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LACLOS, LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FRENCH NOVEL.

(Abstract of the thesis submitted to the University of Durham for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Graham H. Rodwell.)

The thesis represents an attempt, first of all, to arrive at an acceptable biography of Choderlos de Laclos, and in the process to avoid placing unreasonable emphasis on certain documents which, accepted at face value, seem in the past to have led to the identification of Laclos with the principal male character in his novel and, on occasion, to his being represented as a monomaniac possessed by an all-consuming ambition. Laclos is examined as a writer in several genres, a soldier, a member of the household of Philippe d'Orléans and a member of the Jacobin club. A chapter is devoted to Laclos's private life, his relationships with his family and friends insofar as we can know them. It is hoped that, even if it does not answer all the questions involved in what has been described as "the Laclos enigma", this biographical study will seem as balanced and objective as circumstances permit.

Secondly, the thesis moves on to an examination of Les Liaisons dangereuses itself, the moment and circumstances of its publication, public reaction to it, and certain of the author's claims for it. There follows a study of the psychology of the novel and a study of how far it can be considered representative of the manners of the day and how far it can be seen as a revolutionary tract.

Thirdly, an attempt is made in some detail to examine the works of several writers prior to, contemporary with and subsequent to Laclos in the light of Les Liaisons, not in an attempt necessarily to prove the existence of direct "influences" of predecessors on Laclos, or of Laclos on his successors, but to point to parallels here they seem to exist, and to suggest that this, Laclos's only

piece of prose fiction, is by no means an isolated phenomenon in the development of the French novel, but that it has its place in a clearly discernible tradition.

D'après les renseignements que j'ai recueillis, le nombre d'habitants de la commune de Saint-Étienne, qui se trouvent
 dans les communes limitrophes, est de 15000. Ce chiffre est le résultat de la somme des habitants de ces communes.
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LACLOS, LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES

AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FRENCH NOVEL

by

Graham E. Rodmell, B.A.

Thesis submitted to the University of Durham for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

1967

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PRINCIPAL ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE FOOTNOTES:

- 1) O.C.: Oeuvres complètes de Choderlos de Laclos. Texte établi et annoté par Maurice Allem. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris, 1951.
- 2) L.D.: Les Liaisons dangereuses - unless otherwise stated, references are to the edition published in (1).
- 3) L.I.: Lettres inédites de Choderlos de Laclos (ed. L. de Chauvigny), Paris, 1904.

NOTE ON SPELLING.

In all quotations, the spelling and punctuation used are those to be found in the editions referred to in the bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

Laclos is notorious. He has acquired a reputation such as it is very difficult to lose. Symptomatic of this is the appearance in 1965 in one of the more serious English Sunday newspapers of an advertisement couched in the following terms: "Liaison dangereuse. Live DANGEROUSLY - spend the night with a bottle of Rhum Negrita, the X certificate rum of France". This advertisement no doubt owes more to Roger Vadim's film Les Liaisons dangereuses 1960 (itself initially banned for export by the French government) than to the actual novel.

Laclos is considered wicked almost in the same way as Sade is considered wicked, although there are considerable differences between the works of these two writers. In the nineteenth century Laclos's novel was twice banned as an obscene work, and the fact that as late as 1921 it could be published in a collection going under the title of Bibliothèque des Joyeusetés littéraires is indicative of an attitude which has long prevailed towards it. Nor is it, one feels, entirely accidental that the Gallimard Livre de Poche edition of 1952, although it contains a preface by André Malraux, is bound in black and bears on its front cover a picture of Valmont, candle in hand, by the bed of a nearly naked Cécile. On the other hand, it remains true that since the beginning of the present century Les Liaisons dangereuses has gradually come to be more and more recognised

as a novel which merits the serious attention of a public other than that which is likely to be attracted by such devices. This fact in itself has not been an unmixed blessing. When an author is "discovered", his talents frequently come to be exaggerated. There is a tendency for him to be seen as unique, and the fact that he fits into a pattern, a literary tradition, tends to be ignored.

In no sense does this study set out to whitewash Laclos. Several attempts have been made to do this in recent years, and this is perhaps a natural reaction against the anathema which has been pronounced over Laclos's name and his novel, which became inextricably intertwined the one with the other in the mind of the public of his own life-time and of the nineteenth century. Laclos has, in fact, become fashionable. It is still a moot point, however, whether this improvement in his fortunes has been brought about by purely aesthetic considerations: it is as possible today as it was in 1782 to have a succès de scandale, and the popular reception of Vadim's film or, to take an example from the domain of literature, of the novels of Grace Metalious, is sufficient proof of this, if any such proof be needed.

The present work represents an attempt to see Laclos with reference to the development and trends of the French novel in the eighteenth century. It is divided into three parts. Firstly, there comes a biographical section. We feel justified in devoting some considerable space to this. Laclos has suffered considerably at the hands of literary journalists, and although the two major biographies, those of Emile Dard and Fernand Caussy (especially the former), were in their day valuable works, they both date from 1905, and both contain errors of emphasis and fact which must be set right. We are encouraged in this venture by the reservations expressed concerning Dard and Caussy by A. and Y. Delmas in their recent book A la Recherche des 'Liaisons dangereuses' (1964).

In particular it may be said of Dard, although his work is the more useful of the two, that his thesis that Laclos was a man devoured by ambition is far from being totally satisfactory. Dard says of Laclos,

"La gloire fut l'idéale maîtresse de ses vingt ans, la chimère insaisissable de sa jeunesse, il devait la poursuivre jusqu'à sa mort." (1)

We shall have occasion to bring evidence that this picture of Laclos as a monomaniac of ambition is not a proven likeness.

This biographical section, then, will attempt to make an objective assessment of such facts as we possess about the life of Laclos. It is, of course, particularly lamentable that hard

1. / E. Dard, Un Acteur caché du Drame révolutionnaire. Le Général Choderlos de Laclos..., Paris, 1905, p. 25.

facts about Laclos's youth are relatively rare, and that the exact nature of his political role in later years is still very open to debate. About the Orléanist movement - if movement it can be called - with which he was connected, the professor of the history of the French Revolution at the Sorbonne succinctly states, "La question d'Orléans n'est pas résolue, il manque des Archives" (1). It is very difficult to find objective comment upon Laclos's political activities, but there has grown up around him a legend which depicts him as an eighteenth-century Machiavelli, and how far this is the result of his real political actions and how far it is due to, firstly, his reputation as the author of Les Liaisons dangereuses and, secondly, a deliberate "smear campaign" directed by his political opponents, is one problem which has to be considered. As for his latter years, it will not be difficult to prove that then, at least, ambition, or "la gloire", was the last thing with which Laclos was concerned. This is not to say that he led a life devoid of ambition. Normal ambition is one thing, but one must be able to bring forward many incontrovertible facts before one can erect the thesis that his entire life and work are to be explained in terms of an excess of this passion.

A question closely connected with the problem of Laclos and ambition is how far his novel can be taken to be a political pamphlet heralding the Revolution. Another problem not far removed from this is that of the morality of the novel. Laclos professed that Les Liaisons was written with

1. Prof. M. Reinhard, in a letter, 23rd February, 1959.

a moral aim in view, and his friend Pariset, comparing it with Samuel Richardson's Clarissa, remarked that

"On peut dire, en faveur des Liaisons dangereuses, qu'elles renferment une leçon pour plus de personnes" (1),

whilst, more recently, René de Planhol wrote in his preface to the novel,

"Affirmons-le, les Liaisons dangereuses ne sont pas un livre immoral: le vice y est dépeint dans son affreuse vérité" (2).

Many critics, on the other hand, have taken precisely the opposite view, and have seen the work as a "regular manual of seduction" (3).

Consideration of these questions will involve some examination of Les Liaisons as a novel of manners, an enquiry as to how far it can be seen as an accurate reflection of the life of the time. These problems, along with the psychology of the work and other questions, will be tackled in our second section.

The third section will continue a task to some degree broached in the second. It will attempt, by a series of comparisons with the works of other writers, to situate Les Liaisons dangereuses in the evolution of the French novel.

1. E. Pariset, Notice sur le Général de La Clos (sic), an XII - 1803, p. 5, footnote.
2. R. de Planhol, Les Liaisons dangereuses, Paris, 1925, 2 vols., I, xiv.
3. F. C. Green, Minuet..., London, 1935, p. 421.

I. LACLOS.

I

LACLOS THE PUBLIC MAN BEFORE 1782

To speak of the first forty-one years of a man's life as "the early years" may seem peculiar, and yet in the case of Laclos it is not without justification. It is true that he did not live to a great age, but it is equally true that for the first four decades of his life Laclos was a nobody. He showed little sign during this period of the versatile activity which was to characterise the years of his maturity. His literary productions during this time are of little intrinsic worth, as we shall see, whilst in his life outside literature - and it is worth stating at the very outset that literature was always only a small part of Laclos's activity - he was having difficulty in finding his feet, largely because of circumstances quite outside his control.

These first forty-one years are the period of Laclos's childhood, his youth, and his first attempt at a military career. On the literary side these years see his first ventures into writing, and culminate in the event which suddenly brought him out of obscurity and focussed public attention upon him: the publication of his only outstanding literary work, Les Liaisons dangereuses.

Pierre-Ambroise-François Choderlos de Laclos was born at Amiens on the 18th October, 1741. His family contrary to that of the Marquis de Sade who, like Laclos, acquired a scandalous popular reputation, was far from illustrious. It is thought that the family was Spanish by origin (1);

1. F. Caussy: Laclos, 1741-1803, d'après des documents originaux, suivi d'un mémoire inédit de Laclos, Paris, 1905, p. 8.

what is known is that Laclos's father, Jean-Ambroise Choderlos de Laclos, was subdélégué général (1718) and later secretary (1731) to the Intendance of Picardy and Artois under the Intendant Chauvelin, and therefore a man of respectable but by no means exalted standing. He was, in the words of M. Roger Vailland, "un fonctionnaire moyen (quelque chose comme, aujourd'hui, 1/ un "secrétaire de préfecture" (1), in other words, quite an important local personage. It is from him that dates the ennoblement, although without title, of the family (2). In view of this, it is worth noting in passing that in later years Laclos was unofficially referred to as both "Marquis" and "Chevalier" (3). According to Mme Riccoboni, Laclos inherited his talent for letters from his father: "Je ne suis pas surprise qu'un fils de M. de Chauderlos (sic) écrive bien. L'esprit est héréditaire dans sa famille" (4). How far this is merely conventional eighteenth-century politeness it is impossible to determine, but we shall have occasion at a later stage to consider Mme Riccoboni's opinion of the use to which Laclos put these inherited talents.

Very little more is known of Laclos's family. We know from the register of the parish of St. Michel in Amiens that his mother was one "Dame Marie-Catherine Gallois" (5). During the reign of Louis XIV there was a Choderlos in the army in command of the gates of the town of Ath and another, also in the army, at Belfort. A Jean-Baptiste Choderlos de Laclos

1. R. Vailland: Laclos par lui-même, Paris 1958, p. 6.

2. Family coat of arms, *ibid.*, p. 6 & MS.

3. Cf. Bibliography under WORKS WHICH HAVE BEEN ATTRIBUTED TO LACLOS (les Vertus de Louis XVI.... par M. le Marquis de Laclos) and under ORLEANS (Lettre de M. le Duc d'Orléans à M. le Chevalier de Laclos ...)

4. Laclos: O.C. p. 710.

5. Archives administratives de la Guerre, Laclos dossier. Photographically reproduced by Vailland, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

purchased Quinault's post as valet de chambre to the king in 1683, and one Pierre Choderlos, "bourgeois de Paris", died on the 23rd April 1700, aged forty-nine, in the Rue Montmartre, parish of Saint-Eustache, and was buried in the cemetery of Saint Joseph in the presence of "Jean de Laclos, prêtre, prieur de Mont-Saint-Jean" (1). It is possible, as Dard suggests (2), that this worthy bourgeois was the grandfather of the author of Les Liaisons dangereuses.

On the day following that of his birth, Laclos was baptised in the church of Saint-Michel, Amiens. This we know from an extract from the parish register dated 14th May 1759, the year in which Laclos became a candidate for entry into the artillery academy of La Fère (Aisne). It is now preserved in the Archives administratives de la Guerre (3). Little is known of his childhood, but these same archives show that his father wrote to the Ministry to discover the methods of entry into La Fère. M. le Camus, who was in charge of this matter, suggested that M. de Laclos put his son under M. de la Blottière, a teacher of mathematics, and eventually, as a result of this preliminary tuition, Laclos was accepted as a pupil on January 23rd 1760 into the school which Napoleon was later to make into the École Polytechnique.

As has often been pointed out, the artillery was the least aristocratic section of the French army before the Revolution, and it was here that an officer of Laclos's extraction stood the best chance of promotion. It was

1. Jal.: Dictionnaire critique de biographie et d'histoire, articles Laclos & Quinault, 2nd edn., (Paris, Plon, 1867).
2. E. Dard: Un Acteur caché du Drame révolutionnaire. Le Général Choderlos de Laclos, (Paris, Perrin, 1905)
3. vide n.l. supra

3. vide n.l. supra.

here that were to be found "les fils de la bourgeoisie et de la petite noblesse, qui avaient du goût pour les sciences et peu d'appuis à la cour" (1). The high aristocratic officers of the court, who prided themselves only upon personal valour, did not enter the artillery, and tended to look down upon the technicians who formed its officer strength. The Comte d'Artois is reputed to have declared at a battle of the Windward Islands in 1782 that "en fait de batteries, il ne connaissait que sa batterie de cuisine" (2).

In 1762, as a second lieutenant, Laelos left La Fère to join the Brigade des Colonies, which was then being formed for service in Canada. As a result of the Peace of Paris in 1763, however, this project came to nothing and Laelos was deprived of the choice of active service, and his inactivity was to be extended throughout the period of the American War of Independence. The force to which he was attached was sent to Toul, from which town it took its name, becoming the Régiment de Toul, and Laelos spent the next few years in various towns performing garrison duties. Before leaving Toul he was promoted lieutenant, and in the following year (1766) he was transferred with his regiment to Strasbourg. From 1769 to 1775 he was in Grenoble, where he was promoted, on the grounds of seniority, captain and then "aide-major". Then he moved to Besançon and in 1776 to Valence, to help see to the billeting of troops at a time when there was being founded a school of

1. Dard, p. 4,. Vide also Caussy p. 9 & Vailland p. 7.
2. Dard, p. 27.

artillery and a regiment in which Bonaparte was later to serve as a lieutenant (1). In 1778 Laclos was transferred back to Besançon, and during the following year he was appointed to assist Montalembert in the construction of a fort on the Ile d'Aix near La Rochelle.

Montalembert was developing the traditions of fortification, and in the process was transforming this art. That Laclos was deeply influenced by his superior officer will become clear when we consider his letter on Vauban. The fort was only a wooden construction, but was proved to be an excellent piece of workmanship when on October 7th 1780 its entire battery of guns was fired simultaneously with no ill effect upon the structure. Montalembert was to give much credit for this work to Laclos, and later was to describe him as "un autre moi-même" (2). In this same year of 1780 Laclos was promoted "capitaine-commandant", again by seniority.

On September 4th 1781 he applied for six months' leave. Dard implies (3) that Les Liaisons dangereuses was written during this leave in either Paris or La Rochelle. Tilly informs us that Laclos told him that he wrote the novel whilst "en garnison à l'île de Ré" (4). This island is close to the Ile d'Aix and it seems reasonable to suppose that Tilly has made a minor error here, although it is possible, if one wishes to be ultra-cautious, to say with M. Allem (5): "Peut-être Laclos a-t-il, dans l'une et l'autre(île),

1. *ibid.*, p. 8.

2. Archives administratives de la Guerre, Laclos dossier.

3. Dard, p. 30.

4. Tilly: Mémoires, 3 vols. Paris, 1828, I 322, p. 317. Reprod. in Pléiade edn. of Oeuvres complètes of Laclos, p. 732.

5. In his edn. of the Oeuvres Complètes of Laclos, Pléiade, 1951, p. 8.

travaillé à la rédaction de son ouvrage." Pariset, who knew Laclos well, states in his Notice sur le Général de La Clos (1) that Les Liaisons was written during Laclos's tour of duty on the Ile d'Aix. On this point, one must take Pariset's version as more probable than that of Dard, who brings no corroborative evidence. It is impossible to prove conclusively where the novel was written, but it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that it was, in its first draft, either completed "ou, du moins, bien près de l'être" (2), when Laclos went on leave, and that he copied it out during this six-month period for, as will be shown later, the only manuscript of the novel that we possess (3) may well not be the original draft. The time of composition of the novel will also be investigated later, but it can be said here that it seems likely that Laclos began work on Les Liaisons in 1780, and possibly as early as 1779. He managed to spin out his six months' leave beyond the limit of that period and was still absent from his post when, in the spring of 1782, the novel was published.

We are here ^{primarily} ~~specifically~~ concerned with Laclos the man, and so consideration of his novel will be postponed for a while. However, before going on to give a biographical account of Laclos after the publication of his masterpiece, we shall look back over these years from 1741 to 1782 and consider what kind of picture emerges from the few facts we have about his early life, and then make a brief survey of Laclos's first ventures into the literary field.

1. An XII, p. 3.
2. O.C., p. 8.
3. Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français 12845, folios 35-127.

J

It is true that throughout his younger days, because an unexpected period of peace had come after many years of almost continuous war, Laclos had to be content with garrison life, at a time when the French artillery was admired and respected throughout Europe (1). This must certainly have been frustrating for him, if he had the ambition which Dard attributes to him. That Laclos was a highly intelligent man is clear, and he certainly believed in making his ideas known, as his letter on Vauban will show, but one cannot help wondering whether Dard's formula that "sa vie fut, comme son livre, le roman d'un ambitieux" (2), means quite as much as it would appear. If we are to take it as inferring that Laclos was a man possessed by a devouring ambition to the extent of mania, then there is very little evidence of it in his life, and ~~more~~ particularly in the period prior to the publication of his novel, which we are now considering. In these circumstances, one can only think that something of the legend of Laclos as a Machiavellian figure, which grew up after the publication of Les Liaisons and was embroidered upon by pamphleteers during Laclos's period as secretary to the Duc d'Orléans, has rubbed off ^{6/} upon Dard and influenced him to set up what can only be described as an a priori theory. That Laclos had the normal ambitions of an intelligent man is certain, but it is a far cry from this to the erection of ambition, seconded by rancour, as the principal driving force behind the man and his

1. vide Dard pp. 6-7.

2. Dard, op. cit., Avertissement, p. ix.

work. Indeed, such a statement about a work of art means very little indeed. In no sense can ambition be said to explain an excellent piece of writing such as Les Liaisons dangereuses. It does not explain the talent - or genius - which suddenly appears in a man and urges him to write one masterpiece, when all that he has written previously, and all that he is to write in the future, is trivia. It is just as dangerous, on the evidence at our disposal, to erect a thesis upon the idea that Laclos's life and work can be explained by the one impulse of ambition, as it is to identify Laclos with Valmont and maintain that the author himself was a rake and a libertine. This smacks of pre-conceived ideas, or at least of a failure to take into account all the known facts.

One of the greatest difficulties is that we are not richly endowed with information concerning Laclos's life, particularly during those years which precede the publication of Les Liaisons. If only we possessed some personal letters of his to cover the years from 1770 onwards we might be able to throw some real light upon what has been called the Laclos enigma. As Émile Henriot rightly says, Dard's summary of Laclos's life and work as those of a man consumed by ambition, "ne satisfait point notre curiosité; ce n'est que justifier, dans une certaine mesure, la déconcertante biographie du militaire et du politique, sans permettre de mieux comprendre les desseins secrets de l'homme et les intentions du romancier. Ambitieux, d'ailleurs ne signifie rien; c'est-à-dire que l'homme est supérieur, le sait, et voudrait tirer le meilleur parti de cette supériorité. Le grand crime!"(1) "A chercher toujours des raisons extra-littéraires à la création littéraire,

1. E. Henriot: Choderlos de Laclos, in Revue Universelle, mai 1925, p. 499.

on fait bien souvent fausse route, alors qu'il serait si simple d'imaginer qu'un écrivain, même amateur, n'obéit qu'au besoin d'écrire quand il a quelque chose à dire." (1) Dard's remark is very little more than a shot in the dark. We have no definite evidence, with one possible exception which is itself second-hand and suspect both through the nature of the reporter and its date - Tilly's claim that Laclos said, "Je résolu de faire un ouvrage qui sortît de la route ordinaire, qui fît du bruit, et qui retentît encore sur la terre quand j'y aurai passé." (2) - that Laclos consciously wrote from motives which might be said to be those of ambition. This evidence will be considered more fully at a later stage. Even if we accept Tilly's evidence, can it be said to show an abnormal form of ambition in Laclos?

For the moment, however, we are concerned with the earlier years of Laclos's life, and here there are two points which should be made, the first in connection with his period at artillery school, the second with his life as a young officer on garrison duty. Dard, to support his ambition theory, seizes upon one or two snippets of information and blows them up to a size which may well bear little or no relation to reality. Thus, for instance, as the Archives administratives de la Guerre show us, it is a fact that Laclos attempted to have his entry into La Fère back-dated to January 1759, since it was then that he had first applied for

1. E. Henriot: L'Enigme Laclos, in Temps, 11/11/1930.
2. Tilly: Mémoires I, 322. In O.C., p. 732. Tilly's italics.

admission, although he did not enter the school until 1760. He pointed out that he had privately been receiving the tuition which others received free at the school (1). His failure to win his case meant that he lost a year's seniority by comparison with his colleagues. This might possibly be described as a sign of ambition, but really one has to stretch the point considerably to find any profound significance in it.

We know very little about Laelos's life at La Fère, although it is reasonable to suppose, in view of the excellent reports given of him by his superior officers, and the fact that, for instance, he was entrusted with the Valence mission, that he did well.

As has been said, the reports on Laelos given by the military inspectors and by his colonel are excellent (2). Here again, Dard seizes upon a single incident to support his thesis (3). Whilst Laelos was stationed at Grenoble, one of his colleagues by the name of Burtin was promoted to a higher rank than his in a neighbouring regiment. Laelos protested that this promotion was out of accord with the principle of seniority, and asked that he too should be promoted, even if for the time being he were not granted an increased salary. This was granted, and a military inspector, perhaps in a fit of spleen, or perhaps simply because it is always unpleasant to admit

1. Dard, p. 5, footnote 1. vide Caussy, pp. 9-10.
2. Archives administratives de la Guerre, Laelos dossier & dossier of the Rég't. de Toul.
3. Ibid, Laelos dossier. Dard, pp. 26-7.

that a mistake has been made, remarked that Laclos only fulfilled his duties "par ambition". Dard makes much of this, and yet it seems quite clear that Laclos was within his rights to complain at being passed over in this way. One can see nothing phenomenal in this kind of ambition.

