. [A]près lui avoir donné quelques secours, je l'ai laissée comme elle m'en priait […]" (pp.324-325). Tourvel's power over Valmont remains limited, however, as Valmont also informs Merteuil that he believes she will reward his kindness by accepting him as a lover: "Déjà j'en ai presque reçu le prix" (p.325).

Tourvel also attempts to use her *candeur* to hold herself accountable. After nearly yielding to Valmont in their tête-à-tête, she begins a correspondence with Rosemonde and flees the elder woman's château. In these letters, she pledges to hide nothing from Rosemonde so that her new confidante can serve as her conscience and guide:

> Recevez […] [le serment] que je fais de ne vous dérober aucune de mes actions; recevez-le, je vous en conjure; je vous le demande comme un secours dont j'ai besoin: ainsi, engagée à vous dire tout, je m'accoutumerai à me croire toujours en votre présence. Votre vertu remplacera la mienne. Jamais, sans doute, je ne consentirai à rougir à vos yeux […].
>
> (letter 102, p.335)

Moreover, Tourvel uses this correspondence with Rosemonde to candidly reflect on her past mistakes. Most notably, she reproaches herself for having believed that she could repress her feelings for Valmont, of which she claims to have been fully aware from the very beginning: "Fatal effet d'une présomptueuse confiance! pourquoi n'ai-je pas redouté plutôt ce penchant que j'ai senti naître? Pourquoi me suis-je flattée de pouvoir à mon gré le maîtriser ou le vaincre? Insensée! je connaissais bien peu l'amour!" (letter 102, p.335)[61] Yet here again, her *candeur* does more to undermine her defenses than to fortify them: in short order, Valmont begins to intercept her letters to Rosemonde and uses their contents to manipulate her, thereby turning her own words against her once again (letter 115).

Tourvel's long-deferred surrender to Valmont, which occurs at the beginning of the novel's Part 4, marks a major turning point in her perception of herself and in her efforts to live by principle. In many respects, her defeat appears absolute: despite her firm understanding of herself,

[61] In the same vein, Tourvel laments her hubris to Valmont in letter 90: "Hélas! le temps n'est pas loin, où je me croyais bien sûre de n'avoir jamais de pareils combats à soutenir. Je m'en félicitais; je m'en glorifiais peut-être trop. Le Ciel a puni, cruellement puni cet orgueil […]" (pp.298-299).

her love for Valmont leads her to grow deeply deceived about his character (and thus to fall into the role of dupe, rather like Cécile). Nowhere is this more apparent than when Valmont recalls his seduction of her in letter 125 (written to Merteuil), in which he explains that he persuaded her to yield by staging a carefully crafted scene of suicidal despair.[62] As Anne Vila observes, Tourvel experiences this moment as an ungovernable crisis of sensibility: moved by Valmont's theatrical lamentations, she bursts into tears, labored breathing, and convulsions which overwhelm the last vestiges of her resistance (*Enlightenment and Pathology* 276). As she later recounts the event to Rosemonde, she explains that she has decided to devote herself to Valmont, to whom she refers as the new "possessor" of her existence: "[Je n'ai plus] mon existence en moi: […] un autre en est possesseur: et cet autre est M. de Valmont" (letter 128, p.413). She also stoically declares that she shall end her life in the "fatal moment" when he abandons her, should that moment come to pass: "Tant que ma vie sera nécessaire à son bonheur, elle me sera précieuse, et je la trouverai fortunée. Si quelque jour il en juge autrement… il n'entendra de ma part ni plainte ni reproche. J'ai déjà osé fixer les yeux sur ce moment fatal et mon parti est pris" (p.414). This prompts Caroline Jacot Grapa to read Tourvel's devotion to Valmont as a self-effacing "don total de soi, pour un bonheur dont elle pressent le caractère éphémère, même si elle tente d'en effacer l'idée" (*Choderlos de Laclos* 152). In light of this, Jacot Grapa argues that Tourvel ultimately lives her "passion tragique" (119) as "une fatalité" (148). Indeed, Jacot Grapa's use of the rhetoric of tragedy here is fitting for Tourvel, who, as the letter cited above illustrates, often employs such rhetoric to speak about her love. In this respect, as Laurent Versini points out, Tourvel comes to resemble many seventeenth-century tragic figures who succumb to "fatal" passions, like Racine's Phaedra (*Tradition* 325-329).

[62] Valmont employs a number of other tactics to dupe Tourvel into seeing him as tender-hearted and reformed. Over the course of their courtship, he plays the role of the repentant libertine by drawing upon several literary clichés: for example, he claims to have been led astray as a youth (letter 52), that he has long searched for true love (letter 52), and, in letter 125, that he is suicidal in the face of Tourvel's persistent rejection of him.

Be that as it may, Tourvel's perception of her devotion to Valmont is more complex than her words above suggest. In her next letter to Rosemonde, she exalts her newfound happiness and claims that the joy one gives to one's beloved "ennobles" and "purifies" love:

> Qui sait si nous n'étions pas nés l'un pour l'autre! si ce bonheur ne m'était pas réservée, d'être nécessaire au sien! […] [J]e veux vivre pour le chérir, pour l'adorer. Pourquoi cesserait-il de m'aimer? Quelle autre femme rendrait-il plus heureuse que moi? Et, je le sens par moi-même, ce bonheur qu'on fait naître, est le plus fort lien, le seul qui attache véritablement. Oui, c'est ce sentiment délicieux qui anoblit l'amour, qui le purifie en quelque sorte, et le rend vraiment digne d'une âme tendre et généreuse, telle que celle de Valmont.
>
> (letter 132, p.423)

Given that Tourvel had formerly disdained love as "un délire dangereux" and "un trouble involontaire" (letter 50), her words here mark a profound change in the way she perceives it. At this point in the narrative, she has come to regard it not simply as an inexorable and terrifying loss of oneself: rather, she sees it as a sublime form of spiritual fulfillment and devotion, provided it is given to ensure the happiness of another. I would therefore argue that she does not live her passion *purely* as a self-effacement or "fatalité," but rather, as her new principle: that is, as a replacement for the principles of virtue and tranquility that had previously defined her life.[63] In doing so, she also effectively espouses some of the ideals of love that were championed by the seventeenth-century *précieuses*. In James Fowler's words, she "recall[s] the *Grand Siècle* […] by insisting on

[63] In this respect, I disagree with Jacot Grapa's conclusion that Tourvel simply lives her passion as "une fatalité, non comme une aspiration à quelque chose de plus gratifiant" (*Choderlos de Laclos* 148).

an elevated view of love, [which has] historical connections with *préciosité* and (therefore) *amour courtois*" (*Libertine's Nemesis* 6).[64]

The significance of Tourvel's decision to adopt love as her new principle becomes even more ambiguous when one considers the tragic end to her affair with Valmont. On the one hand, her tenderness and candor have a remarkably transformative effect on him: although he attempts to resist this change over the course of the novel, his feelings for Tourvel prove too strong. As Anne Vila observes, his letters to Merteuil constantly betray his "thinly veiled alarm" that Tourvel is causing him to "los[e] his sangfroid—that is, his capacity to control his own sensibility at will, and thus to qualify for membership in the community of roués" (*Enlightenment and Pathology* 275). This comes to a head in letter 125, when he narrates his seduction of Tourvel for Merteuil. At first, he raises the possibility that he has fallen in love in order to dismiss it, assuring himself (and Merteuil) that none of the following is true: "que je puisse dépendre en quelque manière de l'esclave même que je me serais asservie; que je n'aie pas en moi seul la plénitude de mon bonheur; et que la faculté de m'en faire jouir dans toute son énergie soit réservée à telle ou telle femme, exclusivement à toute autre" (pp.400-401). But of course, these denials only underscore his dawning realization that he has lost control of his feelings: that is, Tourvel's "fall" has served to deepen his attachment to her, rather than to dispel it as he had hoped. This becomes even clearer when he recalls being swept away by her pledges of love; or more precisely, by the "candeur naïve ou sublime" with which she expressed them. He quotes her words to Merteuil with evident amazement, striking a confessional tone as he does so:

[64] Fowler's broader argument is that this is a common phenomenon among literary prudes, including Richardson's Clarissa Harlowe. But as Laurent Versini has observed, Clarissa's overriding objective is to live in peace by herself, and she never knows happiness with the brutally violent Lovelace (*Tradition* 104-105).