It is difficult to determine to what extent freemasonry in the eighteenth century was looked upon as a social game. Masonic lodges existed in a considerable number of regiments. In the words of Dard (1):

"On s'y piquait de littérature, de philosophie, de goût pour les lumières, c'est-à-dire qu'on s'y montrait frondeur et irréligieux... Les oisifs y venaient pour s'y distraire, les beaux esprits pour y briller et les ambitieux pour s'y faire des relations utiles."

Be that as it may, and no matter into which category one cares to put Laclos, it is certainly true that many of the people with whom he was to become connected were freemasons, the most eminent of these being the Duc d'Orléans himself (2). It is also quite clear that Laclos himself was a freemason, and his signature is preceded by masonic signs, whether it be on a private or an official letter, or even on his contract with the publisher Durand for the publication of Les Liaisons dangereuses (3).

It is, in any case, difficult to see Laclos's membership of a masonic lodge (4) as a sign of either unusual ambition or revolutionary tendencies. If we do this, then we must attribute revolutionary tendencies to the most

1. Dard, pp. 27-8.

2. vide A. Britsch, La Jeunesse de Philippe-Égalité (Paris, Payot, 1926), and Philippe-Égalité, le Prince Rouge, d'après des documents inédits (Paris, Sfelt, 1958), by A. Castelot.

3. B.N. MSS. fonds français 12845, A.A.G., etc., Photographic reproductions of letters and the contract in Laclos par lui-même, vide pp. 34-5, 45-7, 104-5, 121, 159, 170-1.

4. The Paris lodge of La Candeur, according to the Abbé Barruel: Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du jacobinisme, (Londres and Hambourg, 1797-8, 4 vols., IV, 360).

unlikely people. It is probable that Louis XVI himself was a freemason (1). Orléans (or Chartres, as he then was) became Grand Master in 1773, "et c'est à qui s'empresera de suivre son exemple." (2) Mornet makes it quite clear that the nobility did not see freemasonry as a revolutionary, still less as a democratic enterprise, nor ^{did} the clergy ^{see it} as a threat to religion. Many clergy, especially regulars, were masons, and their number included several superiors. Adoptive lodges for women were formed, and prominent in them were such people as the Princesse de Lamballe, Mme de Montalembert and Mme de Bouillé.

"Les récriminations ne commencent qu'avec la Révolution, au moment où, s'il n'y a pas d'action révolutionnaire évidente de la maçonnerie, il y a du moins des franc-maçons notoires qui semblent des révolutionnaires aux défenseurs têtus ou prudents du passé. C'est alors que se forme la légende d'un complot maçonnique qui aurait, de longue main, prévu et préparé la Révolution ..." (3) The lodges were in fact often reactionary rather than the opposite. As late as 1787 the lodge of Saint-Jean de Jérusalem in Nancy excludes actors from membership purely on the grounds that they are excommunicated by the Pope, and because they are "vils aux yeux mêmes des profanes." In Toulouse the hour of masonic meetings was put back "pour faciliter à nos frères l'exercice de la religion" (4), whilst the freemasons of Marseilles built a temple which they decorated with allegorical paintings around a central inscription which read, Deo, regi, patriae fidelitas.

1. D. Mornet: Les Origines intellectuelles de la Révolution française, 1715-1787 (Paris, Armand Colin, 1933), p. 364.

2. *ibid.*, p. 364.

3. *ibid.*, p. 362.

4. *ibid.*, p. 367

8/

The Etoile flamboyante declared in 1764 that "nos conversations ont des bornes prescrites; tout objet de contestation est pros crit, controverse politique.." (1)

It seems clear, then, that in the eighteenth century masonic lodges were anything but centres for plotting: "On n'y méditait aucun dessein ni politique, ni même philosophique" (2). To some degree freemasonry was, with its symbolic ritual, baffling even to many freemasons, a social game. It had the attraction of mystery, and was probably to some extent a replacement for the religious mysticism of the seventeenth century. For many, no doubt, masonic meetings were simply an excuse for eating and drinking in congenial company, for banquets were an important feature among the activities of the lodges (3). But although in many respects they were little more than social clubs, for dining or reading and writing verse, many of them combined this kind of activity with charitable works, the "bienfaisance", often of a sentimental nature, which is characteristic of the eighteenth century, and which is reflected in its literature.

It is even doubtful whether the boasted equality within the lodges was a reality (4). This was, at the most, in practice merely "une égalité momentanée, semblable à celle qui fait du gueux l'égal du milliardaire le jour d'une élection." (5) However, even allowing for the fact that some freemasons may well, by the use of such formulae as that of "égalité" - and

1. . *ibid.*, p. 368.
2. *ibid.*, p. 368.
3. *ibid.*, p. 373.
4. *ibid.*, pp. 379-80.
5. *ibid.*, p. 378.

incidentally Laclos was never in any real sense an egalitarian - have sought to express some kind of democratic aspiration, it is impossible to find in eighteenth-century French freemasonry "une volonté ou même une tendance révolutionnaire, - même une volonté ou tendance nettement réformatrice, - même une volonté ou tendance clairement philosophique..." (1) Mornet concludes that "l'histoire du complot secret poussant dans l'ombre une masse ignorante et docile n'est que l'histoire d'une légende" (2), and that "la plupart des maçons ne sont ni des révolutionnaires, ni même des réformateurs et des philosophes, ni même des mécontents" (3). We in our turn may conclude that, for lack of any evidence to the contrary, at this stage Laclos was one of this majority within the ranks of freemasonry.

So far we have come across no sign which would justify the picture of Laclos as a man devoured by ambition. All that has been said about him so far could be said of almost any man who found himself in a similar position to that of Laclos, whether in the eighteenth or the twentieth century.

It is true that many officers of Laclos's regiment were sent to Corsica between 1767 and 1773 in the campaigns which finally won that island for France, and were thus more fortunate than he in the quest for active service. Yet despite the fact that Laclos was an enthusiastic, intelligent artillery officer, there is no necessity to picture him during

1. *ibid.*, p. 381.

2. *ibid.*, p. 387.

3. *ibid.*, p. 375.

his period of garrison duty as brooding over plans for his future greatness, preparing a revolutionary pamphlet in novel form, or even being bored by all that went on around him. This is in fact far from likely. Not all garrison towns were unpleasant, and Grenoble in particular, where Laclos spent the years 1769 to 1775, "les plus vives années de sa jeunesse" (1), had acquired for itself a high reputation as a social centre where a pleasurable life awaited a young army officer. "Cette ville est très coûteuse et très dangereuse pour le jeu et pour les femmes", writes Lepelletier (2), and last this reference to expense should give rise to the notion that an impoverished Laclos sat in his barrack-room and fumed with frustration and rancour whilst wealthier and more aristocratic officers went out on the town, it is worth noting that it is on record that Laclos had "des qualités personnelles qui le faisaient se répandre dans la meilleure société." (3) This was in 1771, and years later, when Laclos, himself attached to the Army of Italy, was passing through Grenoble once more, he too admitted that his old acquaintances there were all "la fine fleur de l'aristocratie" (4). Indeed, Laclos says very little about these old acquaintances, and tells his wife, "Je n'avois laissé icy aucune véritable affection." Nevertheless, if the somewhat dispirited elderly general is not prepared to go out of his way to renew these contacts - most of the people he knew are, he says, in the country - he does describe them

1. Dard, p. 16.

2. op. cit., p. 41. Dard, p. 10.

3. A.A.G. Régt. de Toul dossier.

4. Lettres inédites de Choderlos de Laclos, publiées par M. Louis de Chauvigny. 2e édition, (Paris, ~~Mercur~~ de France, 1904), p. 140. Letter to his wife, 19 Thermidor an VIII. d/

as "aimables connoissances" (1), and the adjective should be noted. Thus everything would seem to indicate that, as an officer on garrison duty, particularly in Grenoble but in all probability in the towns about which we have less information (2), Laclos took full advantage of the opportunities which were offered to him to have a good time.

According to Tilly, and we must point out once again that not all his evidence can be taken at face value, Laclos said that, "C'est à Grenoble que je vis l'originale (de Mme de Merteuil) dont la mienne n'est qu'une faible copie, une marquise de L.T.D.P.M., dont toute la ville racontait les traits dignes des jours des Impératrices Romaines les plus insatiables. Je pris des notes et je me promis bien de les réaliser en temps et lieu" (3). This might, one supposes, if a sufficiently loose interpretation were taken of the reference to the "jours des Impératrices..." as referring to a generally corrupt Ancien Régime, and if a sufficiently melodramatic interpretation were taken of the last sentence, be seen as support for the idea of Laclos preparing a revolutionary bombshell. This is the expressed view of Tilly himself, as we see later in the same passage.⁽⁴⁾ We shall have cause to return to this question and also to that of the "keys" to Les Liaisons, but suffice it to say here that nowhere in his letters does Laclos refer to this "marquise de L.T.D.P.M.", not even when he is in Grenoble and writing of his "aimables connoissances" there. Moreover, if, as is perfectly possible, he had an occasional affair in Grenoble, this does not necessarily indicate

1. Ibid., p. 130. Letter to his wife, 8 Messidor an VIII.

2. Certainly in La Rochelle. Vide infra.

3. Tilly, Mémoires, I, 323. O.C., p. 732.

that he was himself a Valmont. For a young officer to strike up a liaison with a lady in the town in which he is stationed never has been surprising, and presumably never will be.

As for Laclos's literary efforts during this period, they are of two types, verse and opera. His activity in these fields also seems to show that he had no serious axe to grind, and the poems in particular bear out the view that he was, like any young man in his position, enjoying himself. Most of these poems were brought together for the first time in an edition which included Les Liaisons dangereuses and Laclos's correspondence with Mme Riccoboni, in four duodecimo volumes without the name of the publisher or the place of publication, in 1787 (1). Some of Laclos's poems had appeared prior to this, chiefly in the Almanach des Muses, but also in La Harpe's Correspondance littéraire and in that of Grimm. Others appeared later: Sur Madame de Genlis was published in the Galerie des Dames françaises in 1790, and mention will be made of this work at a later stage; others have been published in far more recent times by Caussy, Arthur Symons and Louis Thomas, and van Bever, from the manuscript preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale. (2)

The majority of these poems take the form of spicy verse, and none is of really great moment. In the main they are fairly described by Laclos

1. Vide M. Allen's bibliographical comment on this edition, O.C. pp. 754-6.
2. La Harpe: Chanson ("Lison..."); À Une Dame; Sur Cette Question. Grimm: À Une Dame; Épitaphe de Lemierre. Caussy: Rondeau ("Elle est à moi"); Les Désirs Contrariés. Symons & Thomas: Le Paradis et l'Enfer; À ...la Marquise de Montalembert; À Mlle de Sivry ("Jeune fleur"). Van Bever: La Procession.

as "quelques poésies fugitives échappées à ma jeunesse" (1). Indeed, whilst it is impossible to place them all in strict chronological order, it seems likely that they were mainly written in his young days, although one of them, À Mademoiselle de Sivry qui, à l'âge de douze ans, sait le grec et le latin et fait de très jolis vers, can have been written only in 1787, when Laclos was forty-five or forty-six (2).

The first of these poems to be published was À Mademoiselle de Saint-S—, en lui envoyant des mirabelles de Metz, which appeared in the Almanach des Mises in 1767 when Laclos was stationed at Strasbourg. This is an occasional poem, rather trite but not entirely without charm:

Perrette, vous avez six ans
Et les goûts heureux de votre âge.
Le bonbon doit être un hommage
Pour vous au-dessus de l'encens.

De votre mine enchanteresse,
Quelqu'autre un jour vous parlera,
Mais que de peines il faudra
Pour retenir votre tendresse!

Trop éloigné de mon printemps,
Je n'en pourrai plus prendre aucunes,
Et je veux profiter du temps
Où vous la donnez pour les prunes. (3)

This is, of course, a purely conventional piece, yet it is almost surprising that so far no one has seen fit to suggest that it signified that the Machiavellian Laclos really had unhealthy designs on a six year old girl!

1. Lettres inéd. p. 295 To son Etienne, 30 Messidor an X.
2. Vide M. Allem's note. O.C., pp. 880-1.
3. O.C., pp. 500-1.

L.I./

In 1773 there appeared in the same review a piece which is typical of the tone of Laclos's verse. It is Les Souvenirs: Épître à Églé (1). In a manner quite devoid of subtlety it develops the commonplace that

Le souvenir de ce qu'on aime
Est au moins l'ombre du bonheur,

dragging in the conventional "berger" and bergère" in the process. There is also a perfectly conventional cynicism:

Soumise encore à sa puissance,
Et racontant, avec candeur,
Le trouble de sa conscience
Et les feux qui brûlent son cœur,
La dévote et sensible Hortense,
Aux genoux de son Directeur,
Pour obtenir quelque indulgence
Des fautes qu'à sa Révérence
Sa bouche vient de confier,
Veut bien en faire pénitence
Mais ne veut pas les oublier.

Later we shall see the Présidente de Tourvel in a similar situation. Mme de Tourvel is, in many ways, as much a conventional literary figure as Hortense, but the vaster canvas of the novel enables Laclos to give a far subtler and far more detailed analysis of her state of mind.

Some controversy has raged over whether Laclos really is the author

1. O.C., pp. 501-2.

of the Épître à Margot (1) Pidansat de Mairobert, continuing Bachaumont's Mémoires secrets writes (4th February 1774) (2):

"Il court une Épître à Margot qui fait grand bruit dans cette capitale, à raison des allusions qu'on croit y trouver à Madame la comtesse Dubarry, quoiqu'elles ne roulent en général que sur mille exemples, qu'on voit tous les jours, de courtisanes parvenues, mais la malignité du public s'exerce et donne beaucoup de vogue à cet ouvrage, bien fait d'ailleurs, mais dont l'auteur est obligé, par la raison ci-dessus, de garder l'incognito."

If this is true, then apparently Mme Du Barry was not the only one to be annoyed by this poem, for Dorat, to whom the Épître had been attributed, hastily published a verse epistle disowning it, entitled Aux bien intentionnés qui m'attribuent d'être l'auteur de l'Épître à Margot. (3)

In 1776 the Épître à Margot appeared in the Almanach des Muses with the attribution "M. de la Ol---", in exactly the same version as that given by Pidansat de Mairobert, and it thus seems clear that Laclos was taken to be the author. In July 1777 Meister's Correspondance describes Laclos as "capitaine d'artillerie, connu par une certaine Épître à Margot qui fit quelque bruit sous le règne de Mme la comtesse du Barry" (4).

La Harpe similarly attributed the Épître to Laclos (5).

1. O.C., pp. 502-5.
2. Mémoires secrets, I., (Londres, Chez John Adamson, 36 vols. 1780-9, Vol. VII, p. 122).
3. Reproduced in O.C., pp. 873-4.
4. Tourneux edition, Paris, Garnier frères, 1877-1882. Vol XI, p. 497
5. Corr. litt., in Oeuvres complètes de La Harpe, Paris, Verdière, 1820, Lettre LXX, Vol. X, p. 395.

S/

However, although Mairobert wrote in 1774 of this poem as a new one, this was in fact far from the case. It had appeared as early as 1770 in L'Occasion et le Moment, recueil de poésies fugitives de M. Mérard de Saint-Just (1).

Nowhere does Laclos explicitly claim the poem as his own work, but in a letter written to his wife much later, in which he criticises the title of a new novel, Le Danger d'un tête à tête, as being too vague, he adds, "Au surplus, c'est le cas de répéter ce vers de l'Épître à Margot: 'Que fait le nom, la chose est tout'." (2) This certainly suggests a certain familiarity with the poem, which in any case would hardly be surprising, since the work had certainly been attributed to Laclos, but it does not necessarily suggest more than this. The editor of the Lettres inédites, Louis de Chauvigny, however, categorically states in a footnote to this letter, "L'Épître à Margot est de Laclos". Dard echoes this remark (3). Caussy, however, is not satisfied, and he suggests that its attribution to Laclos in the Almanach des Muses is either an error or a deliberate publication by Laclos of a work which he had not written, an act which, says Caussy, "est bien dans les mœurs littéraires du temps" (4). That this kind of thing happened from time to time may well be true, but it is not proven in the case of the Épître, and the remark that Laclos in his letter to his wife "paraît bien se montrer comme l'auteur de l'Épître, peut-être avait-il fini par croire l'être, à force de se l'entendre dire" (5), is pure speculation.

1. Paris, 1770, pp. 21-4.
2. L.I., p. 187. 24 Brumaire an IX.
3. Dard, p. 12.
4. Caussy, p. 13.
5. ibid., p. 16.

As M. Allem rightly observes (1), one can turn Caussy's argument about the "mœurs littéraires du temps" around and say that if it was possible for Laclós to have taken as his own a poem by someone else, then it was equally possible for another poet to have done the same thing. Now in 1782 M  rard de Saint-Just published a new edition of his collected verse, on this occasion with a slightly different title: L'Occasion et le Moment, ou les Petits Riens par un amateur sans pr  tentions (2). In the Avertissement the author remarks, "Je n'ai presque jamais sign   mes ouvrages, mais je me suis aper  u qu'il y a quelque inconv  nient    garder l'anonyme; c'est pourquoi je prends le parti de mettre mon nom    la t  te de ce recueil." He had done so in 1770 without feeling the need of any such self-justification. In these circumstances it can hardly be an accident that the   p  tre    Margot is excluded from the 1782 edition.

This poem was written in 1770 at the very latest, since M  rard de Saint-Just published it in that year, and apparently on that occasion it aroused little or no interest. In 1774, when Pidansat de Mairobert heard of it and copied it down, the influence of Mme du Barry was on the wane, so much so that Louis XV was about to cast her off. In 1782, however, discussing the new published Les Liaisons dangereuses, Meister writes:

"M. C--- de L--- est M. Choderlos de Lacl  s, officier d'artillerie; il n'  tait connu jusqu'ici que par quelques pi  ces fugitives ins  r  es dans l'Almanach des Muses, et plus particuli  rement par une certaine   p  tre    Margot, qui manqua lui faire une tracasserie

1. O.C., p. 871.

2.    La Haye, & se trouve    Paris chez Jombert jeune, rue Dauphine, no. 24 1782.

assez sérieuse à cause d'une allusion peu obligeante pour Mme la Comtesse du Barry dont la faveur ~~à~~ alors au comble voulait être respectée" (1).

Moreover, there is here a direct reference to the publication of the poem in the Almanach, that is to say to 1776 when, as M. Allen points out, Louis XV had been dead for two years (10 May 1774) and so "Laclos ne pouvait être tracassé alors" (2). We have shown that the poem was in circulation six years at least before it appeared in the Almanach, and whilst it is true that in 1774, at the time when Mairobert notices it, the 'reign' of Mme du Barry was nearing its end, this was certainly not the case in 1770, the year in which the Épître appears in Mérard de Saint-Just's collection, and the year in which Mme du Barry was sufficiently powerful to be instrumental in ensuring the replacement of Choissul by Maupeou, Terray and d'Aiguillon. Yet there is no evidence that Mérard de Saint-Just was "tracassé" as a result of the poem, any more than there is positive evidence from any source, including the military archives, that Laclos at any time suffered any suggestion of such a "tracasserie". The whole question must remain shrouded in mystery.

It seems extremely probable, then, although it is impossible to prove it completely, that Laclos is the author of the Épître. The Almanach des Mises says in a note that "cette pièce a été corrigée par l'auteur," a remark which may presuppose a still earlier version than that of Mérard de

1. Correspondance litt., XIII, 107. Moufle d'Angerville in 1782 also attributes the poem to Laclos (Mémoires secrets ..., 29 April 1782, XX, 211-2.)
2. O.C., p. 875.

Saint-Just, which is virtually the same as that given in the Almanach.
 Allem suggests that this earlier version may well be that published in
 1782 in an anonymous collection entitled Les Fastes de Louis XV, de ses
maîtresses, généraux et autres notables personnages de son règne (1).

According to the Mémoires secrets (2) the person responsible for this work
 was "un mauvais sujet attaché au chevalier de Zeno, autrefois ambassadeur
 de Venise et qu'on nomme Bouffonidor." M. Allem gives the variants found
 in Les Fastes in the notes to his version, which is that of the Almanach.
 Some of these show a greater degree of lasciviousness and point the poem
 more obviously at Mme du Barry. For example, we are told that

Le travail est fort de son goût
 Toute la journée elle file
 Et toute la nuit elle... coud,

and in another place we find:

Laissez-la devenir Catin.
 Bientôt, peut-être, le Destin
 La fera Marquise ou Comtesse.

There is also a manuscript in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal (3) in the
 form of a collection of poems and prose by various authors, written in an
 unknown hand, which includes Dorat's epistle Aux Bien Intentionnés and a
 version of the Épître à Margot which differs in a few minor respects from
 all the versions mentioned above, although it is essentially a combination
 of the Almanach version and that of Les Fastes. Obviously no authority

1. A Villefranche, (2 vols.) chez la Veuve Liberté, 1782.
2. Mémoires secrets, 8 Sept. 1782, XXI, p. 93.
3. MS 6874, tome IV.

can be bestowed upon this manuscript, and one or two of its variants are manifestly incorrect, but for the sake of complete documentation a description of it will be given in an appendix to this study.

The text itself of the Épître is of little use in determining the authorship. It could have been written by the same hand as poems which are beyond all doubt those of Laclos, but on the other hand it could have been written by any one of several writers, as the dispute itself shows. However, there is one passage which, in the absence of any really convincing evidence to the contrary, would incline one to accept it as the work of the author of Les Liaisons dangereuses. It is the passage (1) which deals with the "beaux esprits" and love. The "beaux esprits", we are told.

"ne sont pas
Grands docteurs en cette science."

When it is suggested that Margot is lacking in intelligence they cry out,

"Que deviendront les doux propos,
Les bons contes, les jeux de mots,
Dont un amant, avec adresse,
Se sert auprès de sa maîtresse..."

This is also the theme of Le Bon Choix (1779)(2), in which we are told that

"Des Beaux Esprits, je hais la vanité;
Les rabaisser est oeuvre méritoire;
Ils ont besoin de plus d'humilité
Et c'est pour eux que j'écris cette histoire",

and it is because Danceny, like Pamphile in the conte, spends too much time

1. O.C., p. 504.
2. O.C., pp. 511-5.

"Faisant bouquets, contes et madrigaux",

that he makes such slow progress in his courtship of Cécile in Les Liaisons, and allows Valmont to seduce her first, just as Cléon seduces Isidore, who ends by telling Pamphile that

"entre nous, ce que vous pourrez dire
Ne vaudra point ce que Cléon a fait."

From a poem entitled Avis aux Princes (1774)(1) we might expect great things if Laclos were already at that time dourly beginning to meditate writing a revolutionary pamphlet. True, the story told here is Machiavellian enough, about the Roman courtier who, whilst awaiting news of the battle of Actium, trained six talking birds to shout the praises of Octavius and six to shout those of Antony. When the victor arrived,

"Des Antonins les six cols sont tondus;
Le reste dit: Vivat Octavius!"

The poem is, however, nothing more than a banal elaboration of the hackneyed theme that rulers should beware of flattery.

Lison revenant du village (1776) (2) is a "naughty" chanson of a type very common in the eighteenth century. If one ignores the inevitable "berger" it is not unlike some of the songs of M. Georges Brassens, although M. Brassens would no doubt go more directly to the point. There is, however, no need to comment with Dard (3) that "on devine aisément ce qu'il advint un soir, qu'il faisait noir, pourquoi Lison eut peur et quel fut le malheur".

La Harpe posed, in Le Mercure, the question: "Orosmane fut-il plus

1. O.C., p. 505.
2. O.C., pp. 506-7.
3. Dard, p. 14.

malheureux quand il se crut trahi par Zaïre que quand après l'avoir tréuée, il l'eut reconnue innocente?" In his Correspondance littéraire (1) he reproduced Laclos's light-hearted treatment of the subject, sent from Valence where he was stationed in 1777 (2). There is clearly satirical intent here:

N'est-ce pas une vérité
 Que voir mourir ce que l'on aime
 Vaut mieux que d'en être quitté?
 Si vous doutez de mon système,
 Interrogez tous nos Sultans:
 De ces Messieurs Paris abonde:
 On ne voit qu'eux dans le grand monde,
 Bien scélérats, bien séduisants,
 Petits despotes de tendresse,
 Un peu Français par la faiblesse
 Mais bien Turcs par les sentiments.

On the strength of this passage, Dard concludes that "voilà l'auteur des Liaisons qui perce et qui ramasse déjà le fouet de la satire" (3). There is satire here, certainly, but to see this as a sign of a revolutionary spirit, as Dard seems to do, is going too far. We have already used the term "light-hearted" in connection with this poem, and this was done advisedly, for it seems that this was how it was intended, and certainly how it was received. According to La Harpe (4), "M. de Laclos a pris la chose galement; aussi ne veut-il pas que j'imprime sa pièce, quoique, dans le genre si facile du persiflage, elle ne soit pas mauvaise." It is very difficult to see in the "Sultans" any more than the conventional rake in which this type of poem, by its very nature, abounds. Moreover, the irony is principally directed, as again is common in this kind of verse,

1. Oeuvres, X, 462-5.
2. O.C., pp. 518-9.
3. Dard, p. 15.
4. Oeuvres, X, p. 462.

against women, as we see in a passage not quoted by Dard:

... les verrous
Ni tous les soins que l'on peut prendre
N'ont jamais garanti l'époux
Quand l'épouse a voulu se rendre...

.
Maris prenez tous un poignard:
Un peu plus tôt, un peu plus tard,
Vous pourrez tous en faire usage ...

.
L'hymen n'a point de feux constants.
Zaïre aurait été légère
Et le sultan, dans sa colère,
Ne s'est trompé que sur le temps.

The Épître à Madame la Marquise de Montalembert (1) is yet another piece of conventional gallant verse of no great worth or significance. It shows the poet flitting from woman to woman, starting with the idea that

Je sentais le besoin d'aimer,
Mais je voulais être fidèle,

and thinking that each woman that he meets is

La maîtresse selon mon coeur.

First of all it is Isabelle, but unfortunately

Isabelle avait une amie ...

.
Isabelle n'était que tendre,
Elle ne savait que sentir;
Corinne peignait le plaisir.
Dieux! que j'en avais à l'entendre!

1. First published from the MS by Symons & Thomas: Poésies de Choderlos de Laclos, Paris, Dorbon l'aînée, 1908, pp. 56-62. O.C., 495-500.

And so we have new vows of eternal fidelity.

Trois mois, ensemble, nous parlâmes
 Le métaphysique jargon
 Que, sur la liaison des âmes,
 Inventa le divin Platon;
 Et, pour égayer la leçon,
 Parfois aussi nous y mêlâmes
 Les préceptes d'Anacréon.
 Mais, pour l'honneur de la science,
 Avant ces fortunés moments,
 Sur l'amour et sa puissance
 Il fallut disserter longtemps,
 Et ce qu'on accordait aux sens
 N'était que pour l'expérience.
 Dieux! Que nous fîmes, quand j'y pense.
 D'insipides raisonnements!

This is once again the theme taken up in Le Bon Choix. There is nothing essentially new about it. It will also be one of the themes of Les Liaisons.

Soon, he tires of Corinne and he leaves her for Julie, followed by Céphise, Iphise, Zulmé, Flore, Lise, and then Margot,

... bonne personne,
 Raisonnant mal, mais aimant bien,
 Et ne mettant de prix à rien
 Qu'au doux plaisir que l'amour donne.
 Pour lui seul nous vivions tous deux,
 Et, que l'esprit me le pardonne,
 Jamais je ne fus plus heureux ...

It should be made quite clear that there is no connection whatsoever between this Margot and that of the Épître à Margot: the two are spoken of in similar terms, it is true, but the tone is quite different. However, Margot cannot hold the poet for long, and he is soon renewing his refrain about how difficult it is to stay constant. Then, "Amour" appears on the scene and suggests Mme de Montalembert as

Le plus digne objet de ton choix,

but the poet has by now decided that there is more pleasure in seeking than in finding, and he ends with this envoi to Mme de Montalembert:

Si mes soins, mon ardeur sincère,
Pouvaient un jour vous engager,
Ah! malgré mon humeur légère,
On ne me verrait plus changer.
Dieux! je frémis de ce danger!
L'amour me garde de vous plaire!.

This poem, like the others quoted above, and like La Procession (1), Le Paradis et l'Enfer (2), the rondeau "Elle est à moi, cette aimable Rosine" (3) and almost all Laclos's other poems, is a conventional, light-hearted piece of verse, such as many a young army officer wrote: "Beaucoup d'officiers écrivaient en prose et en vers. L'Académie en comptait neuf, dont Guibert, Boufflers et Florian..." (4). There is no need to see in them anything more than the idle scribblings of a young man enjoying himself, and they certainly show no sign of thwarted ambition or deep rancour against the society of the Ancien Régime. It would be quite unreasonable to read any such significance into the passage from the poem Sur Cette Question posée dans le Mercure ... mentioned above (5), or this passage from the Épître à Madame la Marquise de Montalembert (6):

Margot! quel nom ignoble et bas!
Soit, mais elle avait des appâts,
De l'amour et de l'innocence;

1. O.C., 492-5.
2. O.C., 492.
3. O.C., 490-1.
4. Dard, p. 9.
5. *supra*, p. 28.
6. O.C., p. 499.

Heureuse par elle, entre ses bras
 J'oubliais tous les noms de France,
 Et le plaisir n'y perdait pas.

After all, he does return to the possibility of a liaison with a marquise, and there is not the slightest suggestion in the poem that he intends to be constant and true to his plebeian Margot!

Even when he turns to more serious topics, Laclos is extremely disappointing for anyone who wishes to see him as a revolutionary figure. We have already seen that the Avis aux Princes - such a promising title! - is nothing but a dreary platitude. The only other poem which can be said to be of serious intent is anything but revolutionary in nature, nor does it show the faintest glimmer of ambition. It is the Épître à la Mort (1777) (1), and this poem too is thoroughly platitudinous. The least said about it the better. None of Laclos's poems is brilliant, but it is safe to say that his uninspired best is slightly lascivious verse similar to that of Gentil Bernard, whom he finds occasion to praise in the Épître (2).

Before leaving the subject of Laclos's verse, there is one last point to be discussed. There has been some suggestion (3) that Laclos knew Rousseau personally. According to Vaughan, Rousseau's acquaintance with Laclos "is proved by a letter (à M.D.L.C.) containing a criticism of his

1. O.C., pp. 507-10.

2. O.C., p. 509. vide A Van Bever (ed.): Conteurs galants du 18e siècle (Paris, 1910).

3. The Political Writings of J.-J. Rousseau, edited ... by C. E. Vaughan (C.U.P., 1915, 2 vols. Vol. 1, Introduction, p. lx, note.)

Épître à la Mort, printed in Ed. 1782 (of Rousseau's works)..." This letter, which Vaughan could not find in the Hachette edition of Rousseau's correspondence, is to be found in the Geneva Collection complète des Oeuvres de J.-J. Rousseau, Citoyen de Genève (1) and in the Armand-Ambrée edition of Rousseau's Oeuvres complètes (2), dated December 1762(3) and placed under the heading "À.M.D.L.C." Upon examination, however, it becomes clear that this letter is not a criticism of Laclos's poem. Although the letter mentions a "Zélie" the name of the poet's love in the Épître à la Mort is "Zélis", and even allowing for a possible error in copying, or an original spelling different from that which we know, Rousseau's letter simply does not make sense as a criticism of the Épître. Moreover, the Épître was not published until 1777, in the Almanach des Mises, and whilst it is possible that the poem was written prior to this date, it is extremely improbable that it was composed as early as 1762, the year in which Laclos left La Fère, and when he was only twenty-one.

However, as Vaughan points out (4), strength is added to the idea that Laclos knew Rousseau personally by the editors of the Bozerian edition of Rousseau's works. In their Avis sur cette édition (5), they write, "Le citoyen Olos ... nous a généreusement offert l'exemplaire des Lettres de la Montagne, qu'il tient de l'amitié de Jean-Jacques, et dans lequel on remarque plusieurs corrections de sa main, dont nous avons

1. 15 vols., Genève, 1782, vol. XII, pp. 513-7, edited by P. A. Du'Peyrou.
2. Paris, 1829, 17 vols., vol. 4, pp. 181-4. Letter CCCLXXII.
3. not dated in Geneva edition.
4. op. cit., loc. cit.
5. Oeuvres de Jean-Jacques Rousseau, citoyen de Genève, Paris, an X-1801, 25 vols., Vol. 1, p. ix.

profité avec plaisir et reconnaissance." If, as is not impossible, for Laclos's name suffered various misconstructions, the "citoyen Clos" is in fact the author of Les Liaisons, then one can only regret that the present whereabouts of this volume, which could be brought as proof that he knew Rousseau, ~~are~~ unknown. (1) are/

Without such concrete evidence, one can only stress the fact that Laclos, who was never shy of mentioning Rousseau and his works, on no occasion says anything to indicate that he knew him personally. He certainly admired Rousseau. For instance, he writes to his wife from imprisonment in Picpus (2):

"Tu trouves que Rousseau et moi écrivons de même! Tu me fais assurément beaucoup d'honneur, et toi beaucoup d'illusions; mais il écrit presque tout que tu m'as inspiré et tu m'inspires encore, et tu prends la ressemblance du sentiment pour celui de l'expression. Au surplus, talent à part, j'assure que je ne connais que lui digne d'être, auprès de toi, l'interprète de mes sentiments et peut-être, lui et moi, étions-nous les seuls capables de parler à ton coeur le langage qui lui convient, et que tu sais si bien entendre et apprécier."

This is Laclos at his most lyrical on the subject of Rousseau, and yet there is no sign here that Rousseau was a personal acquaintance. The probability of any such relationship is extremely remote.

We have yet to deal with another aspect of Laclos's literary work

1. See Vol. III, p. cxviii of the Bible de la Pléiade edition of the Oeuvres complètes of Rousseau for a mention of such a corrected copy. (1964)
2. Lettres inédites, p. 60. 14 Prairial an II.

during this period, but here there is not much that can be said. In July 1777 there was produced at the Comédie Italienne an opera which "n'a vécu qu'un jour" (1). It was entitled Ernestine, and had been adapted from Mme Riccoboni's novel of the same name. The music was by "M. de Saint-Georges, jeune Américain plein de talent" (2). The words were by Laclos, Mme Riccoboni's remark about wit and literary talent being hereditary in the Laclos family (3) lends colour to Caussy's suggestion that Laclos was influenced to choose this particular subject because Mme Riccoboni was a friend of his family. (4)

However, any hopes he and Saint-Georges may have had of becoming the Rodgers and Hammerstein of the day were soon brought to nothing. Their choice of subject seems to have been an unlucky one, or rather Laclos's treatment of it seems to have been inadequate, if not disastrous. ~~Meister~~ *y* sums it up as follows (5):

"Le sujet de ce malheureux drame est tiré du joli roman de Mme Riccoboni, intitulé Ernestine. On ne pouvait guère choisir un sujet plus agréable, on ne pouvait guère le défigurer d'une manière plus maussade. MM. de Laclos et Desfontaines (who collaborated with him) ont jugé que le fond de ce sujet, plus intéressant que comique, avait besoin d'être égayé par un épisode; ils y ont ajouté un rôle de valet, qui est le chef-d'œuvre de la platitude et du mauvais goût. Le talent de Pergolèse même n'aurait pu soutenir un pareil ouvrage, et la composition de M. de Saint-Georges, quoique ingénieuse et savante, a paru manquer souvent d'effet. On y a trouvé de la grâce, de la finesse, mais peu de caractère, peu de variété, peu d'idées nouvelles"

1. Grimm, et al., Corr. littl, XI, 497.
2. *ibid.*, loc. cit.
3. *vide supra*, p. 2.
4. Caussy, p. 23.
5. Grimm, loc. cit.

This could scarcely be described as a "rave notice", and there were more in the same tone. The Mémoires Secrets also condemned the opera (1):

"Quant à la pièce nouvelle, intitulée Ernestine, le poète a eu l'art de rendre détestable un sujet si agréable et si touchant dans le Conte. Rien de plus plat. Il ya des choses agréables dans la musique, et en général elle est digne de meilleures paroles. Les auteurs n'ayant point eu de succès ont jugé à propos de garder l'anonyme.

Pour dédommager le public, les Comédiens ont annoncé tout de suite une autre nouveauté, intitulée Laurette."

Laurette was based on a conte by Marmontel, and if it fared a little better than Ernestine, (2) nevertheless we are told (3) that

"Quant à l'auteur des paroles, il garde prudemment l'Inoognito, ainsi que celui du poème d'Ernestine. On a su que celui de la musique de cette pièce, jouée la semaine dernière, étoit M. de Saint-George, amateur et violon distingué, mais qui n'a pas le même goût en fait d'ouvrages dramatiques et auroit dû sentir qu'une excellente musique adaptée à un plat et détestable opéra-comique perd toute sa valeur."

Arsène Houssaye (4) reports a legend about the first and only night of Ernestine. Immediately after the curtain had come down, according to this story, Laclos and Saint-Georges went to the Café de la Régence, where they accidentally brushed against someone:

1. Mémoires secrets ..., 20 July 1777, X, 181.
2. Grimm, XI, 497-8. Ernestine was produced on 19 July 1777. The attendance was 976 in a theatre the capacity of which was in the region of 1500. Laurette had seven performances; from 23rd July to 21 August, 1777 (cf. C.D. Brenner, The Théâtre Italien, Its Repertory, 1716-1793, Univ. of California, 1961, pp. 375-6 and p. 16.
3. Mémoires secrets ..., 24 July 1777, X, 183.
4. A. Houssaye: Galerie du 18e siècle (3e serie, Poètes et Philosophes, 6e edn. Paris, Hachette, 1858, p. 229.

"C'était Jean-Jacques Rousseau, qui se retourna furieux: 'C'est donc un guet-apens!' dit-il, pâle et sombre, croyant voir ses ennemis imaginaires 'Corbleu! monsieur, dit La Clos, qui ne connaissait pas la figure du célèbre philosophe de Genève, savez-vous qui je suis?... Apprenez donc qu'il ne faut pas me parler sans respect, car je suis un auteur sifflé!"

We have only one reference by Laclos himself to Ernestine. It comes years later, when he is writing to his wife from Milan, and he says (1)

"Si tu retrouves les manuscrits, soit de la Matrone, soit d' Ernestine, tu peux bien en faire tout ce que tu voudras, mais je ne conseille à personne de perdre là sa musique. Ce n'est pas que ses ouvrages soient bêtes, mais je ne les crois pas coupés pour le théâtre."

We do not know whether or not Mme de Laclos found these manuscripts, or what she did with them if she did come across them. About La Matrone absolutely nothing more is known than that it once existed in manuscript. There is no evidence that it was ever performed.

To sum up Laclos's life up to the publication of Les Liaisons in 1782, there is no real evidence whatsoever that during these years he was smouldering with an exceptional degree of ambition, or that he was an "angry young man" ready to let loose at the Establishment of the Ancien Régime. His military life was, it is true, relatively humdrum, but after all, he was entrusted with the mission to Valence and, above all, with the building of the fort on the Ile d'Aix which, in view of his great interest in the art of gunnery, he cannot have found so very boring. The evidence is that, in Grenoble at any rate, he mixed with the best provincial society, and one

1. Lettres inéd., p. 191. 28 brumaire, an IX.

cannot help but feel that Dard's thesis would have been more defensible if this had not been the case, if he had been excluded from this society, and if we had not Laclos's own testimony that he made within this society some "aimables connoissances." His literary efforts too are those of a gay young man about town, written after very little thought in the facile fashionable style of "galanterie", and as such they seem to indicate that, far from having a grudge against society he was, at this time, very much at ease in it.

2. THE FIRST FLUSH OF NOTORIETY: 1782-1788

Les Liaisons dangereuses was an immediate success. It brought down scandal on the head of its author, who was immediately identified with his work, or, more precisely, with the principal male character in it, the Vicomte de Valmont. The nature and value of the accusations levelled against Laclos will be considered at a later stage, after the completion of the biographical study. Suffice it to say that as a result of his novel Laclos acquired such a reputation that Dard could still say of him in 1905 that "il conserve encore pour nous un renom criminel" (1). The object of this biographical study is to discover to what extent the facts - leaving aside the prejudices - about Laclos's life justify this evil reputation.

On the 24th May 1782, two months after the publication of his novel, Laclos was ordered back to his regiment, which was now stationed at Brest, by the Minister of War, the Maréchal de Ségur. This was the only sanction which could be taken against him, since officers entitled to ~~were~~ publish, without special permission, works which had no bearing on military matters (2). Moreover, it was not an unreasonable order, since Laclos had already overstayed his six months' leave. It is possible, as Dard suggests (3), that the order was principally motivated by the fact that Ségur was a member of the "vieilles générations" who "voyaient

1. Dard, p. 89.
2. Gaussey, p. 32.
3. Dard, pp. 90-1.

avec colère le goût des lettres se répandre dans l'armée; écrire des vers ou des romans leur semblait une occupation pernicieuse pour un militaire et qui dérogeait pour un gentilhomme. Le père de Vauvenargues rougissait des livres de son fils (1) et le vieux Comte de Guibert refusait d'assister, même à Versailles, en présence de la Reine, à une comédie du sien." Be that as it may, the Archives administratives de la Guerre show that Montalembert sprang to the defence of Laclos, insisting that he needed his services (29th May). Ségur was swayed, it seems, by these military considerations, but he added a stern rider: "Je vous préviens qu'il est indispensable que le sieur de Laclos s'occupe promptement à mettre un des officiers, qu'il a avec lui, à même de le remplacer, afin que rien ne s'oppose à ce qu'il aille reprendre son service à sa troupe, à la première occasion qui pourra l'exiger. Je le lui signifie et je vous prie d'y tenir la main."

There is no need to suppose that this matter was ever seriously intended to go any further, now that military discipline had been satisfied and that Laclos was, if not back with his own company, then at least back with the army. He did, in fact, spend a short time during this controversy at Brest, where he fell ill. By the time he was able to travel to La Rochelle (24th August) he was in financial difficulties, despite the 1600 livres he had received from Durand neveu for his novel (2),

1. vide May Wallas: Luc de Clapiers, Marquis de Vauvenargues (C.U.P., 1928. pp. 87-90).

2. B.N. MS 12846, fol. 361. Photographically reprod. in Laclos par lui-même, pp. 34-5. O.C., pp. 751-2.

and to cover his medical expenses and the cost of his journey to La Rochelle he had to apply for a grant of 600 livres (1).

Commenting, on the 14th May, on the controversy aroused by the publication of Les Liaisons dangereuses, the Mémoires secrets say of Laclous that "parce qu'il a peint des monstres on veut qu'il en soit un, foenum habet in cornu, longe fuge. Il est allé à son régiment travailler à une justification" (2).

Laclous's next work, which was not published in his life-time, was a Discours sur la question proposée par l'Académie de Châlons-sur-Marne: Quels seroient les meilleurs moyens de perfectionner l'éducation des femmes (3). The Discours is incomplete, and was published for the first time by Édouard Champion in 1903 (4), along with another unfinished but larger-scale work on the same topic, entitled in the manuscript (5) Des Femmes et de leur Éducation. Champion gave the two fragments the joint title of De l'Éducation des Femmes. There is a third fragment, without a title in the manuscript (6), which was first published in 1908 as the Essai sur l'Éducation des Femmes. All three have been brought together by M. Allen under Champion's title (7).

1. A.A.G. Laclous dossier.
2. Mémoires secrets, XX, 250. O.C., p. 729 incorrectly has "sa justification"
3. B.N. MS 12846 fol
4. Paris, Messein, 1903.
5. B.N. MS 12846, fol 6-12.
6. *ibid.*, fol. 13-15.
7. O.C., Discours, pp. 427-9; Des Femmes et de leur Éducation, pp. 430-472; Essai sur l'Éducation des Femmes, pp. 473-482.

Are these fragments attempts at the "justification" of which Moufle d'Angerville speaks? When considering Laclos's novel we shall return to them to discover what bearing, if any, they have upon Les Liaisons. Meanwhile, however, it is not out of place to examine their content and merit here, for as they were not published during the lifetime of their author they had no effect upon his reputation. Moreover, as Laclos was, as a literary figure, to all intents and purposes known solely as the author of Les Liaisons, we shall consider the rest of his writings in chronological order as we come to them in his biography.