> "[D]ès ce moment je me donne à vous, et vous n'éprouverez de ma part ni refus, ni regrets." Ce fut avec cette candeur naïve ou sublime, qu'elle me livra sa personne et ses charmes, et qu'elle augmenta mon bonheur en le partageant. L'ivresse fut complète et réciproque; et, pour la première fois, la mienne survécut au plaisir. Je ne sortis de ses bras que pour tomber à ses genoux, pour lui jurer un amour éternel; et, il faut tout avouer, je pensais ce que je disais.
>
> (letter 125, pp.407-408)

On the other hand, however, Tourvel's influence over Valmont is once again shown to be limited: although she believes that they have forged a bond of trust and mutual devotion, he is unable (or unwilling) to choose between love and libertinism until it is too late. The root cause of this, as Merteuil correctly surmises, is his vanity: a weakness that the jealous Marquise opts to exploit to sabotage his liaison with Tourvel. She begins by routinely mocking his attachment to Tourvel as a slavish infatuation, steadily nurturing his feelings of fear and shame (letters 10, 106, and 134). These taunts eventually goad him into breaking off his liaison with Tourvel by sending her a letter that Merteuil composes for him for that purpose: the famous epistle in which Valmont (or rather, Merteuil) punctuates cruel words of indifference with the "Ce n'est pas ma faute" refrain (letter 141).[65] When Valmont (who has failed to anticipate the devastating effects of this letter) attempts to persuade the Marquise to let him reunite with Tourvel, she mocks him for his cowardly

[65] Merteuil's motives for sabotaging Valmont and Tourvel's liaison are never made fully clear, although the novel hints at them. She clearly feels betrayed by Valmont's lack of esteem for her: at several points, she rebukes him for expecting her to join his "harem" alongside Tourvel and Cécile (letter 127). She also claims to believe that she and Valmont loved each other in the past: "Dans le temps où nous nous aimions car je crois que c'était de l'amour, j'étais heureuse; et vous, Vicomte!..." (letter 131, p.421). One could interpret this as a cynical attempt to manipulate him, or as a sign that she is attached to him and is distressed upon realizing that he does not feel the same. But given Laclos's claim that Merteuil has "des sens actifs et un cœur incapable d'amour" in his letters to Madame Riccoboni (Laclos, *Œuvres complètes*, letter IV, p.691), perhaps it is most accurate to say that she "loves" Valmont as a prized possession—and that, as a libertine, she is unwilling to accept losing anything to a rival, let alone the man whom she believed she had "mastered" more than any other (letter 81).

abandonment of the woman. She then confronts him with the selfishness of his offer to renew his break with Tourvel whenever Merteuil pleases:

> [V]ous l'aimez comme un fou: mais parce que je m'amusais à vous en faire honte, vous l'avez bravement sacrifiée. […] Il vous conviendrait beaucoup, n'est-ce pas, de vous donner le mérite de cette rupture sans y perdre les plaisirs de la jouissance? Et comme alors cet apparent sacrifice n'en serait plus un pour vous, vous m'offrez de le renouveler à ma volonté! Par cet arrangement, la céleste dévote se croirait toujours l'unique choix de votre cœur, tandis que je m'enorgueillirais d'être la rivale préférée; nous serions trompées toutes deux, mais vous seriez content, et qu'importe le reste?
>
> (letter 145, pp.451-452)