The manuscript of the Discours, despite Dard (1) and Caussy (2), bears the date 1st March 1783, and not 1785, and mentions "M. Sabathier, Secre. perpétuel" (of the Châlons Académie)(3). Laclos opens with a bombshell: "il n'est aucun moyen de perfectionner l'éducation des femmes" (4). This is so because education is the "développement des facultés de l'individu qu'on élève et la direction de ces facultés vers l'utilité sociale" (5). Now, in all societies, women are slaves (6). Laclos develops this idea in a long apostrophe:

1. Dard, p. 93.
2. Caussy, p. 67.
3. Not, as M. Allem says (O.C., p. 803) "M. Sabathé", & not after the title, but in the right-hand top corner.
4. O.C., p. 427.
5. ibid., p. 428.
6. ibid., p. 429. Vailland (Laclos par lui-même, p. 29) sees a parallel here with Engels' idea that the first class antagonism was the war of the sexes brought about by monogamy, and the result the first class oppression. This does not make Laclos a Communist avant la lettre! It merely shows that he could be as naive as Engels.

"O! femmes, approchez et venez m'entendre ... Venez apprendre comment, nées compagnes de l'homme, vous êtes devenues son esclave; comment, tombées dans cet état abject, vous êtes parvenues à vous y plaire, à le regarder comme votre état naturel; comment enfin, dégradées de plus en plus par votre longue habitude d'esclavage, vous en avez préféré les vices avilissants, mais commodes, aux vertus plus pénibles d'un être libre et respectable ..." (1)

Thus, there is no way of perfecting the education of women for, as Laclos says in the words of Seneca which he uses as an epigraph, "le mal est sans remède quand les vices se sont changés en mœurs" (2). Indeed, it is doubtful whether women would be any happier in the present state of society, even if they could obtain a better education.

Laclos offers no solution to the problem of how women can remedy this state of affairs. He merely repeats that "sans liberté point de moralité et sans moralité point d'éducation" (3). He does inform them that "on ne sort de l'esclavage que par une Grande révolution." (M. Jean-Jacques Salomon asks, "Est-il besoin de noter que Laclos fut le seul en 1783 à parler de révolution comme d'un événement susceptible d'apporter la fin de l'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme?" (4)

1. O.C., p. 428.

2. *ibid.*, pp. 427, 428-9.

3. *ibid.*, p. 429.

4. O.C., 429 Liberté et Libertinage: Les L.D., in Temps Modernes, July 1949, p. 63, note.

It is true that no dictionary gives an earlier example of this usage of the word (1), and it is equally true that, so far as his letters show, Laclos treated his wife as an equal partner with whom he could converse about all subjects, from literature to the disposal of shares in a coal-mine, as we shall see in the chapter on his private life, but it must also be said that one must not attempt to make too much out of this application of the word "révolution". Whilst it has been argued that, in these fragmentary writings, Laclos appears as something of a feminist, this does not mean that we can label him at this stage as a revolutionary in the purely political sense. Certainly the somewhat disenchanted conclusion of the Discours cannot be described as feminist.

This is all we have of the Discours, but the fragment Des Femmes et de leur Éducation seems to indicate that Laclos had decided to treat the subject on a far vaster canvas. Of this effort Dard says with justice that it is "un amas de contre-vérités dont le vide finit par dégoutter et dont la fausseté fait sourire" (2). There is nothing original in this hotch-potch. Echoes of Émile and of the Contrat social abound. Laclos shows a complete disregard for anything approaching objectivity, and parrots out his piece in defence of purely a priori notions.

1. Certainly the examples given by Little from Montesquieu, Condillac and Rousseau are not in this sense.
2. Dard, p. 94.

He begins by describing "la femme naturelle" or, in other words, "non la femme défigurée par nos institutions, mais telle qu'elle est sortie des mains de la nature" (1). She is, we are told, "ainsi que l'homme, un être libre et puissant", but the bliss of the golden age is a thing of the past, for "les hommes ont voulu tout perfectionner, et ils ont tout corrompu; ils se sont chargés de chaînes, ils ont abandonné la nature qui les rendait heureux, puis, ils l'ont calomniée, en l'accusant des maux que cet abandon causait, qu'eux-mêmes s'étaient faits" (2).

After this description of social original sin, Laclos goes on to contend that, what is more, woman bears more than her fair share of the weight of these chains. How different this is from her lot in the state of nature! Then, as an infant, she was not deprived of "la chaleur maternelle", or refused "le lait préparé pour sa subsistance" (3). With the passage of time in the state of nature the mother's care becomes less necessary, and is eventually abandoned as the child learns to fend for herself.

Puberty comes quite naturally, without being accelerated by the imagination, "après que le corps aura presque fini sa croissance" (4). "C'est alors, qu'à quelque distance, elle aperçoit un homme; un instinct puissant, un mouvement involontaire, la fait courir vers lui; plus près,

1. O.C., p. 430. It is arguable that the Discours sur l'Inégalité is an even more obvious source for Laclos here than ~~in~~ the Contrat Social. s/
2. ibid., p. 431.
3. ibid., p. 432.
4. ibid., p. 437.

elle devient timide, elle s'arrête; mais emportée de nouveau, elle le joint et le serre entre ses bras ... Jouissance délicieuse, qui, jamais, osera te décrire?" (1) Physically, "ses chairs, continuellement battues par un air vif, sont plus fermes et plus vivantes" than those of the woman in society. As is not uncommon in the sentimental writers whom Laclos is here imitating, the description of the adolescent "femme naturelle" is full of sensuality of a maudlin kind. Says Laclos, "On ne peut mieux comparer ces deux femmes qu'à des fruits, dont les uns seraient venus en pleine campagne et les autres dans des serres chaudes" (2). The natural woman will imitate her mother, with the result that maternity will be no trouble to her, and she, like her male counterpart, will be able to face old age and death with equanimity. "L'imagination des femmes sociales fait maître leurs sens et leur sert; celle de la femme naturelle naît et meurt avec eux; l'âge des plaisirs passé, elle n'est plus qu'un enfant mieux instruit; tranquille, elle n'a pas besoin de se repaître d'illusions; elle pourra vieillir, sans être joueuse, médisante ou dévote." (3)

What woman of the eighteenth century would dare to suggest that she was happier than the Woman of Nature? There follows a passage of which Dard says, "À ces traits, on reconnaît sans peine la jolie femme qui chasse Turgot, la fille de Marie-Thérèse, impopulaire à Paris, la folle

1. *ibid.*, p. 439.

2. *ibid.*, p. 440.

3. *O.C.*, p. 444. (cf. Mme de Rosmonde in Les Liaisons)

amie de Mme de Polignac, la ~~bergère~~ frivole de Trianon. À la veille de la Révolution, un couplet contre elle était de rigueur dans toutes les chansons sur la vertu" (1). Over the last sentence one can scarcely quibble, but it is far from certain that this passage is Laclos's "couplet" against Marie-Antoinette or that, as Dard implies, it shows Laclos as a political revolutionary. What woman, then, asks Laclos, would dare to suggest that she is happier than the Woman of Nature?

"Sera-ce cette reine puissante, fière de dominer sur de vastes États? Où cherchera-t-elle sa félicité? Sans doute dans celle de ses sujets: elle saura donc se rendre redoutable aux ennemis de dehors et étouffer les troubles intérieurs; à la fois économe et libérale, elle n'accordera rien à l'intrigante avidité des courtisans et sera toujours assez riche pour récompenser les services rendus; ses guerres, justes et heureuses, seront suivies de la victoire et les impôts multipliés ne dévoreront pas la substance du pauvre; le faible ne l'implorera pas sans succès: contre l'oppression du puissant; sa justice vigilante sauvera le simple des embûches, de la mauvaise foi; chérie des bons, son nom sera la terreur des méchants, alors sans doute elle sera bénie; mais qu'elle n'espère pas un moment de repos; ne faut-il pas qu'elle veille pour tous? Veut-elle donner un moment à ses plaisirs?

1. Dard, pp. 96-7.

Qu'elle attende celui qu'aucun de ses sujets ne réclamera, ou plutôt que sa vie soit une action continuelle et qu'elle meure debout, victime dévouée au bonheur de son peuple. Découragée à la vue d'une carrière si ^{2/} pénible, préférera-t-elle d'être faible et voluptueuse, oubliera-t-elle son peuple, pour ne s'occuper que de ses plaisirs; ils vont se rassembler autour d'elle; son imagination sera moins prompte que le zèle de ses courtisans; mais par là même ses jouissances seront imparfaites; malheureuse elle n'aura pas le temps de désirer. Cependant, sous un règne faible, l'intrigue déploie toutes ses forces; le courtisan ambitieux, non content d'opprimer le peuple, veut encore dominer sa souveraine; maîtresse de tant d'États, elle ne l'est pas de sa volonté; mais par des ressorts secrets, elle cède à une impulsion étrangère et inconnue; elle ordonne par faiblesse l'éloignement de ceux qu'elle chérit et reste avec étonnement livrée à ceux qu'elle craint; alors elle perd l'habitude d'aimer, la défiance et l'insensibilité viennent flétrir et resserrer son âme; bientôt elle ne s'ouvre plus au plaisir; elle n'est plus susceptible que de distractions, et les distractions mêmes sont devenues difficiles; son palais l'ennuie, et toutefois elle craint d'en sortir; traverse-t-elle les villes, le silence morne de son peuple contriste son coeur; parcourt-elle les campagnes, l'image de la misère afflige ses regards importuns et, elle-même, elle se prend aux lieux qu'elle habite de l'ennui qu'elle y porte; elle se fuit, elle erre, sans choix comme sans dessein, elle recherche la vaste solitude des forêts; laissons-lui

cette triste ressource: les seuls moments où elle se supporte sont ceux où elle parvient à s'oublier." (1)

It is certainly tempting to accept Dard's contention, and when this passage is taken out of context as it is by Dard (who quotes only the section in italics), the temptation becomes almost irresistible. Nevertheless, one may question whether Turgot was ever one of "ceux qu'elle chérit", and whether the reference to the "vaste solitude des forêts" is in fact an allusion to the queen's diversions under the guise of "la folle bergère de Trianon". It would, of course, be foolish to pretend that Marie-Antoinette was anything other than unpopular, and no doubt it is not entirely coincidental that such a passage should occur at a time when such a woman was the king's consort. On the other hand, Laclos's passage clearly refers to a queen sovereign in her own right, or at least, if one takes the word "reine" loosely, to a woman in a position of power by her own right. It is of course a fact that French law forbade the succession to the throne of a woman, but even then this would not dispose of the possibility of the passage referring to Marie-Antoinette, for this may simply be a device by Laclos to avoid a direct and overt attack upon the French queen.

Up to this point, however, Laclos has merely been parroting the notions of Rousseau, and one cannot help but feel that this passage has

1. O.C., pp. 445-6.

a more general application than Dard implies, particularly when it is placed in context, as we have attempted to show by quoting the preceding section. It then appears as a repetition of some of Rousseau's ideas on monarchy, such as are expressed in the Contrat Social, where Jean-Jacques says that "les rois veulent être absolus, et de loin on leur orie que le meilleur moyen de l'être est de se faire aimer par leurs peuples. Cette maxime est très belle, et même très vraie à certains égards: malheureusement on s'en moquera toujours dans les cours. La puissance qui vient de l'amour des peuples est sans doute la plus grande; mais elle est précaire et conditionnelle; jamais les princes ne s'en contenteront." The reference to the fact that "(il faut) qu'elle veille pour tous" (2) is paralleled by Rousseau's notion that "tout au contraire des autres administrations, où un être collectif représente un individu, dans celle-ci (monarchy) un individu représente un être collectif..." (3), and Laclos's description of the courtiers echoes Rousseau when the latter says that "ceux qui parviennent dans les monarchies ne sont le plus souvent que de petits brouillons, de petits fripons, de petits intrigants, à qui les petits talents, qui font dans les cours parvenir aux grandes places, ne servent qu'à montrer au peuple leur ineptie aussitôt qu'ils sont parvenus" (4).

1. Du Contrat Social, ou Principes du Droit Politique, ed. by C. E. Vaughan, Manchester University Press, 1926, Livre III, Ch. 6. p. 62.

2. O.C., p. 445.

3. op. cit., p. 61

4. ibid., pp. 63-4.

These ideas are no doubt revolutionary enough, and there is no doubt that Laclès was familiar with the, but in the last resort Laclès is far less revolutionary than Rousseau. He at least is prepared to leave his queen "cette triste ressource" that she finds in the solitude of the forest, whereas Rousseau writes (1): "Dieu donne les mauvais rois dans sa colère, et il faut les supporter comme des châtimens du ciel. Ce discours est édifiant, sans doute, mais je ne sais s'il ne conviendrait mieux en chaire que dans un livre de politique. Que dire d'un médecin qui promet des miracles et dont tout l'art est d'exhorter son malade à la patience? On sait qu'il faut souffrir un mauvais gouvernement quand on l'a; la question est d'en trouver un bon."

Even if Laclès had Marie-Antoinette directly in mind, and this is not proven, then it is still difficult to see this passage as more than a conventional tilt at the foreign woman, a tilt which, as Dard himself says, was nothing out of the ordinary in a work dealing with virtue: and that is the subject with which Laclès is here concerned, rather than with political theory as such. Had Laclès been writing about men instead of women he might well - although this is admittedly in the realm of sheer hypothesis - have written this passage in exactly the same way, and then one would have seen it as an accurate portrait of Louis XVI. It is, in fact, a description, à la Rousseau, of any monarch. There is no need to take the view

1. *ibid.*, p. 66. My italics.

that when he wrote this Laclos accepted Rousseau's republican idea that "s'il est difficile qu'un grand État soit bien gouverné, il l'est beaucoup plus qu'il soit bien gouverné par un seul homme." (1) Rousseau himself recognises that republics can only work on a small scale, and says that "la monarchie n'est convenable qu'aux grands États." (2) Laclos certainly did not accept republican ideas a few years later when he was working for the Duc d'Orléans or still later when he acclaimed Bonaparte, despite the fact that he did not live to see the establishment of the Empire. It is then clear that whatever revolutionary feelings he may have had at this stage, they were not republican. It is possible that he was already thinking in terms of constitutional monarchy with a change of dynasty, but even of that there is no clear sign in this passage, which is concerned with the corruption inherent in all human institutions.

Laclos has now told us all about "la femme naturelle". Finally he has to face up to, or at least make a show of facing up to, the question of whether she ever existed. On this question of the existence of the state of nature, Laclos shows himself as naive as it is possible to be. He sets about attempting to refute the arguments of Voltaire and Buffon. Buffon sees men in their original state as savages, "des masses de matière brute attachées à la terre" (3). Voltaire simply describes those who believe in the state of nature as "quelques mauvais plaisants" (4).

1. & 2. *ibid.*, p. 63.

3. *O.C.*, p. 449.

4. *ibid.*, p. 453.

With rather heavy-footed wit (1), Laclot tries to turn Voltaire's argument into a boomerang and, for support, calls upon Rousseau's Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité parmi les hommes. He seizes upon the opportunity to digress into the idea that man is not naturally a monogamous animal and to oppose the idea of indissoluble marriage with one woman (2), which seems to fore-shadow the clause in the Instructions ... aux Assemblées des bailliages which advocates divorce, if indeed Laclot was responsible for these Instructions (3). He also attacks the notion that parents have a natural instinct which makes them love their children while they are still in the womb.

However, he finally brings himself back to the point at issue and says that "ces peuples encore grossiers que nous nommons sauvages" have nothing whatsoever to do with the human being in the state of nature. They are simply men who have "déjà perdu les avantages de l'état de nature et n'ont pu pallier encore les leurs vices de la société." He points out that there is still a large portion of the earth's surface which is unexplored, and argues that it is possible that there are still, somewhere, people living in the state of nature: "De ce qu'on n'en a pas trouvé, s'ensuit-il qu'il n'y en a point?" (4) They may well, he suggests, 6/

1. *ibid.*, pp. 453-4.
2. *ibid.*, pp. 454-6, & 458. *vide infra*.
3. *ibid.*, p. 451.
4. O.C., p. 451

have existed in America before the arrival of Columbus. It is enough for Laclos that it is impossible to prove that the state of nature never existed. On this basis he erects his hypothesis as fact.

He does not believe that society was initially brought about by a union of families. It was essentially the result of an all-male agreement drawn up between men who, "se sentant plus égaux en force, durent se craindre moins les uns que les autres"(1). Women, by reason of the fact that they were the weaker sex, were subjected. "L'oppression et le mépris furent donc, et durent être généralement, le partage des femmes dans les sociétés naissantes." Cet état dura dans toute sa force jusqu'à ce que l'expérience d'une longue suite de siècles leur eût appris à substituer l'adresse à la force. Elles sentirent enfin que, puisqu'elles étaient plus faibles, leur unique ressource était de séduire; elles connurent que si elles étaient dépendantes de ces hommes par la force, ils pouvaient le devenir à elles par le plaisir." (2) The result is that in the state of perpetual war which exists between the sexes they have often been able to "tirer avantage des forces mêmes dirigées contre elles."(3)

There then follows a chapter on beauty, which Laclos defines as "l'apparence la plus favorable à la jouissance, la manière d'être qui fait espérer la jouissance la plus délicieuse." (4) He emphasises the relativity of the concept of beauty, which depends to a large degree upon

1. *ibid.*, p. 458.
2. *ibid.*, p. 459.
3. *ibid.*, p. 460.
4. *ibid.*, p. 461.

national temperament.

Chapter XII, entitled De la Parure, deals with the techniques adopted by women to achieve "l'apparence la plus favorable à la jouissance." Here Laclous advises moderation in the use of jewellery and follows Rousseau in laying stress upon the importance of hygiene. He advises against over-indulgence in food and drink, against late nights, against strong drink and gambling, and recommends cold baths and plenty of exercise, even going so far as to furnish his readers with the formula of a cosmetic: "Il en est un simple et salubre dont l'usage nous paraît trop peu fréquent, et que nous énonçons volontiers ici: prenez de la graine de pavot blanc, pilez-la dans un mortier, en y jetant de l'eau en sorte que l'espèce de lait qui en provient soit plus épais que clair; passez le tout, et servez-vous-en au moins toutes les semaines." (1) But above all he recommends naturalness, for "l'art doit aider et non changer la nature Arrivez à votre but par le chemin que la nature vous a tracé." (2)

This work is incomplete, and so Laclous arrives at no conclusion. Indeed, he has by this stage already begged so many questions that one cannot seriously lament the absence of the rest of it. There is, however, a third fragment, the Essai sur l'Éducation des Femmes. It amounts to little more than a suggested course of reading for young ladies of high rank. First of all, says Laclous, they should read the moralists so as

1. *ibid.*, pp. 469-70.

2. *ibid.*, p. 471.

to learn to understand the passions, "à les diriger, à les maîtriser au besoin; à apprécier le beau, le juste et l'honnête; à les préférer à l'utile; à braver ou supporter la douleur et les chagrins par le courage ou la résignation; à distinguer dans l'homme ce qu'il tient de la nature et ce qui lui vient des institutions humaines; enfin ce qu'on doit à soi-même et ce qu'on doit aux autres." (1) Then they should turn their attention to the historians, for once the moralists have shown them "ce qui doit être, ... il devient utile et ... il ne peut être dangereux de connaître ce qui est", and it is in history that "les hommes se montrent avec toutes les modifications de la société."

Here again Dard (2) seems to give a wrong emphasis to a passage. It is in works of history, says Laclos, that "se trouve discutée, par l'éloquence des faits, cette grande question, encore indécise, de savoir si on doit respecter les préjugés et jusqu'à quel point ce respect peut être nuisible ou salutaire; c'est enfin là qu'un lecteur attentif se convaincra peut-être que, dans toute grande administration, le bien naît aussi souvent à côté du mal que le mal à côté du bien; et que la sagesse des empires est de réparer sans cesse et de ne détruire presque jamais." (3) Of this passage Dard says: "On peut se demander par ce passage la date de cet écrit. Fut-il écrit par un révolutionnaire inconscient ou par un jacobin assagi? Je penche plutôt pour ce dernier parti." (4) One may

1. O.C., p. 474.
2. Dard, pp. 100-1.
3. O.C., pp. 474-5.
4. Dard, p. 101.

with justification challenge Dard's case here. It is true that Laclos appears to have come back to Des Femmes et de leur Éducation. The manuscript bears notes taken from the travels of La Pérouse, of which work Laclos wrote an account, published for the first time by M. Allem (1). These travels did not appear until 1797. However, these notes have nothing to do with the Essai, which is quite a different work in nature, and there is no evidence in the manuscript as to its date of composition. On the other hand, there is no reference in it to any work published later than 1778, and so it seems rather gratuitous to suggest that it was written at a time when Laclos might reasonably be described as a "jacobin assagi", simply to fit in with a thesis. It could, in fact, have been written at any time from 1783 onwards, and in all probability was written nearer to this date, when the Châlons question was fresh in Laclos's mind, than to 1797, or even to 1791, when he left the Jacobins. Even if we assume some such early date, we are left with Dard's other suggestion, that the Essai is the work of "un révolutionnaire inconscient." It is difficult to attach much significance to such a formula in relation to this passage. Laclos clearly inclines to the view that one should "réparer sans cesse et ... ne détruire presque jamais." This is far milder than the view of Rousseau that the depositaries of the executive power are not the people's masters, but their officers, and that the people can set them up and pull them down as they like.

1. O.C., pp. 546-563.

2. Contrat soc., III, 18, pp. 88-89.

Laclos goes on to recommend his young lady to seek to have the rédiments of knowledge in as many spheres as possible, because "ce qui éloigne beaucoup de gens de mérite de la société des femmes, et même des femmes aimables, c'est l'impossibilité de causer avec elles, ou même devant elles, des objets auxquels ils s'intéressent." (1) More specifically, she should not neglect belles-lettres. "C'est particulièrement en étudiant les poètes et les orateurs, qu'on s'apercevra que celui qui veut bien parler ne doit être étranger à aucun genre de connaissance."

The choice of the novels that the young lady should read must be very carefully made, and there is perhaps not a single one that she can read without some danger, unless she be "guidée dans sa manière de voir." This observation applies even to Clarissa, "le chef-d'oeuvre du roman." (2) Nevertheless, if due precautions are taken, it will only be necessary to keep away from her frankly licentious works, "qui offrent des détails trop libres, et qui faneraient, en quelque sorte, cette fraîcheur d'innocence qui fait, plus encore que la fraîcheur naturelle, le véritable charme de la jeunesse." (3) One wonders, whether Laclos would have included Les Liaisons in the ban.

1. O.C., 475.
2. p. 478.
3. p. 479.

In the Essai he takes a somewhat different line from the one he adopted in the Discours. Perhaps that is saying too much: it is rather that here he is not concerned with abstract theorizing, but with practicalities. He is facing up to the fact that even if the state of nature did once exist, there is no chance of the eighteenth-century Frenchwoman getting back to it. "Le mal est sans remèdes, les vices se sont changés en mœurs." She must therefore make the best of things. There is a minor contradiction when he assures his pupil that if she works hard along the lines he has indicated, she will become "non seulement plus instruite, mais aussi plus heureuse que la plupart des autres femmes." (1) This goes against the idea expressed in the Discours (2) that "si malgré (les) obstacles, quelques femmes parvenaient à se la procurer, (i.e. a better education), ce serait un malheur de plus pour elles et pour nous." This new attitude is a movement away from pessimism to optimism, and Rousseau himself was far from being without an optimism of rather a naive kind, even despite his idée fixe that he personally was the object of persecution, ~~for~~ the future of humanity. concerning /

"Ne prenez pas cet alert officier pour un idéalogue", says Dard, "Toutes les théories sur la société ne sont que des formules opportunes pour un ambitieux mécontent." (3) Laclot shows himself, in De l'Éduc-

1. p. 482.
2. p. 427-8.
3. Dard, p. 102.

ation des Femmes at least, a disciple of Rousseau in the fullest measure.

These three fragments are, in fact, all Rousseau. They stand out in Laclos's writings as something quite different from the rest, Les Liaisons, the poems, and the political writings. They represent the repetition of an ill-digested lesson in Rousseauism, and throughout them Laclos's feet scarcely ever touch the ground. Dard has to place all his stress on one or two passages which are quite capable of bearing interpretations other than the one he gives them, in order to make of Laclos "un ambitieux mécontent." He suggests that Mme de Tourvel, "la douce victime de Valmont", is none other than "la femme naturelle" égarée dans la société".(1) We shall examine this argument in a later chapter on the novel itself.

Laclos never finished an article on the education of women. This can hardly have been because he was afraid of scandal, or of offending the powers that be. He showed no such timidity in 1785 over his letter on Vauban. In fact it is possible that these attempts were intended to result in a work that would be a "justification" to offset the effect of the scandal caused by his novel. If this is so, they were never put to the test, for they were left unpublished. It may be that the reason they were never finished is that he was already beginning to feel that lethargy, that inability to write, to which he was

1. *ibid.*, p. 103

to refer several times in his letters to his wife. From prison we find him writing to say that he is doing a good deal of reading, but no creative writing, "car quand il faut tirer de son propre fonds, le fonds ne se trouve pas toujours productif, soit par épuisement, soit par aridité! J'ai donc mis, pour le moment, mon esprit en jachères et je le fume avec quelques connoissances que je tâche d'acquérir, ensuite je la labourerai, et peut-être produira-t-il encore quelques récoltes dans l'arrière saison"(1). Similarly, he writes to her from Milan; complaining that, "Je vas (sic) me trouver en tête à tête avec l'opéra buffa, cela n'est pas gai, surtout avec le mauvais temps continué que nous avons, mais je loue des livres ..., et si j'avois plus de courage, j'en ferois; mais je suis si bête que je n'ai pas la moindre idée."(2) The publication of the letter on Vauban does not invalidate this notion, for after all, here he was dealing with military matters, which were throughout his life of the utmost importance to him. If anything were calculated to rouse him from lethargy, it was a work on military tactics, and especially one to do with the use of the artillery. Even on such a topic as this, however, he significantly has to borrow much of what he says from other sources, as we shall see, and the letter in fact contains very few ideas of Laclos's own.

Work on the Ile d'Aix was discontinued in 1783, but still Laclos did not rejoin his regiment. He went to La Rochelle to work on a new

1. Lettres inédites, pp. 67-8. 28 prairial anII.
2. Lettres inéd., p. 181, 14 brum. an IX.

L. I. /
L. I. /

arsenal to be built there. La Rochelle prided itself then, as it does to this day, on being something of a cultural centre. In this connection it is worth pointing out that life must have been anything but boring for Laclos in La Rochelle, as in Grenoble. It was here that he met Alquier, the lawyer who was later to be a deputy at the States-General, and who became a friend of Laclos's. Alquier had something of a reputation with the ladies, and Laclos was to say in a letter to his wife that Alquier's frivolousness prevented his being a really intimate friend (1). This is interesting, in view of the stories which have grown up around Laclos's own amorous activities in La Rochelle.

The theatre was very fashionable at La Rochelle, and the town had its own Académie. Laclos was elected a member of this on June 22nd 1785. He never read a paper there, however, and never even gave the customary speech of induction, but before leaving the town he was instrumental in obtaining for its citizens a statue of Henri IV, whose memory was naturally held dear in the Protestant stronghold of La Rochelle (2). No doubt through Alquier and Montalembert's connections it was made possible for Laclos to live an enjoyable social life during his stay there, and it is reasonable to suppose that the

1. *ibid.*, 230-1, 28 nivôse an IX.

2. *ibid.*, 323-5 (Extract from town records, June 1787)

Épître à Mme de Montalembert was written during this period, and also the Épitaphe de Lemierre, which appears in Grimm's Correspondance in August 1785 (1):

Passant, entre en cet antre et pleure sur ce roc
Un rare et grand auteur qui passa la noire onde,
Ravi d'avoir, avant, tiré de son estoc:
Le trident de Neptune est le sceptre du monde(2).

The Correspondance littéraire deplores this as being in bad taste, saying that Lemierre is "si estimable que l'envie même ne peut s'empêcher de le respecter." (3) Meister adds the explanatory footnote that "il faut savoir que M. Lemierre appelle mon vers ce dernier vers, qui est tiré d'une de ses première pieces couronnées par l'Académie. On l'a gravé sur la porte de l'Arsenal de Toulon." (4)

On the other hand, the impromptu À Une Dame, à qui l'auteur offrait une pomme dans un bal et qui ne voulut la recevoir qu'avec des vers (5) cannot, despite Caussy (6), have been written during this period, since, although Meister gives it in May 1784 (7), La Harpe quotes it, although in a slightly different version, in his Correspondance littéraire for 1st January 1779 (8). This does not, of course, rule out the possibility of its referring to a lady of La Rochelle. It is as trite a piece as any of Laclos's:

Comme Vénus vous êtes belle.
Comme Pâris je suis berger.
Comme lui je viens de juger;
Voulez-vous me traiter comme elle?

1. XIV, 199-200.
2. O.C., p. 515
3. op. cit., p. 199
4. ibid., p. 200.
5. O.C., p. 511.
6. Caussy, p. 81.
7. XIIIIV, 529.

8. La Harpe: Oeuv. compl., Corr. litt., Paris, Verdière, 1820, XI, 119-120

Laclos did however publish during these years his criticism of Fanny Burney's Cecilia. It appeared in three parts in the Mercure de France during April and May 1784, and is important only because at the beginning of it Laclos gives us his views on the novel. These we shall consider at a later stage.

The most important single event in these years so far as Laclos is concerned is his marriage to Marie-Soulange Duperré, whose youngest brother - there were twenty-two children in all! - was to become Amiral de France and a peer of the realm under Louis-Philippe. The facts and the fables about this courtship and marriage can best be considered in the chapter on Laclos in private life, and for the time being it is sufficient to note that on April 1st 1786 Laclos asked Ségur's permission to marry "la Dlle Marie-Soulange Duperré, fille majeure", and asserted that "dans ce mariage la naissance et la fortune se trouvent d'une parfaite convenance avec celle du sieur Choderlos de Laclos." (1) On the 14th Ségur gave his permission and also awarded Laclos a month's leave to start from May 1st. Dard informs us (2) that in 1833 work being carried out at the La Rochelle arsenal revealed a plaque bearing the following inscription:

1. Arch. admin de la Guerre, Laclos dossier.
2. Dard, p. 110.

"L'an 1786 et le 3 de mai. Messire Pierre-Ambroise Choderlos de Laclos, écuyer, capitaine d'artillerie, au régiment de Toul, a épousé Demoiselle Marie Soulange Duperre, que a posé elle-même cette première pierre. Le même jour a vu s'établir le fondement de cet Arsenal et celui de leur bonheur." The pomposity

of this phraseology was not strictly accurate. The "bonheur" of M. and Mme de Laclos had in fact started some time before, and they had an illegitimate son, Étienne Fargeau. The document which recognises his legitimisation, and which is dated May 11th 1786, is photographically reproduced by M. Roger Vailland.(1)

Séguir abruptly cancelled Laclos's leave on May 11th, but Laclos had already left La Rochelle with his young wife for Paris, where he took up residence in the Marais, at the Hôtel des Milords, rue Saint-Louis. The cause of the Maréchal's action was simple. Laclos had published his Lettre à Messieurs de l'Académie Française sur l'Éloge de M. le Maréchal de Vauban, proposé pour sujet du prix d'éloquence de l'année 1782(2). Laclos sent a copy of this work to Séguir himself. Thus, in the view of Dard (3), we have the "incorrigible" Laclos deliberately cocking a snook at authority. "C'était un nouveau défi", says Dard, "qu'aved un gambade d'amoureux, il lançait à la face de l'opinion et à la tête du vieux ministre." Yet again it appears that Dard is failing to take into account all the available information, for the issue is by no means as clear-cut as this. Laclos in fact pleads his case most eloquently in a letter to Séguir preserved at the Bibliothèque

1. Laclos par lui-même, pp. 46-7.

2. À Amsterdam, et se trouve à Paris chez Durand neveu ..., et à La Rochelle, chez P.-L. Chauvet ..., 1786.

3. Dard, pp. 110-111.

Nationale (1), and in particular he makes it quite clear that not only did he send a copy to the Maréchal, but also "chez tous les autres ministres", and he suggests with some semblance of truth that "ce ne seroit pas ainsi que se seroit conduit celui que croiroit publier un écrit téméraire ou reprochable." This letter we shall have an opportunity of examining in more detail when we have studied the nature of the work which called down ministerial wrath upon Laclos's head for the second time (2).

The Dijon Académie had chosen the praise of Vauban as the subject of its competition in 1784. The first prize was won by Lazare Carnot who was, with the passage of time, to become a successful general and a minister under Napoleon. When he wrote his Eloge de Vauban Carnot was, like Laclos, a mere captain. His views were vigorously opposed by Montalembert, who as early as 1761 had begun to develop his views attacking Vauban's followers' reliance on bastions. The first volume of Montalembert's work, La Fortification perpendiculaire, did not however appear until 1776, and the eleven volumes of the complete work were spread over twenty years. It is important to remember, in view of this, that Laclos's attack on Vauban was not an isolated one. Carnot's panegyric of Vauban irritated Montalembert, and he replied to it by publishing an edition of Carnot's Eloge, "enrichi d'observations par un Amateur." (3) The Académie Française in its turn put forward

1. Fonds fr., 12846, folios 1 & 2.
2. O.C., pp. 567-589.
3. Published without date, name of publisher, or place of publication.

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the same subject as the Dijon Académie for its "prix d'éloquence" for the year 1787.

Laclos, under Montalembert's orders at La Rochelle, worked on his letter, and published it in 1786. He begins by saying that in choosing this subject the gentlemen of the Académie have done nothing other than "consacrer une opinion très généralement répandue, déjà adoptée par une Académie célèbre, et propagée depuis assez longtemps, avec un zèle presque religieux, par le corps militaire dont M. de Vauban a été le chef" (1), namely that Vauban is entitled to the heartfelt praise and gratitude of the French nation. He points out, however, that "les honneurs rendus à M. le Maréchal de Vauban ne peuvent être exagérés sans être dangereux" (2). He stresses the importance of the word "exagérés" for, he insists, "on aurait tort de croire que, détracteur d'un homme célèbre, je veuille lui disputer la portion d'estime que je reconnais lui être due. Après les places éminentes, il est encore des places honorables; mais les confondre serait abaisser les unes sans élever les autres." (3)

He points out that popular feeling about such a matter is no criterion. "Les objets qui doivent décider la réputation de M. de Vauban ne peuvent intéresser que les Militaires" (4) - this is the chief argument he will use in refuting Fontenelle who had also written an Eloge of Vauban. Fontenelle was "entièrement étranger à l'art de la

1. O.C., p. 568.
2. Ibid., p. 569.
3. Ibid., p. 569.
4. Ibid., p. 570.

guerre", and "la fonction du secrétaire de l'Académie (des Sciences) était de louer et non de juger." (1) Moreover, it was quite reasonable for the Dijon Académie to put forward this subject. Vauban was a Burgundian, and therefore one need see no more in their choice than "seulement un hommage, rendu par une société de gens de Lettres, à la mémoire d'un compatriote célèbre et recommandable à beaucoup d'égards." (2) But it is a very different matter to erect Vauban as one of "les grands Hommes de la nation" (3) as a whole.

The essential point which Laclos seeks to make is that "l'art de la guerre que les Déclamateurs de tous les temps n'ont jamais envisagé que comme l'art de détruire, n'est pas moins essentiellement celui de conserver." Laclos must have been especially aware of this so soon after his work on the fort on the Ile d'Aix. He goes on to say that "cette division de l'art de la guerre ne se montre nulle part avec plus d'évidence que dans l'Attaque et la Défense des places, double objet des travaux de M. de Vauban." (4) So far as the question of attack is concerned, Laclos does not quibble about Vauban's greatness: "en ce genre, il a fait plus que perfectionner, il a créé l'art." (5)

But, laments Laclos, "si M. de Vauban avait su conserver comme acquérir, sa gloire serait entière." (6) If he had simply concentrated

1. *ibid.*, p. 580.
2. *O.C.*, 570.
3. *ibid.*, p. 571.
4. *ibid.*, p. 572.
5. *ibid.*, p. 573.
6. *ibid.*, p. 573.

ibid., p. /

his efforts on the side of warfare in which he was proficient, and had not dabbled in the problems of defence, "sa gloire au moins serait pure. Mais qui pourra louer M. de Vauban, passant toute sa vie à fortifier et ne faisant pas faire un pas à l'art de la fortification?"(1)

There is a system of fortification which has come to be known as the "système de M. de Vauban. Mais ce système n'est autre que le système bastionné, connu dès la fin du quinzième siècle."(2) Laclos gives examples such as Otranto in Italy and Antwerp. Vauban "n'a fait ... que quelques changements dont encore on pourrait contester également le mérite et l'importance."(3) It is true that towards the end of his career Vauban tried to develop a new system, but this failed and has been ignored ever since, and the general practice has been to revert to the system of bastions. Thus, Vauban's fame rests not on a system which he invented, but on one that he merely adapted here and there, and with which he was himself clearly dissatisfied, since he sought to develop a new one. (4)

Vauban even failed to make a better use of the old system. "Il est reconnu que cette foule d'ouvrages extérieurs, dont il a si prodigieusement surchargé ces places, en diminue souvent la force au lieu de l'augmenter; et ce reproche s'étend jusqu'à plusieurs de ses citadelles." (5)

1. *ibid.*, p. 573

2. *ibid.*, p. 574

3. *ibid.*, p. 574

4. *ibid.*, pp. 574-5.

5. *ibid.*, p. 575.

It would be logical to consider, says Laclos, the situation of these fortresses, but "ce serait commencer une dispute interminable." He contents himself with asking how Charles of Lorraine managed, in 1774, to sweep through Alsace as though the fortress of Landau did not exist.(1) Moreover, although Vauban easily managed to capture fortresses which he himself had fortified, he did not change his system in the slightest degree, and "c'est lui qui a construit ou réparé presque toutes les forteresses qui bordent nos frontières et qui, aujourd'hui, appartiennent à d'autres puissances." In a footnote, Laclos gives a list: "Fribourg, le Vieux-Brisach, le Fort-De-Kell, Philisbourg, Mayence, Luxembourg, Mons, Bruxelles, Tournai, etc., etc." All Vauban's useless work cost France "une somme de plus de quatorze cents millions, dont l'immense fardeau pèse encore, en ce moment, sur cette même nation au nom de qui l'on prépare l'hommage public contre lequel je réclame."(2)

Laclos now turns his attention to the Éloges written by Fontenelle and Carnot. Fontenelle's task was simple. All he had to do was praise, but although he was not a military man, Fontenelle had seen some of the elements of the art of fortification, and although he coyly says that space forbids him to list Vauban's achievements in the art of defence, he manages to find space to give details of his talents in that of attack. "Ce ne sont plus là des ressources oratoires; c'est le langage facile de la vérité,"(3) says Laclos.

1. O.C., p. 576.
2. ibid., p. 577.
3. ibid., p. 581.

ibid. /

Carnot, on the other hand, was a military man, and as such could not offer the same excuses as Fontenelle. It is significant that later Laclos was to meet Carnot and that the latter was to prove an opponent of what Laclos considered to be his reasonable claims concerning his position in the army of Italy. It is possible that memories of Laclos's criticisms of Carnot's Éloge de Vauban played a part in this.

Laclos suggests as an explanation of Carnot's errors that "un Officier du Génie, occupé des détails de son art, a bien pu, sans doute, négliger d'en étudier l'origine et les progrès. Il ne serait donc pas juste de lui faire un reproche de quelques erreurs, que cependant il faut relever par respect pour la vérité.^{1°} Il est difficile de rapporter l'origine des bastions à l'usage des armes à feu, attendu qu'entre l'une et l'autre époque, on trouve environ deux cents ans d'intervalle.^{2°} Il n'est pas exact d'appeler le système bastionné une invention; ce n'est pas évidemment qu'une modification de ces hautes murailles, armées de grosses tours, que M. Carnot vient de citer."(1)

Laclos quotes Carnot's own words against him, and says, "...Ce que je reproche principalement au génie de M. de Vauban, c'est de s'être laissé captiver; de s'être laissé assujettir à des Lois; et de n'avoir jamais su faire que des bastions, quoique convaincu, par son expérience et par celle des autres, que les bastions ne peuvent fournir qu'une défense très insuffisante."(2) One cannot place Vauban amongst the

1. ibid., pp. 583-4.

2. ibid., p. 587.

ibid./

really great men, for every one of his triumphs brings to mind one of his weaknesses. "Quelle forteresse a-t-il conquise, qui ne rappelle l'idée d'une forteresse semblable qu'il a élevée?"(1)

Vauban, then, was truly talented in the art of attack. He gave almost sixty years loyal service, and there is no questioning "son zèle patriotique et... son attachement à son Roi."(2) But this is insufficient for him to be regarded as a truly great man. After all, his long service was spent chiefly in erecting three hundred inadequate fortresses. "Et quant à son zèle patriotique, à son attachement pour son Roi, à cet amour du bien qu'on trouve, en effet, et dans sa conduite et dans ses ouvrages, ce serait faire injure à la nation Française que de supposer ces qualités assez rares parmi elle pour mériter, à celui qui n'aurait point d'autres titres, l'honneur que l'Académie annonce être dû à M. de Vauban."(3)

Laclos's letter is, in fact, a devastating attack on the hallowed name of Vauban. One would, perhaps, like to hail this as a sign of originality on Laclos's part, but this would be incorrect. One would be unjust in saying that the views expressed in the letter were not sincerely held by Laclos, but the fact remains that the inspiration came from elsewhere. Laclos's contemporaries soon realised this.

1. *ibid.*, p. 587.
2. *ibid.*, p. 588.
3. *ibid.*, p. 588.

The author of the Mémoires secrets wrote on the 3rd June 1786(1):

"C'est M. de Laclos, Capitaine d'artillerie, si fameux par son roman des liaisons dangereuses (sic), qui est l'auteur de la lettre... sur l'éloge de M. le Maréchal de Vauban... Le prétexte de M. de Laclos, malgré ses protestations de vénération pour la mémoire du héros qu'il attaque, ressemble beaucoup à de l'envie, ou du moins annonce un désir de se singulariser, de faire du bruit. M. de Laclos aurait pu attendre que l'ouvrage couronné parût & en refuter les assertions qu'il y auroit rencontrées contraires à ses idées."

One may say in passing that this argument is of no great value, for after all Laclos had answered two previous Éloges. By 19th August, however, the target has changed(2):

"Il paraît que cet officier d'artillerie (Laclos) n'étoit que l'organe du Marquis de Montalembert, un des plus ardens détracteurs de ce grand homme (Vauban), parvenu même à faire adopter nombre de ses idées par des Ministres d'État."

M. Allem has made it quite clear that Muffle d'Angerville was not mistaken in this belief. He makes some very revealing textual comparisons between Laclos's letter and Montalembert's notes to his edition of Carnot's Éloge:

LACLOS

"Si ces barrières sont impénétrables, elles font l'éloge de M. de Vauban; si, au contraire, elles sont très faibles, elles font sa critique." (p. 582)

MONTALEMBERT

"Si ces barrières sont impénétrables elles sont son éloge, si elles sont très faibles, elles sont sa critique."

1. XXXII, 92-3.
2. *ibid.*, 279.

"Il est difficile de rapporter l'origine des bastions à l'usage des armes à feu, attendu qu'entre l'une et l'autre époque, on trouve environ deux cents ans d'intervalle." (p. 583)

"Les bastions ne furent imaginés que deux cents ans après l'invention de la poudre."

"Cet art a, comme tout autre, des règles constantes; c'est seulement l'application qui doit varier suivant le local." (p. 586)

"... l'art a été de tout temps soumis à des règles constantes, mais son application seule a dû varier, suivant que le local l'a exigé."

"Il faut y joindre le mérite de près de soixante années de service très assidu, et souvent très dangereux; le mérite de l'ordre et de l'économie qu'il a su établir dans tous les travaux dont il a eu la direction, avantage d'autant plus grand qu'il a toujours subsisté depuis; le mérite de son zèle patriotique et de son attachement pour son Roi. Il faut joindre de même, à ce qu'il a fait de bien, le mérite du bien qu'il aurait voulu faire; et, sous ce point de vue, on pourra compter pour quelque chose ses nombreux manuscrits. Tels sont les titres de M. de Vauban à l'estime publique..." (p. 588)

"Tels sont les vrais titres sur lesquels sa gloire est à jamais fondée; c'est sur cette base qu'on peut élever solidement un trophée digne de lui, en y joignant le mérite de plus de soixante années d'un service le plus assidu et le plus dangereux; le mérite de l'ordre et de l'économie qu'il a su établir dans tous les travaux dont il a eu la direction, avantage d'autant plus grand qu'il subsiste depuis lui; le mérite de son zèle patriotique, de son attachement à son roi; le mérite enfin de tout le bien qu'il a fait et de celui qu'il est prouvé par ses écrits qu'il eût voulu faire..."