With these words, Merteuil places herself in the odd position of acting as Tourvel's advocate and counterpart, even as she boasts of having tricked Valmont into destroying the woman. More precisely, she forces Valmont to contemplate his failures as both a libertine and a lover, which, as Merteuil reminds him, stemmed from his choice to place his desires above those of his partners in both arenas. Thus, in an ironic twist, Tourvel's loving devotion to Valmont serves to underscore the validity of Merteuil's habitual criticisms of men: that they, out of arrogance, conduct their affairs without discipline or foresight and treat their lovers carelessly at best.[66] In a further twist, Valmont's reckless decision to copy and dispatch Merteuil's letter without thinking about its contents prompts Caroline Jacot Grapa to argue that, in this instance, he becomes a dupe

[66] To a certain extent, Merteuil's criticisms of Valmont also echo Rosemonde's warning to Tourvel in letter 130: that men cannot love in the selfless way that women can. As Rosemonde puts it: "Ne croyez pas […] que leur amour soit semblable au nôtre. Ils éprouvent bien la même ivresse; souvent même ils y mettent plus d'emportement: mais ils ne connaissent pas cet empressement inquiet, cette sollicitude délicate, qui produit en nous ces soins tendres et continus, et dont l'unique but est toujours l'objet aimé. L'homme jouit du bonheur qu'il ressent, et la femme de celui qu'elle procure" (pp.417-418). As Thomas Kavanagh observes, Rosemonde's worldview is a throwback to seventeenth-century *préciosité*, which held that only women were capable of pure love (*Enlightened Pleasures* 146). Yet whereas Rosemonde implies that men's selfishness is inevitable, Merteuil describes it as a choice Valmont has made.

on par with Cécile: "Ironiquement, [Valmont] est ravalé au rang d'une Cécile, dépossédé d'une parole propre, piégé par Mme de Merteuil qui met sous sa plume les mots qu'elle sait irréparables" (*Choderlos de Laclos* 64). Moreover, although he manages to exact vengeance on Merteuil at the novel's end by having her letters published, his attempts to save the heartbroken Tourvel prove futile: having never read his last letters to her, she succumbs to madness and dies in the convent to which she has retreated, ironically realizing her previously stated fear of suffering a "délire dangereux" (letter 161).

Despite the undeniably tragic nature of Tourvel's fate, however, her final moments leave the reader with some added layers of nuance to contemplate. Upon hearing of Valmont's death in his duel with Danceny, she suddenly recovers her sanity and prays for her ex-lover's salvation: "'Dieu tout puissant,' […] 'je me soumets à ta justice: mais pardonne à Valmont. Que mes malheurs, que je reconnais avoir mérités, ne lui soient pas un sujet de reproche, et je bénirai ta miséricorde!'" (letter 165, p.490) She then (as reported to Rosemonde by Madame de Volanges) meets her death with stoic acceptance (p.491). Critics have traditionally interpreted this scene as a confirmation of Tourvel's selflessness and Christian devotion, which it undoubtedly is.[67] Yet when read in light of her previous discourse, it can also be regarded as her last effort to live by her more personal principles. By emerging from her delirium to declare that she has deserved her suffering, she takes possession of what she believes were her own mistakes. In doing so, she reclaims a sense of control over herself and resumes her habitual willingness to candidly evaluate her choices. She also reaffirms her commitment to practicing her love for Valmont as her new principle: even after discovering that her perception of him was deeply mistaken, she chooses to regard her devotion to

[67] Patrick Byrne, for example, proposes this interpretation in "Second Thoughts on the Dénouement of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*," in *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 94, no. 4 (October 2001): 964-972. See also David McCallam, *L'art de l'équivoque*, 68-71.

him as the act that gives her life its ultimate meaning. Thus, in a novel in which nearly every major character says "Ce n'est pas ma faute" on some occasion, she—rather like Merteuil—stands out as one of the more introspective players and one of the few who manage to seize some degree of control over their own existence.