Replies to Laclos's letter were not slow in appearing. On the 14th June the Mémoires secrets record that "M. le Marquis de Villette, indigné de l'acharnement de M. de Laclos contre la mémoire du Maréchal de Vauban, y a répondu par la boutade poétique suivante:

Comme tant de héros, Vauban maître du fort,
 Servit l'État pendant sa vie;
 Mais plus grand qu'eux par son génie
 Il le défendit après sa mort.(1)

Laclos no doubt would have said of that, as he was to say when criticising a poetic effort of his wife's, that it was "non pas de la poésie, mais des vers." (2)

However, not all the replies to Laclos were as slight as this, and Moufle d'Angerville was to write on the 19th August (3) that "plusieurs officiers du corps royal du génie ont cru devoir venger la mémoire du Maréchal de Vauban Ils déclarent que leur serment d'officier les oblige de détruire des erreurs propagées sans réclamation, qui deviendroient dangereuses pour la défense du Royaume." One officer, M. de Lestre, published a Lettre à MM. les officiers français au sujet de celle écrite par M. de Laclos, à MM. de l'Académie française(4). In this he mixes compliments to Laclos the novelist with criticism of Laclos the military theorist. General Michaud d'Arçon wrote some Considérations sur l'influence du génie de Vauban dans la balance des forces de l'État(5). The general avoids mentioning Laclos's name, but alludes to him as "un nouvel Hérostrate...(qui) compte exécuter son projet incendiaire (i.e. the sacrilegious destruction of Vauban's reputation) avec les feuilles d'une brochure légèrement écrite."(6)

1. Mémoires secrets, XXXII, 112.
2. Lettres inédites, p. 44 24 floréal an II
3. Mémoires secrets, XXXII, 279.
4. Brest, 1786.
5. Strasbourg, 1786.
6. *ibid.*, p. 55.

He inveighs against those who tell their countrymen "Abandonnez l'esprit militaire... Reposez-vous sur mes secrets... Je vous promets des places imprenables et dont la résistance invincible n'exige ni talents, ni courage, ni mouvement. Accordez-moi votre confiance, croyez-moi; livrez-vous au sommeil." (1) D'Arçon concludes that the envy Vauban has aroused is sufficient evidence of his greatness. (2) The author of the Réflexions sur la lettre de Monsieur Choderlos de La Clos, capitaine d'artillerie, à Messieurs de l'Académie Française, à l'occasion de l'Éloge proposé, de M. de Vauban, (3) says that "un Critique, dépourvu de talens, d'expérience dans cet art, vient d'élever sa voix contre une opinion si long temps soutenue..." (4) He goes on to say that Laclos grossly exaggerates the cost to the nation of Vauban's fortifications. He concludes by inferring that Laclos is merely acting as Montalembert's mouthpiece, and says that "le Critique de M. de Vauban voyant nos forteresses plus nuisibles qu'utiles, entraîné peut-être par l'opinion de quelque Écrivain militaire, lequel ne veut plus de forteresses, pour rendre son arme exclusive sans doute, n'a sûrement point, ainsi que lui, envisagé le nombre de troupes à y substituer, et n'en a point calculé la dépense." (5) There is nothing more to say, for "trop s'arrêter aux reproches, que pour la première fois l'on a osé faire à la réputation, à la mémoire de M. le Maréchal de Vauban, c'est sans doute y faire une attention qu'ils ne méritent pas; l'indifférence absolue est ce que justement on leur doit." (6)

1. *ibid.*, p. 58.
2. *ibid.*, p. 65.
3. no publisher's name, place or date.
4. *ibid.*, p. 3.
5. *ibid.*, p. 26.
6. *ibid.*, pp. 31-2.

Only a military expert could arrive at a reasonable summary of the rights and wrongs of this controversy. Any attempt to do so would be out of place here. It is, however, ironical that at the very time that General Weygand was applauding d'Arçon's remarks (1), France herself was going to sleep behind the impregnable Maginot line. Léon Vibert remarked at the time (2), "J'ignore ce que le général Weygand a pu dire de Vauban et de Laclos, à la réunion solennelle des Académies... Mais je songe: Laclos affirmerait-il, comme M. Daladier: 'Les Allemands ne pourront jamais franchir notre frontière de l'Est depuis que M. Maginot y fait construire des forts'? Nous n'en savons rien!... Peut-être dirait-il: 'Les fortifications de M. Maginot ont coûté des milliards et n'empêcheront pas aux avions de passer.' C'est une simple réflexion de ma part.."

This article is full of the type of irony which one expects from the French press when dealing with the Académie, but it does underline the essential fact about Montalembert and Laclos. At least they were forward-thinking, and tried to shock the complacent conservatism which is so often characteristic of the armed forces.

What was more serious from Laclos's point of view than any number of written objections to his remarks, was the action taken by the Maréchal de Ségur, who considered that he had "imprimé et publié sans permission un paradoxe sur les ouvrages de M. de Vauban, lequel est autant répréhen-

1. Weygand: À propos d'un 3e centenaire, Vauban & Choderlos de Laclos. Séance publique des 5 Académies, 25 Oct. 1933. Paris, Firmin Didot, 1933, p.81.
2. Choderlos de Laclos artilleur, in Volonté, 6th Nov. 1933.

sible qu'insoutenable."(1) Laclos, as has been said, was in Paris when he received the Minister's order to return to his regiment. He acknowledged receipt of the order on 17th May, 1786 and agreed to obey it, but then secured the intervention on his behalf of the Comte de la Châtre and the Duc d'Ayen. The latter submitted for him a self-justifying memorandum of which a copy is preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale(2).

In this memorandum Laclos presents his defence in truly eloquent manner. Dard (3) sees this document as ironical throughout. In this light it fits in admirably with his thesis. Laclos begins by pointing out that "ce n'est point attaquer la mémoire de quelqu'un, quelque grand qu'il soit, que de discuter ses actions ou ses ouvrages", and that "dans tous les temps, les plus grands hommes en tout genre ont été soumis à cette discussion qui est devenue le fondement le plus respectable de leur véritable gloire." He gives as examples Condé, Turenne, and the Maréchal de Saxe. Irony certainly does creep in when he suggests that "j'ai pu et dû croire que je ne manquois point à M. le Mal de Vauban en faisant à son égard ce qu'on avoit déjà fait à l'égard de M. le Mal de Saxe..."

He goes on to stress that in his letter he gave Vauban the fullest possible measure of credit for his brilliance in attack, and that his aim was "point d'attaquer mais d'apprécier la mémoire de M. le Mal de Vauban et seulement de fixer, d'une manière plus précise qu'on ne l'

1. Note on letter from Mme. L. AAG. Laclos dossier, Phot. Vailland, p. 56.
2. vide supra p. 15, note 4.
3. vide supra p. 41.

avoit fait jusqu'alors, que là étoient ses véritables titres à l'estime et à la reconnoissance de la nation." Laclos then points out that the expression of his opinions cannot be considered dangerous since, as there remains more than a year before the Académie's competition, "le temps ni l'occasion ne manqueront point à ceux qui croient pouvoir combattre ce que j'ai avancé", and surely "cette discussion ne peut que tourner au profit de la vérité si j'ai eu raison et de la gloire de M. le Maréchal de Vauban si je me suis trompé." Thus Laclos reverses the argument used against him in the Mémoires secrets. (1)

Having dealt with the contents of his letter, Laclos now turns his attention to the question of the manner in which it was published. He brings forward the only case which he can possibly argue: he pleads ignorance of any regulation whereby such a work had to be submitted for ministerial approval. What he in fact did was to follow the normal publishing procedure and obtain a civil permit. (2) "Il y a plus: comme j'ai imprimé en province (at La Rochelle), lorsque mon édition fut arrivée à Paris la chambre syndicale en envoya un exemplaire au magistrat chargé de la librairie et ce n'est qu'après que celui-ci en a pris lecture, et sur mon ordre, que j'ai fait retirer l'édition. Comment pouvois-je croire ne pas être en règle, conduit que j'étois par le magistrat chargé des ordres et de la confiance du Roy dans cette partie." Furthermore, he had put his name quite openly to his work, and had sent a copy to all the Ministers. "J'ose croire que ce ne

1. vide supra p. 72.

2. vide B.N. fonds fr. 12845, fol. 143: a certificate that the work is "inscrit sur la Feuille des Permissions Tacites du 16 mars 1786 sous le no. 982."

seroit pas ainsi que ce seroit conduit celui qui croiroit publier un écrit téméraire ou reprochable."

There is no doubt that this memorandum does contain touches of irony, and Laclos clearly still feels that what he wrote about Vauban is correct. It is nevertheless inaccurate to say, with Dard(1), that the entire memorandum was calculated to irritate Ségur even more. The indications are, in fact, to the effect that Laclos realised that he had raised a bigger storm than he had intended, or expected, and that he was now endeavouring to mollify the authorities. How else can one explain the intervention of de la Châtre and Ayen? These two gentlemen met with no success, however, and Ségur merely wrote on their letters "ne pas répondre."(2)

Mme de Laclos, on the other hand, was at least rewarded with a reply. Laclos obeyed orders and on the 22nd May it was reported that he had rejoined his regiment at Metz. On the 25th his young wife wrote to the Minister from the Hôtel des Milords, where she was still living. "Permettez-moi, Monsieur le Maréchal?" she wrote(3), "de vous représenter que c'étoit par vos bontés, que M. de Laclos était envoyé à La Rochelle; que c'est à vous que je dois d'être parvenue à vaincre les difficultés interminables qui ont si long-

1. Dard, p. 125.

2. Archives administratives de la Guerre, Laclos dossier.

3. ibid. Photographically reproduced by Vailland in Laclos par lui-même, pp. 56-7.

tems retardé mon mariage, et que le tems seul a pu résoudre" - there is something amusing about the naive way in which the young Mme de Laclos appeals to the romantic feelings of the elderly minister, suggesting that he virtually made the match. She asks for an interview to plead her husband's case. Ségur makes brief notes on her letter on the 27th to indicate the tenor of the reply to be sent: "Répondre: Bien fâché qu'elle ait eu lieu de prendre du chagrin ... mais le Roy, informé de la conduite qu'avoit tenue M. de Laclos ... a jugé qu'il étoit dans le cas de subir la punition que S.M. a prononcée, comme il y a tout lieu de croire que le Roy ne reviendrait pas de cette décision, je la prie de trouver bien que je n'aie pas l'honneur de l'entendre à ce sujet."

"Cette aventure eut une influence décisive sur la vie de Laclos: elle le décida à quitter l'armée (1)." This is no doubt in some measure true, but it remains a fact that Laclos did not immediately resign. In October 1786 he was transferred with his regiment from Metz to La Fère, and in 1787 and 1788 he was present at the head of his company for the official inspections(2). He became a Chevalier de Saint-Louis by seniority in 1787, after twenty-^{five}~~eight~~ years' service(3). There is, then, no question of a sudden decision to resign: for a while Laclos remained quite decorously at his post.

1. Dard, p. 126.

2. A.A.G. Régiment de Toul dossier.

3. *ibid.*, Laclos dossier: application for Cross of St. Louis, in Vailland, p. 65.

It seems that Laclos was reasonably well-known in fashionable circles during this period. The Duc de Lévis tells that he met "M. de la Clos, l'ingénieur auteur des Liaisons dangereuses" in the salon of Mme d'Angivilliers, whose husband was reported to be very high in the confidence of Louis XVI. Lévis describes Laclos as an "Homme froid, spirituel sans être aimable." (1) There is no evidence that Lévis knew Laclos well, and so this need not necessarily be regarded as absolutely accurate testimony. Moreover, we have a contrary testimony of at least equal weight in the form of a letter written by Alexandre Pleyre, tutor to the Duc d'Orléans's children, after Laclos's death (2). Pleyre tells us he knew Laclos in Paris in 1787, and says:

"Je partageois en arrivant le préjugé, peu favorable, que son livre avoit répandu contre lui; et j'eus quelque étonnement des marques de considération qu'il recevoit dans ce cercle de gens estimables; mais ma surprise et mes préventions cessèrent, dès que je pus connoître par ses amis quels étoient ses sentimens et ses mœurs. Cependant il ne se forma aucune liaison entre nous. L'année suivante nous fumes l'un et l'autre attachés au Palais Royal, lui au Père, moi au fils aîné. Cette circonstance ne nous rapprocha pas davantage: nous bornâmes réciproquement à une ou deux visites d'honnêteté."

a/

nous/

Pleyre knew Laclos quite as well as did Lévis, and indeed probably far better, for, as we shall see, Pleyre was to meet Laclos again some years later. (3) With connections like the Vicomte de Noailles, the son-in-law of the Duc d'Ayen, it is reasonable to suppose that

1. Lévis: Souvenirs et Portraits, 1780-9, Paris, Beaupré, 1815, p. 91.
2. B.N. MS fonds fr. 12845, folios 128-9.
3. of infra, pp. ~~129-130~~ 278.

Mme d'Angivilliers's was far from being the only salon into which Laclos had access. He certainly was introduced into Orléans's circle, as we shall see shortly.

Laclos published a Projet de numérotage des rues et des maisons de Paris, in the form of an open letter to the Journal de Paris. It appeared in the edition of the 22nd July 1787(1). It was dated from La Fère on the 17th June. The basis of Laclos's plan was that Paris should be divided into twenty regions - not unlike the modern arrondissements, ten on the right bank and ten on the left bank of the Seine. Those on the right bank should be lettered from "a" to "k", and those on the left from "l" to "u", "laissant les 4 autres lettres pour les 4 îles que Paris renferme en son sein." (2) The streets in each of these regions should be given a number, odd numbers being given to those which run more or less parallel with the river, even numbers to those which tend to lead away from the river. The houses of the former should be numbered in the direction of the flow of the current of the Seine, those of the latter starting at the river and working away from it. Once the name of the street, the letter of the region and the number of the street within that region were erected upon a sign at the end of each street, there would be no need for anyone to lose his way in Paris. Apart from this, Laclos was still writing occasional and gallant verse, such as the two poems À Mademoiselle de Sivry(3).

1. O.C., pp. 681-4.
2. *ibid.*, p. 682.
3. *ibid.*, pp. 516-7.

Dard is incorrect in saying that in 1787, "comme pour liquider son passé littéraire, (Laclos) recueille tout son bagage épars, les poésies qui avaient paru dans l'Almanach des Muses, sa correspondance avec Mme Riccoboni, et les publie avec une nouvelle édition des Liaisons dangereuses." (1) This idea, which conveniently supports Dard's thesis, and his picture of a Laclos who "depuis trente ans ... attend son heure" (2) to break forth in open revolutionary action and who now publishes his complete works as a revolutionary manifesto, is unfortunately exploded by Laclos himself. Writing of his novel in a letter to his son Étienne (3), he says that "il ne reste pas un exemplaire des 2 seules (sic) éditions que j'en ai faites. La moins mauvaise est actuellement celle où l'on a mis une correspondance entre M. Riccoboni (sic) et moi et quelques poésies fugitives, échappées à ma jeunesse" Nothing could be clearer. Laclos was not responsible for this edition. Moreover it contains an Avertissement du Libraire in which we are told that "on nous a assuré que cette correspondance avoit réellement existé entre Madame Riccoboni et M. C. de L..., et nous le croyons ainsi.." The Mme Duchastellier referred to by Dard (4) as having received a copy of this edition is in fact a M. Duchastellier. Duchastellier's letter to Laclos, dated 2nd May 1787 (5), even suggests that Laclos was not

1. Dard, p. 131. The edition of 1787, 4 12^o vols, without mention of place or publisher.

2. Dard, p. 130.

3. Lettres inédites, p. 295. 30 messidor, an X.

4. Dard, p. 131.

5. B.N. MS fonds fr. 12845, folios 33-4.

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altogether happy about the publication of the letters: "... s'il y a eu de l'indiscrétion d'imprimer ces lettres, il n'y a personne que Mme Riccoboni qui puisse s'en plaindre..." It is tempting to wonder, even, whether this passage implies that Mme Riccoboni was responsible for the publication of them.

Duchastellier also writes that "c'est une chose plaisante que l'esprit de révolte qui existe à présent dans tout ce qui se voit un peu subordonné." It is true that this is an expression of Duchastelliers's personal opinion, and therefore Laclos cannot be held to account for it. Nevertheless, Duchastellier's letter is evidence that some of his contemporaries did not regard Laclos's work as revolutionary in any sense. It should not be forgotten that it is not until after 1789 has come and gone and the revolution is a fait accompli that there is any real suggestion that Les Liaisons is in any way a revolutionary novel.

Furthermore, Dard himself brings forward a piece of evidence which invalidates his picture of Laclos eagerly waiting to plunge into the Revolution. He quotes a letter of 31st August 1787 from Bellegarde, Laclos's colonel, to Hennin at the Foreign Office, which requests an appointment for Laclos to a military mission in Constantinople which was to train the Turks, who were at war with Russia, in the use of cannon. This letter states that Laclos "réunit toute l'instruction et tous les talents que l'on peut désirer dans un officier d'artillerie aux qualités sociales et remplirait à tous les égards les vues de la

Cour." It is true that Laclos's application was rejected(1), but the fact that he was thinking in terms of going to Turkey hardly indicates that he was, as Dard implies, already preparing himself for revolutionary action.

In view of the fact that Laclos was at this time about to embark upon what has often been considered the most Machiavellian part of his career, it is not without significance to note that he was already, in his private relationships, beginning to show signs of tenderness. The Almanach des Mises published in 1786, his Couplets à Mlle ---, le Jour de la Fête des Saints Anges.(2) It is logical to assume, in view of the date and the occasion for which this poem was written, that Mlle --- was none other than Soulange Duperré, whom Laclos married that very year:

J'attends toujours parler des anges,
Et célébrer ces purs esprits,
Qui de Dieu chantent les louanges
Dans les splendeurs du Paradis:
Avant de prétendre à la gloire
D'aller m'asseoir à côté d'eux,
Je veux vivre dans la mémoire
Des Anges que j'ai sous les yeux.

Digne de la céleste vie,
S'il existe un être parfait,
Mon aimable et sensible amie,
Comme toi, sans doute, il est fait:
Toujours bienfaisant et sensible,
Il pense, il agit comme toi:
On dit qu'un Ange est invisible,
Je n'en crois rien quand je te vois.

1. Archives du Min. des Affaires Étrangères. Bellegarde to Hennin, 31 Aug, Hennin's reply 28 Oct. 1787, Dard, p. 131.

2. O.C., pp. 515-6.

That the expression here is trite there can be no denying, but the poem is noteworthy for its complete lack of irony.

Finally, in October 1788, Laclos applied to be removed from the active list. Precisely what were his intimate reasons for the step he now took we do not know. He may have decided that Henmin's refusal of his application for the posting to Turkey was an indication that his clash with the powers-that-be over Vauban had not been forgotten, or he may have decided that the circumstances militated against his promotion in the army, especially in view of the decree of 1788 that only members of the high aristocracy could be promoted general.⁽¹⁾ Or his reasons could have been different from either of these. Whatever they were, he now obtained leave of absence and entered the service of the Duc d'Orléans.

1. Dard, p. 130.

3. THE MAN OF INTRIGUE: WITH ORLÉANS AT THE PALAIS ROYAL (1788-1789)

It has been suggested that before Laclos secured a post with the Duc d'Orléans he tried to obtain one with the Comte de Provence. "Nous l'avons vu protégé par son premier gentilhomme, le Comte de la Châtre, et l'on sait que Monsieur aimait à s'entourer de gens de lettres."(1) This is not impossible, but it should be pointed out that this suggestion is based upon a piece of unreliable gossip which came out, among so many more, in the highly confused enquiry which followed the events of the 5th and 6th October 1789. Peltier, the editor of the Actes des Apôtres, on that occasion gave evidence that that he had heard tell that "M. de la Clos avoit intrigué, avant ses liaisons avec M. le duc d'Orléans, pour se faire présenter dans la maison de Monsieur, frère du roi, et que ce ne fut qu'après avoir été renvoyé de chez ce dernier prince, qu'il se lia avec le premier..."(2) Peltier suggested that the historian Rulhières would be able to give more details about this, but Rulhières in his testimony protested that he had only heard rumours to that effect, and that he had met Laclos only once or twice, particularly at the Club de Valois.

According to Grace Dalrymple Elliott, "the Viscount de Noailles told me himself that it was he who introduced that monster Laclos to the Duke, and that he had recommended him as his secretary."(3)

1. Dard, p. 132.
2. Procédure criminelle instruite au Châtelet..., Paris, 1790, 2 vols. Vol. 1, pp. 13-14.
3. Mrs. Elliott: Journal of my life during the French Revolution, London, 1859, pp. 26-7.

According to Mme de Genlis, it was the Vicomte de Ségur, the son of the Minister. Mme de Genlis's reaction, or the version she gives of her reaction to the idea that Laclos should enter the Duke's household, is interesting:

"J'eus dans ce temps toutes les espèces de mécontentemens: M. le duc d'Orléans me fit la proposition la plus étrange: il me dit que M. le vicomte de Ségur lui avoit demandé une place de secrétaire des commandemens auprès de M. le duc de Chartres, pour M. de Laclos, auteur des Liaisons dangereuses; je restai confondue. Après un moment de silence, je lui répondis que, s'il donnoit cette place à un tel homme, je quitterois le lendemain l'éducation de ses enfants. La place ne fut point donnée, mais il avoit vu plusieurs fois M. de Laclos qui lui avoit plu: il forma avec lui une liaison intime; il le consulta sur beaucoup de choses importantes, pendant la révolution; on a vu les suites de cette confiance. M. le vicomte de Ségur eut le manque de pudeur et d'esprit de venir tout exprès à Belle-Chasse, pour me reparler en faveur de M. de Laclos: il me dit, entre autres choses, que M. de Laclos étoit l'un de mes plus grands admirateurs, et que, si je voulois bien y réfléchir, je trouverois un grand fonds de morale dans son roman: je lui répondis, ce qui étoit vrai, que je venois de le lire pour la première fois; que non seulement je le trouvois exécrable par les principes, mais qu'il me paroissoit un fort mauvais ouvrage, sous les rapports littéraires..."(1)

One may take it as a sign of Mme de Genlis's influence with Orléans that he thought fit to consult her on the appointment. Laclos was taken on as secretary, not to the young Duc de Chartres, but to Orléans himself.(2)

Orléans was the Grand Master of French freemasonry, and it is possible, as Caussy suggests, that "Laclos se servit ... des loges

1. Mme de Genlis: Mémoires, 8 vols., Paris & Londres, 1825-6, IV, 8-9.
2. cf p. 491 supra.

pour s'introduire auprès de lui."(1) This is, however, pure speculation. According to Talleyrand, Orléans is likely to have chosen Laclous simply because "son ambition, son esprit et sa mauvaise réputation l'avaient fait regarder comme un homme à toute main, qu'il était bien d'avoir à soi dans les circonstances orageuses."(2) We have already had something to say about the question of Laclous's supposed ambition, and we shall have many opportunities to say more on the subject.