At the same time, Tourvel's death in a secluded convent room reminds us that the qualities she embodies—*candeur*, virtue, and selfless love—are thoroughly out of place in the world she inhabits. These qualities bring her a brief period of bliss, but they do not offer her a means of securing long-term happiness on the theatrical battlefield of late-Enlightenment high society. Moreover, her story proposes no clear means of restoring her ideals to the world, even as her commitment to her principles provides the reader with a sympathetic character to admire. All that remains for Tourvel is to withdraw from the world entirely: that is, to share Cécile's melancholy descent into obscurity.

CONCLUSION

Laclos's portrayal of ingenuousness in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782) helps to highlight an important development in the ingénue's history as a character: namely, the fact that in the second half of the eighteenth century, French authors came to show a growing interest in exploring the more troubling aspects of ingenuousness, like its association with potentially dangerous levels of *sottise*, inexperience, and vulnerability to others. Traces of these themes had of course been present in texts that featured ingénues since the character's first appearance in Molière's *L'École des femmes* (1662): before Agnès achieves her awakening, she is blind to Arnolphe's efforts to keep her ignorant of the world and to the risks of forming liaisons with young suitors like Horace. Ingénues also play the role of dupe in many eighteenth-century texts, like Marivaux's comedies and Diderot's *La Religieuse* (1760/1780-1782): Silvia, Angélique, and Suzanne are all duped to a certain extent by more savvy and experienced characters who seek to gain something from them (albeit with different motives and to different ends). Yet in Laclos's novel, these themes are carried to extremes in the case of Cécile de Volanges: her ingenuousness not only causes her to be deceived by Laclos's libertines, but to be seduced into moral depravity and utter ruin. Similarly, although the virtuous Madame de Tourvel is not an ingénue, her failure to avoid being seduced by Valmont can be partially attributed to her tendency to speak and write to him with too much *candeur*.

Another important author who explored dark fates for fictional ingénues in the late Enlightenment was Donatien-Alphonse-François de Sade. In the eyes of the libertine characters who star in his philosophical narratives, ingénues make ideal test subjects for sexual experimentation and for pitting the virtues of libertine philosophy against those of traditional

morality. The best example of this can arguably be found in Sade's novel *Justine ou les Malheurs de la vertu* (1791). In this text, the titular heroine is described at the narrative's outset in terms that give her points in common with both Cécile and Tourvel: "[E]lle était d'un caractère sombre et mélancolique […]. Douée d'une tendresse, d'une sensibilité surprenantes, […] elle n'avait qu'une ingénuité, une candeur qui devaient la faire tomber dans bien des pièges."[1] In contrast, her sister Juliette is introduced to the reader as an amoral coquette who readily pursues pleasure and self-interest (132-133). The narrator's assertion that Justine's ingenuousness and candor predispose her to victimhood proves to be quite accurate as the narrative unfolds: her innocence, honesty, and emotional sincerity offer her no protection at all from the libertines who brutally assault her body and values for their own physical and intellectual pleasure. Although Justine remains committed to her belief in the importance of virtue (which gives her another notable point in common with Tourvel), her earnest arguments in favor of conventional morality, religion, and sympathy for others are portrayed as hopelessly ineffectual, especially when pitted against the libertines' veneration of vice as the path to true enlightenment.[2] Ultimately, Justine is presented to the reader as a victim of her refusal to embrace the freedoms and philosophical tenets of libertinism: whereas her sister Juliette finds happiness and success by rejecting moral and sexual constraints, Justine's devotion to virtue merely leads her to suffer at the hands of others.[3]

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[1] Donatien-Alphonse-François de Sade, *Justine ou les Malheurs de la vertu*, cited in *Œuvres*, ed. Michel Delon (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1995), 133.

[2] On this point, see for example Anne Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 288-289.

[3] Notably, Juliette experiences a last-minute conversion to religious piety at the end of this novel: upon witnessing Justine be struck and killed by lightening, Juliette decides that this is a warning of heavenly retribution to come for her own sins and retires to a convent to repent (388-390). However, her choice to interpret her sister's cruel fate through the lens of her own self-interest—coupled with the narrator's sudden and dubious claim that Justine's extreme suffering was merely a test imposed by God—make it clear that Sade is mocking the type of Christian moralizing that one finds at the end of novels like Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748).