It has become the accepted thing to see Laclous as the evil spider at the centre of a vast web of Orleanist intrigue. Yet no one has brought conclusive proof that this was the case. The reason is not far to seek. "La question d'Orléans n'est pas résolue, il manque des Archives."(3) Duff Cooper says that "there is a school of historical writers who will represent the whole of the French Revolution as the result of an Orleanist plot, whereas others deny that the Duke of Orleans was anything but a misguided nonentity exercising no influence whatever upon the events that took place."(4) If it is difficult to determine the role of the duke himself, it is even more difficult to determine that of his secretary. One assumption follows another, and we find Andre Monglond quoting Peltier as a witness to the character of Laclous. According to Monglond, Peltier, writing

1. Caussy, p. 132.
2. Talleyrand: Mémoires, Paris, 5 vols., 1891-2, vol.I, p. 209.
3. Prof. M. Reinhard, letter, 23/2/59.
4. Duff Cooper, Talleyrand, London, 1958, p. 20.

of the Duc d'Orléans, says:

"Ses amis, ses agents furent dignes de lui. L'auteur du roman immoral des Liaisons dangereuses, Laclos, l'homme le plus profondément pervers du siècle, le héros des annales de la débauche." (1)

If, however, we turn to the original and place this passage in its context, we find rather a different picture, heightened by inaccuracy of punctuation in the version given by Monglond:

"Ses amis, ses agens, furent dignes de lui. L'auteur du roman immoral des liaisons dangereuses(sic), Laclos; l'homme le plus profondément pervers du siècle, le héros des annales de la débauche, le fuyard d'Ouessant, Genlis-Sillery, ..." (2)

Thus we see that the passage taken by Monglond to refer to Laclos in fact does nothing of the sort. All the clearly prejudiced Peltier can find as material for an attack on Laclos is that he is the author of Les Liaisons dangereuses.

Our task at this stage is to examine such material as we have in order to determine the actual role of Laclos. It is very likely that we shall not be able to arrive at any very precise facts, but we may hope, without attempting to whitewash Laclos, that we shall come to a more balanced assessment of possibilities.

No one seriously contests Mrs. Elliott's summary of the Duc d'Orléans: "The Duke was a man of pleasure, who never could bear trouble or business of any kind(3)", and was "the most unfit man

1. A. Monglond: Hist. intérieure du preromantisme français, Grenoble, 1929, vol. I, p. 6, note 4.

2. J. Peltier: Dernier Tableau de Paris...., 3e édn. Londres & Bruxelles, 1794, 2 vols., vol. 2, p. 11.

3. op. cit., p. 27.

that ever existed to be set up as the chief of a great faction."(1)
 "I am convinced," she adds, "that he never thought or intended to go the lengths that he did."(2) It is nevertheless true that Orléans did go to considerable lengths, ending by voting for the death of Louis XVI, and there is no doubt that there was a faction at the Palais Royal which consistently urged him on. Several questions must be asked, not the least of which is whether Orléans was capable of a little more application than might be normally expected when it was a question of his indubitable hatred for Marie-Antoinette and by extension for all things Austrian. We are more particularly concerned, of course, with Laclos, and the part he played in the faction. We must attempt to discover whether all the plots attributed to the Orleanists were in fact engineered by them, and by Laclos in particular; whether, in other words, Rivarol and Champcenetz were justified in describing Laclos in the following terms:

"... le confident, le conseiller, l'ami peut-être du duc d'Orléans. C'est lui qui débrouille tous ses sentimens, qui enfante tous ses projets, qui dissipe toutes ses craintes; en un mot, c'est lui qui en a fait un moment l'idole et l'espoir du peuple. À quel degré de gloire il auroit élevé ce grand prince, s'il eut pu le persuader sans l'effrayer! Mais on apprend à jouer toutes les grandes qualités, excepté le courage, et le malheureux Laclos n'a pu même donner le sien à son élève."(3)

Louis-Philippe-Joseph d'Orléans was born in 1741, like Laclos himself. He had a family tradition of animosity towards the Court,

1. *ibid.*, p. 29.

2. *ibid.*, p. 30.

3. Rivarol et Champcenetz: Petit dictionnaire des grands hommes de la Révolution, Paris, 1790, p. 36.

and when Laclos joined him he had just returned from a period of exile from Paris for siding with the Parlement against the king. He also had a family tradition of debauchery, and he lived up to this tradition as much as he did to the other. His orgies at Monceaux and Le Raincy were notorious. Nevertheless, he appears to have been calumniated to a considerable degree. That he was weak cannot be denied, but his behaviour at the naval battle of Quessant in 1778 and his subsequent experimental flights in balloons denote a certain amount of courage, although both were later used to substantiate charges of cowardice against him. However, it seems clear that, dilettante as he was, he was quite incapable of leading any coherent political movement. This fact in itself is not without significance, for Dard himself is forced to admit Orleanism was "une intrigue plutôt qu'un parti", relying to a considerable extent on mercenaries.(1) It is possible, on this basis, that the duke himself played a larger part in deciding policy than has generally been thought the case. The only feeling approaching a consistent political view in Orléans was his personal dislike of the queen and the royal family. Mrs. Elliott tells us that "although I never heard him speak with disrespect of the king, I certainly have heard him very, very violent against the Queen."(2) Dard (3) gives a list of Orléans's grievances against the royal family in 1789: the refusal of the position

1. Dard, p. 263.

2. Mrs. Elliott: Journal, p. 26.

3. Dard, pp. 145-6.

of high admiral, quarrels over etiquette when Maximilian of Austria visited Paris and did not call on Orléans, personal reproaches from the king concerning his conduct, difficulties put in the way of his trips to London, and his failure to bring about a marriage between Mlle d'Orléans and the Duc d'Angoulême. These could be reasons for irrational sniping at the monarchy, but they can hardly be considered the basis for a political party. Indeed, Orléans never took any step which would bring him towards the throne, and shortly before the trial of Louis XVI he confided in Mrs. Elliott, if we are to believe her, that "he had always envied the life of an English country gentleman; and that though his enemies taxed him with wishing to be King, he would willingly change his lot and all his fortune for a small estate in England, and the privileges of that delightful country, which he hoped to see once more." (1) This is the only sign of anything approaching real political ambition in Orléans: he was used to opposition, since by his birth he was so near to the King but so far removed from any influence in French affairs. He may well have wished for a say in government, possibly in a French equivalent of the House of Lords.

When Laclos joined Orléans Mme de Buffon was the "maîtresse en titre", and had been since 1787. Mme de Genlis, as has been mentioned, was, however, still a member of the household. She was the niece of Mme de Montesson, the mistress and later the morganatic wife of the

1. Mrs. Elliott, Journal, p. 100

previous duke. She had quickly become the mistress of the then Duc de Chartres, a feat which it was never difficult to perform. By 1773 the duke's eye had wandered and the affair was over. Mme de Genlis, however, was a skillful woman, and she was able to transform her relationship with the duke into a firm friendship. In 1779 she persuaded him to appoint her as governess to his daughters, and three years later secured a similar post with his sons. If Orléans agreed to this last appointment for the sake of creating a scandal, he certainly succeeded, and much scorn was poured upon him for giving his sons a "Gouverneur en jupe." (1) Despite her pedantry, however, Mme de Genlis was a good choice, and succeeded in teaching the children by amusing them. The future Louis-Philippe was to say that it was she who made a man of him. (2)

Yet despite her habit of adopting a high moral tone, Mme de Genlis was anything but a paragon of virtue. Rivarol went so far as to call her "l'image complète du vice." (3) The same can be said of many of the other habitués of the Palais Royal, itself renowned as a den of harlots: Sillery, La Touche, Noailles, and above all the Duc de Biron who, as the Duc de Lauzun, had built up for himself a notoriety as great as that of the Duc de Richelieu for his dealings with women. If Laclos seriously intended Les Liaisons dangereuses

1. Anon: Lettre adressée à Mgr le duc d'Orléans sur l'éloignement de ses enfans, (Paris), n.d., 6 pp.
2. vide Castellet: Philippe-Egalité, le prince rouge, Paris, 1958, ch.5.
3. Rivarol: Littérature; politique; ..., Paris, 1906, p. 225.

as a revolutionary pamphlet, and now intended to follow it up with more vigorous action, then he seems to have chosen some strange allies.

We have already seen how Mme de Genlis claims to have reacted to Orléans's desire to appoint Laclos. Yet one cannot entirely trust in her veracity. Her best-known work is Adèle et Théodore(1), which appeared at the same time as Les Liaisons dangereuses. Rulhières was in the habit of sending new publications to one of his friends, a M. d'Héricourt, who was living in Italy, and it appears that amongst those he wished to send in 1782 were these two works. According to Mme de Genlis(2) he decided to send Adèle et Théodore first, but made a mistake and enclosed with a letter praising Mme de Genlis's work, but couched in vague terms, a copy of Les Liaisons. This mistake, and the idea that even for a moment she could be thought the author of "l'infâme ouvrage de Laclos" drove Mme de Genlis "au désespoir." But we have already seen that Mme de Genlis claims to have read Les Liaisons for the first time in 1788(3). Therefore we are either to assume that in some curious way her despair was delayed or that she was basing her view that the novel was "infâme" purely on hearsay. This is how legends begin, and this is the way, it seems, in which Laclos himself came to be branded.

If we are to believe Brissot, Laclos took a dislike to Mme de

1. Mme de Genlis: Adèle et Théodore., Paris, 1782, 3 vols. It is a bizarre coincidence that, like L.D., this is an epistolary work, and moreover that it contains a Comte & Comtesse de Valmont, and that the Comte has a sister-in-law Cécile. There the similarity ends.

2. Mémoires, III, 145-6.

3. ibid., IV, 8-9.

Genlis from the start. Brissot writes:

"Je puis également assurer avoir entendu Mirabeau s'exprimer sur Mme de Sillery(1) de la manière la plus désobligeante; Mirabeau la traitait de théologienne bel esprit, bonne à diriger une pension de petites filles et à apprendre aux petits garçons à servir la messe; n'ayant de talents que pour se louer elle-même ou pour déchirer les autres. J'ai un papier de Laclos, dans lequel il l'engage à changer sa plume en aiguille:

Change donc ma fille
Ta plume en aiguille,
Brûle ton papier.

Il faut te résoudre,
À filer, à coudre,
C'est là ton métier."(2)

In another place(3), Brissot tells us how he came to acquire this "papier de Laclos". He describes a conversation he had with Mirabeau about the Mistresses of Louis XV, saying,

"Je témoignai en riant quelque indulgence pour la du Barry, aussi vile mais cent fois moins odieuse à mes yeux que sa rivale et qui n'eut de commun avec elle qu'une faveur dont elle n'abusa pas despotiquement et des mœurs qu'il ne semblaient guère plus coupables.

' - Et vous avez raison, me dit Mirabeau, si ce ne fut pas une vestale, la faute en est aux dieux qui la firent si belle";

mais, du moins, elle n'a pas lancé de lettres de cachet contre ceux qui médisaient de ces bienfaits.'

' - Il faut la purifier, répliqua Laclos qui était présent, ainsi que Mme N...(4) Je parus curieux de la justification qu'on m'offrait de faire et qu'on devait écrire pour je ne sais quelle galerie secrète. Mme N... m'envoya effectivement, avec plusieurs volumes que je lui avais prêtés, le portrait de Mme du Barry; j'en parle parce que, en le copiant, elle y avoit joint un portrait de Mme Sillery. Je pensais que ce second envoi était une méchanceté de Laclos qui était bien aise de me faire lire des épigrammes contre une femme qu'il détestait et pour laquelle il connaissait mes sentiments d'estime..."

1. i.e. de Genlis. Her husband was Cte de Genlis & Marquis de Sillery.
2. Brissot: Mémoires, 4 vols. Paris, 1830-1832, II, 321.
3. ibid, I, 262.
4. Henriette de Nehra, Mirabeau's mistress.

The "galerie secrète" to which Brissot refers is the Galerie des Dames francaises, which was published in Paris in 1790 and which takes the form of a series of word-portraits of women in the public eye. The verses quoted by Brissot appear in the portrait of Mme de Genlis, which is entitled Polixène. This portrait, reproduced by M. Allem among the appendices to the Oeuvres complètes(1) condemns Mme de Genlis for her hypocrisy and pedantry. It is possible to take Brissot's remarks as an indication that Laclos was the author of this portrait. However, it should be borne in mind that Brissot only thought that Laclos was responsible for it. M. Allem suggests that Brissot may be taken as inferring that the portrait of Mme du Barry (Elmire) is also Laclos's handiwork(2). It is impossible to say for certain that Laclos was responsible for either.

Dard suggests that it was Laclos's deliberate policy to dislodge Mme de Genlis from favour with Orléans. This may be true, but it should be pointed out that Mme de Genlis claims never to have met Laclos: "C'est encore un fait que je ne connoissois aucune des personnes qu'il (i.e. Orléans) s'était particulièrement attachées depuis la révolution; je n'ai, de ma vie, rencontré M. de Laclos et M. Shée; je n'ai jamais eu la moindre relation avec eux, et je ne les connoissois même pas de vue."(3) This may seem unlikely, and it is

1. O.C., pp. 693-6.

2. O.C., pp. 689-693.

3. Mme de Genlis: Mémoires, IV, 73.

quite possible that she is here simply making an attempt to preserve her reputation under the Restoration, and to combat such tributes as that of Brissot who, in rather different circumstances, justified his feelings of esteem for Mme de Genlis by saying that "la conduite de Mme de Sillery et ses opinions (étaient) plus constitutionnelles, plus républicaines peut-être que celles des républicains..."(1)

Not only have parts of the Galerie des Dames françaises been attributed to Laclos, along with Mirabeau, Luchet and others, but the same suggestion has been made concerning the work to which this claims to be a sequel, the Galerie des États-Généraux(2). In the introduction to the second volume of this work (3), we are told that "on trouvera dans ce volume les portraits de quelques personnages qui ne sont pas députés aux États-Généraux." The portrait of Cneis(4) is not identified in the key at the end of the volume, and Barbier(5) says that at first he was tempted to see it as a self-portrait by Laclos. On second reading he retracts this view, and one cannot help but congratulate him. The portrait begins: "Il nous a paru plaisant et utile, peut-être, de mêler à ces portraits celui du peintre de la galerie."(6) We are told that "son talent consiste dans l'abondance des idées, la clarté de l'ex-

1. Brissot: Mémoires, I, 292.

2. 2 vols., n.p. 1789.

3. Galerie des États-Généraux, p. 4

4. ibid., pp. 134-9.

5. A. Barbier: Dictionnaire des Ouvrages anonymes, 5 vols., Paris, 1872-1889, vol. II, col. 518.

6. Galerie des États-Généraux, p. 134.

pression, l'indulgence de sa morale, la facilité à produire, la grâce de l'esprit, la justesse de ses portraits(1)", and later that "Cneis aura prodigieusement écrit et ne laissera aucun ouvrage; il aura beaucoup travaillé, et ne laissera aucun monument. Par un contraste malheureux il se croit au-dessus des places subalternes et au-dessous des premières..."(2) There really is nothing here which could pin this portrait down as one of Laclos by his own or any other hand. It is a mere piece of tongue-in-the-cheek writing by some person unknown, no doubt simply lamenting the lot of the hack writer.

The portrait of the Duc d'Orléans as Clémon(3) is very much in his favour, and yet any inclination to attribute it to Laclos is halted by the portrait's whole-hearted praise of Orléans's initiative in entrusting the education of his sons to Mme de Genlis, and its praise of that lady herself. We have no direct information as to Laclos's view of Mme de Genlis, (other than, possibly, the verses on her quoted above which may or may not be his work) and so here once again we must withhold judgement. Indeed any such information would not justify us in attributing this portrait, any more than any of the others in this work, to Laclos. The same can be said of another work on the same lines, Les Grands Hommes du Jour(4).

Michelet envisaged Orléans with two figures by his side, "une femme

1. Galerie des États-Généraux, p. 135.
2. ibid., p. 136.
3. ibid., pp. 109-113.
4. 3 vols., n.p., 1790-1.

blanche, un homme noir,... les conseillers du prince, le vice et la vertu." (1) They were Mme de Genlis and Choderlos de Laclos. We shall say no more about Mme de Genlis's claim to be considered as the personification of virtue. Montjoie, in his Histoire de la Conjuration de Louis-Philippe-Joseph d'Orléans (2) describes Laclos in the following terms:

"Monstre d'immoralité, il s'est peint lui-même trait pour trait dans le scélérat dont il a fait le héros de son impur roman Il aime à mal faire par goût et par système Persuadé que la perversité est l'élément de la nature humaine, de deux actions, l'une bonne, l'autre mauvaise, il fait celle-ci et rejette celle-là, pour ne pas se distinguer de ses semblables. Les gens de bien, selon lui, s'il en existait, ne seraient que des agneaux au milieu d'un troupeau de tigres, et il estime qu'il vaut mieux être tigre, parce qu'il vaut mieux dévorer que d'être dévoré."

These two, despite Montjoie's violence which should have made him immediately suspect, played a great part in propagating the idea that Laclos was a Machiavellian figure at the Palais-Royal. It is now our task to consider the hard facts of the case.

According to Malouet (3) "le duc d'Orléans ... avait son intrigue à part, bien odieuse, bien criminelle. Son but personnel était la vengeance plutôt que l'ambition; celui de son petit conseil, dont les membres sont assez connus, était d'opérer un bouleversement, non par amour de la démocratie... mais pour placer le prince à la tête des affaires comme lieutenant-général et en partager les profits." We are called upon to see Laclos as the central figure of this "petit conseil" or "inner gang" (4). "Actif et secret, il observait et agissait, étendait silenc-

1. J. Michelet: La Prise de la Bastille, Paris, n.d. (1928), p. 201.
2. 3 vols., Paris, 1796, vol. I, p. 213.
3. Malouet: Mémoires, 2 vols., Paris, 1868, vol. I, p. 280.
4. J. H. Clapham: The Abbé Sieyès, London, 1912, p. 64.

ieusement ses liaisons avec le personnel révolutionnaire et, dans l'ombre, machinait froidement une audacieuse intrigue... C'est à Montrouge, chez le Duc de Biron, qui possédait une petite maison dans ce village, que Laclos se retrouvait avec le prince et ses partisans. C'est là, qu'on dépouillait prestement les principes et qu'on traitait cyniquement la politique, comme on traite de femmes entre viveurs."(1)

Is this not to take too easily at their face-value such manifestly prejudiced pamphlets as the Conjuration de Philippe d'Orléans...(2), which gives as a frontis-piece a picture showing Orléans distributing daggers to his followers? Dard himself has to admit that of these "concoiliabules nocturnes... rien n'a transpiré, ni pour les contemporains, ni pour la postérité..."(3). On this evidence it is quite impossible to accept Dard's contention that Laclos directed "dans la coulisse les manoeuvres auxquelles se livra, de la fin de 1788 jusqu'aux journées des 5 et 6 octobre, la faction d'Orléans."(4)

What precisely were the manoeuvres undertaken during this period by the Orleanists? It is true that during the winter of 1788-9 Orléans made himself prominent and popular by his acts of charity. Pro-Orleanist pamphleteers were not slow to emphasise this. The pamphlet entitled Motifs du Départ de Monseigneur, le Duc d'Orléans depicts him as the soul of generosity and charity. The French people are told that "... il est

1. Dard, pp. 162-3.

2. Conjuration de Philippe d'Orléans, ou détails exacts et circonstanciés de l'assemblée qu'il tint en personne au Rinsy, le 7 de ce mois et jours suivans, n.p., 1790.

3. Dard, p. 163.

4. *ibid.*, p. 165

notre appui dans le Sénat François; mais il voit qu'il peut nous être plus utile encore sur les bords de la Tamise..., déjà la Manche est couverte de vaisseaux qui nous apportent des grains."(1) There is no need to say that there were other pamphlets which took exactly the opposite line and claimed that the shortage of grain was an Orléanist plot(2).

The first really important move by Orléans took the form of the publication of the Instructions envoyées par M. le duc d'Orléans pour les personnes chargées de sa procuration aux Assemblées des Bailliages relatives aux États-Généraux(3). These instructions, intended originally for Orléans's domains only, comprise a brief introduction and seventeen articles. These deal with such topics as the freedom of the individual and the press, the inviolability of letters in the post, the respect of property, national consent to all forms of taxation, periodical sittings of the States General and ministerial responsibility to it, consolidation of the national debt and the establishment of a national budget, the reform of civil and criminal legislation, and the drafting of a Consitution. Article XII stated that "on demandera l'établissement du divorce: comme seul moyen d'éviter le scandale des unions mal assorties et de séparations."(4) It is tempting to see here the author of De l'Éducation des Femmes taking the bold step of openly advocating divorce

1. Paris, 1789, p. 7.

2. vide infra

3. n.p., n.d., (1789), 66 pp, pp. 3-10. O.C., pp. 684-8.

4. O.C., pp. 687-8.

in a political manifesto. This was afterwards used against Laclos. In the Réponse de M. Delaclos à M. le duc d'Orléans...(1), a pamphlet which is clearly apocryphal, Laclos is made to claim credit for inserting the article on divorce into the Instructions, firstly to gain Mme de Buffon's gratitude by enabling her to marry Orléans, and secondly to rally all debauchees, and all those who could settle their debts through another marriage, to Orléans's banner.

There is some reason to believe that Laclos wrote the Instructions. Caussy denies this, and suggests that "il en est probablement d'elles comme de l'Épître à Margot: à force de se les entendre attribuer, Laclos dut finir par se laisser croire à ses amis qu'en effet il avait bien pu en être l'auteur."(2) Caussy's grounds for taking this view are that, although on Talleyrand's evidence (3) Laclos was at least responsible for a first draft which did not satisfy Orléans, who submitted it to Sieyès for renovation, the Instructions themselves are designated as being "adressées à M.D.L.C."(4) This indeed is an awkward point. The whole question is somewhat confused, for Pariset explicitly states in his Notice on Laclos(5) that "ses Instructions aux bailliages, écrites en 1789, feront toujours honneur à sa mémoire." It is, of course, possible that, as Caussy suggests, Laclos hoodwinked his friends on this

1. Réponse de M. Delaclos à M. le Duc d'Orléans, pour servir de suite à la conspiration mieux dévoilée, ou à la Lettre de M. le Duc d'Orléans à M. Deléaclos(sic) 17 juin 1790.