The end result of Justine and Juliette's contrasting storylines is a satirical takedown of what Sade saw as the misguided limitations of mainstream Enlightenment thought. By designating the ingenuous Justine to be the advocate of values like virtue, compassion, and modesty—ideals that were often championed by moralists like Jean-Jacques Rousseau—Sade suggested that such concepts were naïve. In their place, he advocated seeking individual freedom through a total rejection of moral constraints and the embrace of one's sexual proclivities: that is, of what Sade sees as humanity's natural inclination to that which society condemns as "vice." In short, as Anne Vila puts it, for Sade, "the truly enlightened, truly natural human being is […] necessarily a libertine" (*Enlightenment and Pathology* 268). Not all of Sade's ingénues were doomed to misery, however: the aptly named Eugénie of his *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (1765) shares none of Justine's moral compunctions, which allows the text's libertines to rapidly persuade her of the pleasures of vice and the impotence of traditional mores.[4] Her initial innocence and sexual curiosity serve to make her a thrilling student for her tutors: as the libertine Dolmancé exclaims upon beginning Eugénie's sexual education, "[C]ette ingénuité me fait horriblement bander."[5] One might almost imagine Laclos's Valmont saying the same about Cécile (although perhaps in less vulgar terms). Yet Sade's libertines would no doubt argue that Eugénie improves on Cécile's performance as a pupil: she is a conscious and willing participant in her conversion to debauchery, which eventually qualifies her to be counted among Sade's enlightened libertines.[6]

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[4] In her reading of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, Lynn Hunt notes that it is difficult to determine when the text was originally composed. Although it includes several references to historical events of the French Revolution, which clearly indicates that at least some of it was written in the mid-1790s, Hunt argues that Sade probably composed many of its other passages during the 1780s. See Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 125-126.

[5] Donatien-Alphonse-François de Sade, *La philosophie dans le boudoir* (Paris: J.-J. Pauvert, 1972), 47.

[6] Lynn Hunt has argued that this text can be read not just as a general refutation of Enlightenment ideals, but as a satirical take on the rhetoric of freedom, equality, and familial bonds that was espoused by the republican government of revolutionary France. See *Family Romance*, 124-150.

At the same time, depictions of *ingénuité* as an idealized quality of unspoiled innocence continued to appear in French literature in the second half of the Enlightenment. For example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau—in a very different vein from Sade—wrote about ingénu(e)s (both male and female) in connection with the theme of education as a means of restoring humanity to its true nature. Yet in Rousseau's corpus (unlike Sade's), ingenuousness is not depicted as a trait to be sexually exploited or morally corrupted, but rather, as something to be nurtured with care in the young for the benefit of mankind. As I discussed in Chapter 4, Rousseau was deeply wary of civilized society, which he saw as a denaturing force of corruption. In his view, as he puts it in *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (1762), vice does not come from within, but from outside forces: "[L]es premiers mouvements de la nature sont toujours droits […]. Il ne s[e] trouve pas [dans le cœur humain] un seul vice dont on ne puisse dire comment et par où il y est entré."[7] To propose a remedy for this, he devotes the first four volumes of the text to narrating the development of a fictional child, Émile, who is raised according to Rousseau's vision of an ideal education. Initially, Émile's tutor adopts an educational regimen that, as Christophe Martin observes, resembles the one that Molière's Arnolphe prescribes for Agnès: Émile is given no formal instruction and is raised in a secluded environment to ensure that he grows up in total ignorance of society.[8] Yet rather than seeking to keep his charge in ignorance forever (as Arnolphe does), this tutor's objective is to provide time for Émile's natural qualities to flourish in their own way. In his words: "La prémiére éducation doit donc être purement négative. Elle consiste, non point à enseigner la vertu ni la vérité, mais à garantir le cœur du vice et l'esprit de l'erreur" (323). This allows Émile to grow up as a purehearted ingénu, thoroughly ignorant of vice and prejudice, thereby laying a solid

[7] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, ou de l'éducation* in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1969), vol. 4, 322.
[8] See Christophe Martin, *Éducations négatives: Fictions d'expérimentation pédagogique au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris: Éditions Classiques Garnier, 2010), 209-210.

foundation for later instruction in the principles of virtue which will prepare him for a life of civic duty (323-324).[9]

In setting up this brief comparison of the very different ways in which Sade and Rousseau use ingénu(e)s to explore their respective philosophies, my intention is to highlight a central theme of this dissertation: one that, in my view, holds the key to unraveling the ingénue's true significance as a major literary motif of the Enlightenment and of the texts I have examined in the previous chapters. Ultimately, although these characters differ in important ways—as the extreme disparity between Sade and Rousseau's ingénu(e)s underscores—they can also be said to speak to the most fundamental questions that served as the foundation of the Enlightenment project. Questions like: what are the wholesome or harmful effects of ignorance, knowledge, and living in society? Who wields knowledge, and for what purposes, whether good or ill? Who is capable of enlightenment and who is not? How far does human potential extend? What are the necessary conditions for creating a better society, culture, and populace, or is it even possible to do so in eighteenth-century France? What comes naturally to given types of people, and what must be cultivated?

Such questions are integral not only to Rousseau and Sade's depictions of ingénu(e)s, but to the other texts I have analyzed. Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* touches on all of them, particularly in its exploration of Merteuil's quest for enlightenment and Cécile's failure to emulate it. In another vein, Diderot's experiments with the aesthetics of beholding ingénues tests the limits of the power of fiction, driving us to contemplate what its purpose is and how it can be used to create certain effects in its readers or spectators. Marivaux's and de Graffigny's ingénues are

[9] Of course, Rousseau proposes a very different educational regimen for female children: in the text's fifth volume, he explains that his ideal female child, Sophie, is taught by her mother to temper many of her natural desires. In Rousseau's view, this is necessary to preserve Sophie's modesty and to prepare her to devote herself to the needs of her future husband (that is, Émile). However, Émile's tutor expresses admiration for what he sees as Sophie's "ingenuous" qualities: namely, her innocent heart and candid demeanor (788-789).

forced to contend with the unfamiliar territory of "polite" French society, surrounded by characters whose knowledge of its norms and subtleties far exceeds theirs. As they struggle to learn and adapt, they must explore the foundations of their own values and their own potential to change. Many characters within these narratives also see ingénues as full of exciting potential (whether correctly or incorrectly): to them, these young girls seem to offer the chance of finding true love, or perhaps, acquiring an ideal pupil for a particular school of thought.

It must be said, therefore, that despite their association with qualities like artlessness, innocence, naturalness, and inexperience, the ingénues who were featured in the French Enlightenment were anything but simple. On the contrary, their unique versatility as a character type imposed very few constraints on what their creators could do with them: they offered a nearly blank slate upon which to experiment with ideas about human development, capabilities, shortcomings, needs, and desires. Indeed, that role became especially vital in the waning decades of the Enlightenment, as thinkers struggled to contend with a world that was (unbeknownst to them) on the verge of being radically transformed. Ingénues helped them to push their readers to reflect on what needed to change in society and culture, on the possibilities for the future, and on what had perhaps been lost or left behind in the process of civilization's ongoing refinement. This seems a fitting legacy for Molière's *L'École des femmes*, which could be read as a celebration of Agnès's awakening to her potential, and which leaves it entirely to the spectator to imagine what her future will be like.

APPENDIX

Figure 1: Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Un mariage, et l'instant où le père de l'Accordée délivre la dot à son gendre*, 1761, Oil on canvas, Department of Paintings of the Louvre, Paris, France. URL: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Noyon_(60),_mus%C3%A9e_du_Noyonnais,_tableau_-_L%27accord%C3%A9e_de_village,_d%27apr%C3%A8s_Jean-Baptiste_Greuze_(original_au_Louvre,_1761).jpg

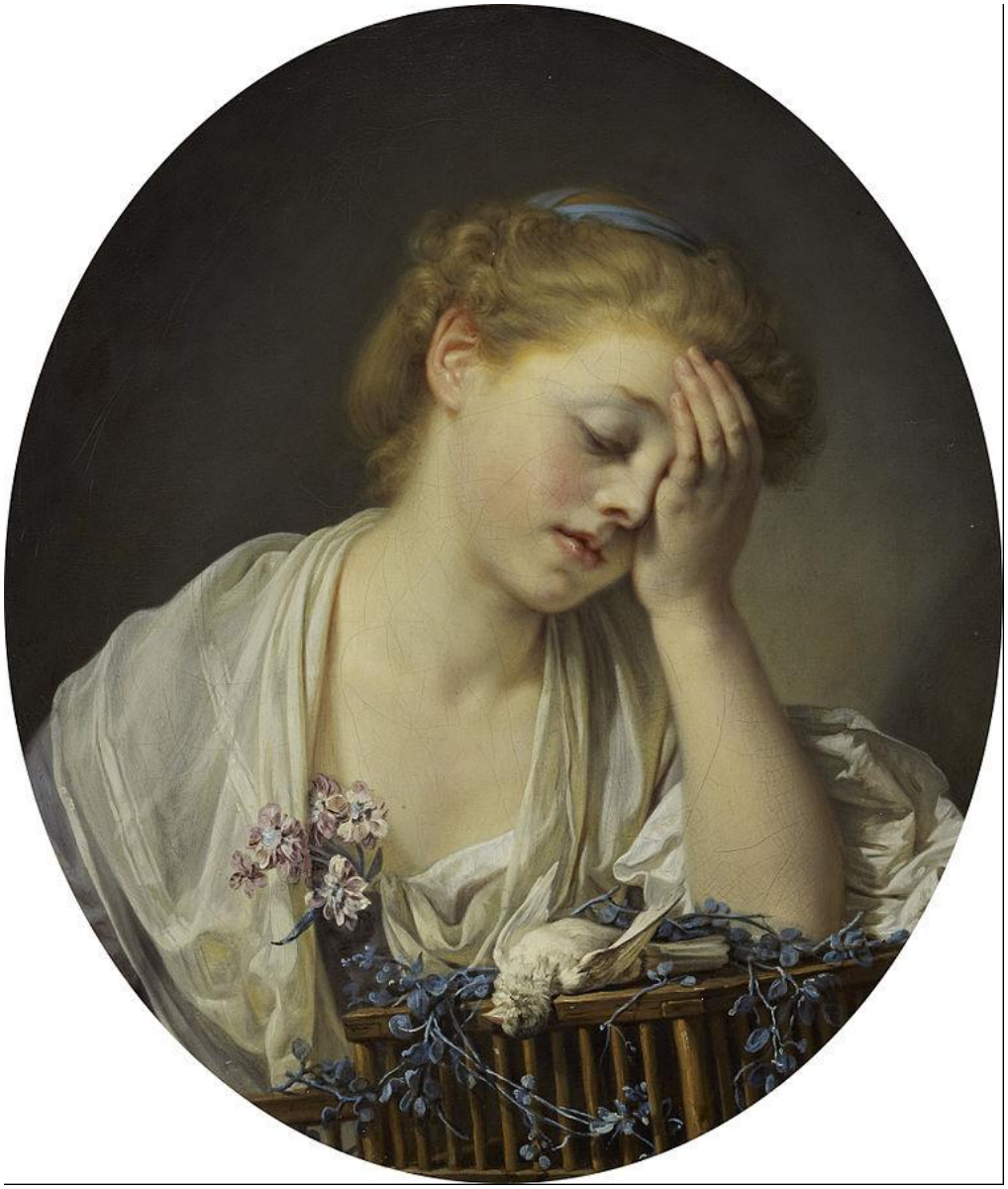

Figure 2: Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Une jeune fille qui pleure son oiseau mort*, 1765, Oil on canvas, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburg, URL: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean-Baptiste_Greuze_-_A_Girl_with_a_Dead_Canary_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

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