2. Caussy, p. 110, note 1.

3. Talleyrand: Mémoires, 5 vols., Paris, 1891-2, vol. I, pp. 209-10.

4. Instructions, 1789 end., p. 3, footnote.

5. An XII, 1803, p. 7.

point, Pariset included.

Talleyrand's claim that Sieyès re-wrote an original draft by Laclos seems weak once we take a look at Sieyès work, the Délibérations à prendre dans les Assemblées de Bailliages, published under the same cover immediately after the Instructions. The Delibérations are a complement to the Instructions, in the words of M. Allen, "une sorte de guide pratique à l'usage de ces assemblées"(1), but this is not the point at issue. What is important is that the Delibérations have a footnote which reads "attribuées à M. l'A.S."(2), and the Abbé Sieyès never denied their authorship, whereas he did deny responsibility for the Instructions, despite Talleyrand's claim that "Sieyès ... ne trouva rien qui dût y être conservé."(3) The Exposé de la Conduite de M. le Duc d'Orléans dans la Révolution française, rédigé par lui-même, à Londres(4) has an allusion to the Instructions: Orléans refers to "ces instructions que je faisais rédiger à mesure par l'un des Secrétaires des Commandements, en y joignant un ouvrage du plus fort de nos publicistes..." This bears out the idea that the Instructions and the Délibérations were in fact written by two different people, but unfortunately the Exposé cannot safely be used as evidence, since it too has been attributed to Laclos, and so could be used to support Caussy's case that Laclos allowed the idea that he was the man behind the Instructions to spread abroad. There is still, of course, the major objection of

1. O.C., p. 921.
2. 1789 ed., p. 11.
3. Talleyrand: Mémoires, I, 210.
4. (Paris), n.d. (1790). O.C., p. 699.

of the footnote claiming that they are "adressées à M.D.L.C." There remains nevertheless a possibility that Laclos wrote the Instructions, and Dard(1) is convinced that he did. Possibility, however, is not proof, and one must agree with M. Allem that the proper place for the Instructions is among the appendices to Laclos's works, and not alongside the Liaisons and the other works whose authorship is beyond all doubt.

The Instructions, along with the Délibérations, were distributed throughout France and, no matter who wrote them, became "un des 'modèles' les plus suivis pour la rédaction des cahiers." (2) When the States General met on the 4th May Orléans, the representative of the nobility of Crespy-en-Valois, refused to walk in procession with the princes of the blood, and joined the less-distinguished members of the nobility. The fictitious Laclos of the Réponse de M. Delaclos à M. le Duc d'Orléans... claims full responsibility for this decision. (3) Orléans was becoming the "idole du peuple". It was he who led the nobles who joined the Third Estate on the 17th June, but when, on the 3rd July, he was asked to preside over the National Assembly, thus becoming the real head of the nation, he refused, offering this as proof positive that, in his own words, "je sacrifierai toujours mon intérêt personnel au bien de l'État." (4)

1. Dard, p. 167.

2. Dard, p. 169.

3. p. 5.

4. Réponse de Monseigneur le Duc d'Orléans à l'Assemblée qui l'avait élu président, n.p. n.d.

It is almost impossible to determine the part played by the Orleanists in the troubled days of 1789, and even more so to determine that played by Laclos. Dard makes the rash comment that, after the events of the 5th and 6th October, "Laclos, après un an de la plus folle intrigue, n'avait réussi qu'à précipiter pour toujours dans un insupportable abîme son malheureux prince." (1) There are very few facts to warrant any such conclusion.

The first case of violence attributed to the Orleanists was the Reveillon affair on the 27th April (2). Talleyrand was to declare categorically that "cette émeute avait été conduite par M. de Laclos." (3) There is no corroborating evidence for this accusation, except the pamphlet L'Ami des Français (4) which claims that police spies "reconnurent plusieurs fois le chevalier de la Cl... Il étoit déguisé: tantôt il traînoit une jambe de bois, tantôt, et toujours sous un vêtement différent, il portoit sur l'oeil gauche un morceau de taffetas noir." One requires more reliable evidence than this before one can accept Laclos's implication as proven. No doubt the true causes of the disturbance, whether it was brought about by deliberate incitement or whether it was the result of spontaneous high feelings aggravated by the sufferings of the previous winter and the bread shortage, will

1. Dard, p. 188.

2. Malouet, Mémoires, I, 281; Montjoie, op. cit., I, 93.

3. Talleyrand, Mémoires, I, 208.

4. L'Ami des Français, suivi d'un précis succinct sur la conspiration du Duc d'Orléans, 1790, p. 21.

never be known. The fact remains, however, that Orléans appeared on the scene in his coach, on the way to indulge in his favourite sport of horse-racing at Vincennes, and was cheered by the rioters. This appearance was a little too opportune to be regarded as purely coincidental, and Montjoie's claim that all the wounded he saw possessed suspicious sums of money(1) supports the idea that the Orleanists may have played some part in the affair.

On the 12th July a bust of Orléans, along with one of Necker, was carried through the streets of Paris. Laelos has been alleged to have been behind this too. In the Réponse de M. Delaclos... Laelos is supposed to be recapitulating all that he has done for Orléans. (This pamphlet is dated 17th June 1790) Up to the 12th July 1789, "Laelos" says, all had gone well, and he says to Orléans, "et d'ailleurs vous vous rappelez que, dans les momens où Madame de Buffon laissait à votre corps et à votre esprit quelque repos, j'eus l'honneur de vous faire part de mes démarches et de leurs effets."(2) The money they spent was buying heroes: "(J'en puis parler savamment, car, derrière la toile, je conduisois toute la machine). Enfin, une vingtaine de louis jetés bien à propos, je fais prendre chez Curtius(3) votre buste, que j'y avois fait placer tout exprès; je le fais promener par tout Paris, et comme Necker, puisqu'il étoit absent, n'étoit plus à craindre, je permis aussi que, pour la forme, il fût fait mention de lui."(4) It would be ridiculous to take such a "document" seriously.

1. Montjoie, Histoire de la Conjuration de Louis-Philippe-Joseph d'Orléans, Paris, 3 vols, 1796, vol. 1, p. 93.

2. Réponse de M. Delaclos à M. le Duc d'Orléans..., p. 5.

3. I.e. wax bust from Curtius's gallery in the Palais Royal.

4. Réponse..., p. 6.

It is accepted that Orléans was not in Paris at the time. The duke's supporters made a great point of emphasising this fact. For example, the Avis au Peuple, sur les véritables Motifs du Voyage de M. le Duc d'Orléans en Angleterre(1) stresses that "au lieu de venir dans le tems de la prise de la Bastille, se montrer à Paris, ou surement il eût trouvé deux cents mille hommes prêts à marcher sous ses ordres, pour éviter toute espèce de soupçon, (ce Prince) est resté constamment à Versailles au milieu de ses ennemis." The Laclos of the Réponse refers to this same fact with some bitterness, saying that he unsuccessfully sent La Touche and then Limon to bring him to the capital. Thus, "cette occasion, qui ne se retrouvera jamais: dans laquelle, sans tirer l'épée, vous eussiez conquis Paris, et par lui la France entière; cette occasion enfin échappa, et je mis mon esprit à la torture pour en faire renaître une autre, de laquelle nous pussions mieux profiter." As a result the fictitious Laclos says he once again loosed his brigands: "Berthier et Foulon furent les premières victimes que je sacrifiai."(2) On the other hand, Mrs. Elliott says of Orléans that she "never saw such unfeigned surprise as his when he heard that Paris was in such a situation."(3) She says that Orléans promptly went to Versailles as a sign that the mob was using his name without authority. He was, however, ill received and said that "if he wished ever so much to be of use to the King and Queen they would never believe him to be sincere."(4) It is perhaps difficult to believe

1. Paris, 1789, p. 3.

2. pp. 6-7. These two were murdered outside the Hôtel de Ville on 23rd July. Berthier had been Intendant of Paris, Foulon an unpopular member of Breteuil's government.

3. Mrs. Elliott, Journal, p. 19.

4. ibid., pp. 25-6.

that Orléans was as lily-white an innocent as Mrs. Elliott would have us believe he was at this time, but it is equally difficult, indeed more so, to accept such evidence of the cloak-and-dagger activities of Laclos.

It has been alleged(1) that during the summer months of 1789 Laclos acted as a go-between for Orléans and Mirabeau, and there can scarcely be any doubt that around this time Mirabeau was on friendly terms with Orleans(2). Étienne Dumont says that Mirabeau spoke of the duke with praise, whilst acknowledging that "Orléans ne sentait plus la différence du bien et du mal." (3) Dumont claims to have met Laclos whilst the latter was paying a visit to Mirabeau. He describes Laclos as "un homme sombre, taciturne, ayant la figure et le regard d'un conspirateur, réservé, spirituel, mais si peu liant qu'à peine lui ai-je parlé, quoique je l'ai vu plusieurs fois." This judgement seems to fit in with that already mentioned of the Duc de Lévis(4), but Dumont openly admits that he hardly ever spoke to Laclos, and so one may question his qualifications for passing judgement upon him. Dumont also admits that he never knew for what reason Laclos visited Mirabeau(5), and he goes on to say that "Laclos était trop habile pour tout confier à l'indiscrétion de Mirabeau." This remark is also open to the suspicion of being based largely upon hearsay, and one cannot justifiably take as gospel Dumont's

1. Dard, p. 177.

2. v. Caussy, p. 115.

3. E. Dumont, Souvenirs sur Mirabeau..., Paris, 1832, p. 169.

4. v. supra, p. 89.

5. Dumont, op. cit., p. 169.

assurance that "il est impossible de ne pas croire à une liaison entre eux." (1) One cannot take this as sufficient evidence that Laclos acted as a mysterious underground contact between his employer and Mirabeau, particularly in view of the Comte de La Marck's corroboratory evidence that Laclos knew human nature too well to put his trust in such a fellow as Mirabeau, and that from the earliest days of the States General he had "persuadé au duc d'Orléans que Mirabeau serait pour le roi." (2) This, of course, implies that Laclos was in fact directing an Orleanist plot, a suggestion which in itself is not yet proven.

If one supposes, however, that during September 1789 there was some such liaison, it seems only reasonable to suppose that it was intended to foster a movement which led up to the events of the 5th and 6th October, since implication in these events is the next charge levelled at Laclos and Orléans. Mirabeau too was said to have been partly responsible for the affair.

Here the pamphlet already quoted returns to the attack: "Enfin, ce qui devoit vous mettre sur le trône et m'y placer, comme vous dites À CÔTÉ DE VOUS;" writes the false Laclos to Orléans, "cette fameuse journée du 5 octobre arrive." (3) This is the Machiavellian Laclos who has been accepted far too easily as the real Laclos. Indeed, this pamphlet actually makes the comparison: "Machiavel, lui-même, n'eût pas mieux

1. É. Dumont, Souvenirs sur Mirabeau..., Paris, 1832, p. 174.
2. Correspondance entre le Comte de Mirabeau et le Comte de la Marck pendant les années 1789, 1790 et 1791..., 3 vols, Paris, 1851, vol. I, introd. p. 111.
3. Réponse de M. Delaclos..., p. 8.

réussi à travailler un peuple qui, n'étant point encore sorti de l'esclavage, n'entrevoit que l'aurore de la liberté."(1)

The anti-Orleanist pamphleteers threw accusation after accusation at the duke and his followers over this affair. It was alleged at the official enquiry subsequently held into it that Orléans himself had been seen at Versailles, urging the crowd on towards the queen's apartment. Dard states categorically that "la complicité des orléanistes dans les journées du 5 et 6 octobre ne paraît pas douteuse."(2) If we examine the evidence brought against the Orleanists in general and Laclos in particular we find that the matter is by no means as straightforward as that. First of all, the pamphlets: in the Réponse...(3), the fictitious Laclos rejoices that in Lafayette he found "un adversaire digne de (lui)," and claims that to encourage restive elements in Paris he stopped the mills and threw what little bread there was into the river. The truth of the matter was that, as J. M. Thompson says, "in spite of a good harvest, there was a serious shortage of flour. The hot weather which ripened the crops also reduced the level of the Seine, and put the Paris water-mills out of action."(4) The Machiavellian Laclos of the Réponse goes on to outline what had been his plans for the October riots(5):

1. Réponse de M. Delaclos..., p. 4.
2. Dard, p. 184.
3. Réponse, p. 7.
4. J. M. Thompson, The French Revolution, Oxford, 1943, p. 93.
5. Réponse..., p. 9.

"LA REINE devoit être assassinée dans sa chambre. Les Gardes-du-corps ne pouvoient guère me gêner, je les faisois fusiller (sic) et un coup bien préparé devoit, au milieu de la mousqueterie, percer LE ROI comme s'il n'eût succombé que sous les coups du hasard. Lui mort, nous eussions commencé par pleurer, par chercher l'assassin, et le faire écarteler," and then, remembering himself, "Laclos" quickly adds, "Non, non, je me trompe, nous vous faisons donner, monseigneur, la tutelle du Dauphin"! "Monsieur" would be conveniently carried off by an attack of apoplexy, whilst Artois could be murdered in Italy at any time. This left only the Dauphin, "mais un enfant est sujet à tant d'accidens, que cet obstacle n'auroit bientôt plus été pour nous un obstacle vivant." But all these plans were spoiled by Lafayette, and "Laclos" tells his master, "Vous n'avez pas d'ennemi plus terrible que cet homme-là. Non, tant qu'il sera là, Louis XVI sera Roi, et Madame de Buffon n'aura jamais le plaisir de pouvoir jouer le rôle de Montespan."(1) Lafayette is again praised to the skies as "le Général que nous admirons tous"(2), and the Orleanists are attacked, in a pamphlet written as a dialogue about the 5th and 6th October in argot. Numerous other pamphlets also hold the Orleanists responsible for the march on Versailles. A letter purporting to have been written by Laclos to Orléans from the Café du rendez-vous, place du Carousel in 1791(3), opens as follows: "Tout réussit à nos vœux aujourd'hui, Monseigneur, et j'espère que ce coup-ci

1. Réponse..., p. 14.

2. Ho! j'y voyons trop clair..., n.p.n.d., p. 9.

3. Lettre de M. Laclos à M. le Duc d'Orléans, du café du rendez-vous, place du Carousel, ce lundi 18 avril, deux heures après midi, n.p.n.d., p. 1.

nous ne le manquerons pas. Ah! la bonne quinzaine que je vous prépare: si je ne vous fais pas jouer de nouveau les scènes des 5 et 6 octobre 1789, mais avec plus de succès, je consens à passer pour un homme sans courage." Another pamphlet(1) tells the people of Paris that Lafayette has exiled Orléans because of his responsibility for the events at Versailles, and urges them to exterminate Orléans and his "brigands", assuring them that "les Aristocrates que vous haïssez, mal-a-propos, ne sont pas vos ennemis; ils vous aideront dans une si belle cause..."(2) Similar accusations of responsibility for the October events are found in other anti-Orleanist pamphlets(3).

It is clear that there was a large section of the public which believed that Orléans was responsible for these riots: his name appears frequently in the report of the enquiry held at the Châtelet(4). Jean Peltier was only one of the witnesses who testified that he had heard "par des bruits publics" that the duke intended to seize control of the country, and Peltier added that he had heard that Mirabeau and Laclos were Orléans's principal agents. He is the only witness to mention the name of Laclos in this connection, but he does state that he had "entendu

1. La Cabale d'Orléans ressuscitée et dévoilée, par un bon citoyen, n.p.n.d., pp. 3-4.
2. La Cabale..., p. 7.
3. Non, d'Orléans, tu ne régneras pas, Paris, n.d.(1791; Conjuration de Philippe d'Orléans, n.p., 1790; Nouvelles de Londres, n.p.n.d., (1789); Lettre de M. Laclos...à M. Forsh..., n.p.n.d. (1790).
4. Procédure criminelle, instruite au Châtelet de Paris, sur la Dénonciation des faits arrivés à Versailles dans la journée du 6 octobre 1789..., Paris, 1790, 2 v.

dire que ce jour-là M. de La Clos, habillé en femme, dirigeait cette portion du peuple que fit une irruption dans les appartement (sic) du château."(1) This rather fantastic piece of hearsay is all that was levelled against La Clos, but Mirabeau and Orléans were considered to be far more deeply involved. Mirabeau presented an alibi, saying that he had spent the whole of the 5th October with La Marck, and the latter bore him out on this point, adding, "C'est du fond de ma conscience que j'affirme ici que cet homme a été tout à fait étranger, par ses intentions comme par ses actions, aux menées qui excitèrent une si violente effervescence dans la ville de Paris."(2)

Edmond Seligman(3) describes this enquiry as "une procédure bizarre, bien oubliée aujourd'hui et à juste titre - car elle ne reposait sur aucune base sérieuse.... Mirabeau et le duc d'Orléans ont été soupçonnés d'avoir lancé sur Versailles le clerc d'huissier Maillard et les mégères qui l'ont suivi." Charles Chabroud reported back to the Assemblée on the 30th September and 1st October 1790. His report earned him, in the public mind, the nickname of "le blanchisseur". He stressed that the accusations against Orléans were based on "des bruits publics, des bruits de société, des pressentimens,"(4) and that no plot as

1. ibid., pp. 11-13. Abrégé de la Procédure..., Paris, 1790, p. 3.

2. Corr. entre la Cte de Mirabeau et le Cte de la Marck..., I, introd., p. 114., vide also p. 144.

3. E. Seligman, La Justice en France pendant la Révolution, 1789-1792, Paris, 1901, p. 275.

4. Rapport de la Procédure du Châtelet, sur l'affaire des 5 et 6 octobre; fait à l'Assemblée Nationale par M. Charles Chabroud, Membre du Comité des Rapports..., Paris, 1790, p. 6.

such had been uncovered. The enquiry had been presented only with rumours and conflicting gossip. As a result of Chabroud's report, it was "déclaré et décrété qu'il n'y a pas lieu d'accusation"(1) against either Orléans or Mirabeau. Indeed, Mirabeau, immediately prior to the October events, had shown himself to be on the side of the king over the matter of the absolute veto, and shortly afterwards, on the 15th October 1789, La Marck presented to the Comte de Provence a Mémoire(2) in which Mirabeau said that nothing good could come of the king and the Assemblée being confined to Paris, and in which he stated that "le seul moyen de sauver l'État et la Constitution naissante, est de placer le Roi dans une position qui lui permette de se coalitionner à l'instant avec ses peuples"(3), by which Mirabeau meant that the king should go to Rouen to escape from all possibility of intimidation by the Paris mob.

Orléanist pamphlets denied that the duke had had anything to do with the march on Versailles(4), and immediately after it had been decided that there were no grounds to inculcate him, Orléans, on the 3rd October 1790 made a speech to the Assemblée denying having played any part in these events and adding that "il est tems de prouver que ceux qui ont soutenu la Cause du peuple et de la liberté, que ceux qui se sont élevés contre tous les abus, que ceux qui ont concouru de tout leur pouvoir à la régén-

1. ibid., p. 118.

2. Corr. entre le Cte de Mirabeau et le Cte de la Marck...., pp. 364-82.

3. ibid., p. 367.

4. e.g. Réponse aux Philippiques...., n.p.n.d.

ération de la France, il est tems de prouver que ceux-là ont été dirigés par le sentiment de la justice et non par les motifs odieux de l'ambition et de la vengeance."(1) Another Orleanist publication of the same year (2) pointed out that "... le Châtelet devoit voir que si M. d'Orléans avoit eu l'ambition dont l'accusoient ces ouï-dire, ce n'étoit pas le 5 octobre, mais le 12 juillet, qu'elle eût éclaté... M. d'Orléans, dont le nom et le patriotisme avoient un grand éclat, n'auroit eu qu'à se montrer pour être à la tête d'un puissant parti." This work goes on to say that according to the stories told at the enquiry, Orléans must have been in several places at the same time, and it ends by advising him to prosecute the procureur, Boucher d'Argis, and various witnesses, for perjury(3).

Michelet, despite the black picture he draws of Laclos, makes no mention of him in connection with this affair. He affirms too that "le duc d'Orléans était parfaitement innocent" and that "les dépositions établissent qu'on le vit partout, entre Paris et Versailles, et qu'il ne fit rien nulle part."(4) Mrs. Elliott states that Orléans "certainly was not at Versailles on that dreadful morning, for he breakfasted at my house, when he was accused of being in the Queen's apartments disguised."(5) She accuses Lafayette of being responsible for the entire affair(6), and

1. Discours de M. d'Orléans à l'Assemblée Nationale, le 3 octobre 1790, (Paris), n.d.
2. Mémoire à consulter et Consultation pour M. L.-P.-J. d'Orléans, Paris 1790, p. 28.
3. ibid., pp. 78-9.
4. J. Michelet, La Prise de la Bastille, pp. 420-1.
5. Mrs. Elliott, Journal..., p. 37.
6. ibid., p. 38.

Caussy points out that "en effet, lorsqu'on cherche, non pas quelqu'un de coupable, mais de responsable dans cette affaire, lorsqu'on examine celui qui bénéficia du mouvement. l'on ne trouve pas d'Orléans, mais Lafayette, si prompt d'ailleurs à accuser celui-là."(1)

All the evidence seems to point to the fact that neither Laclous nor his employer was involved in Maillard's venture. Orléans' disclaimer before the National Assembly may sound suspicious to our ears, but as J. M. Thompson puts it, "neither Orléans nor Mirabeau had been needed to inspire the march on Versailles. It was the spontaneous act of the Paris people"(2). But, guilty or not, Orléans was compromised, and shortly after these events he left for England, and with him went Laclous.

Of this departure, Gouverneur Morris writes that General Dalrymple "returns to tell me that the Duke of Orleans is off for England, and wants to know my Opinion as to his Journey. I am surprised at this but conclude that some transactions of his royal Highness have been discovered which would involve disagreeable Consequences and that the King has desired him to go off by Way of avoiding Enquiry. It is said that he goes on Business of a public Nature but this I think must be an Excuse, because no Man in France is more personally disagreeable to the King of England."(3) Mrs. Elliott's account is not dissimilar:

1. Caussy, p. 120.
2. J. M. Thompson, The French Revolution, p. 100
3. G. Morris, A Diary of the French Revolution, London, 1939, 2 vols. Vol. I, p. 258.

"Soon after this, the ministers and the Court thought that if they could get the Duke out of Paris things would be quieter. They supposed him to have more partisans than he really had, and also more power. It was at this time that they conceived the idea of the Duke being made Duke of Brabant - a very ridiculous plan. I believe, however, that the Duke was foolish enough to consent to it, and, indeed, to wish it much. For that purpose they gave him a sort of mission to England, but on what subject I never positively knew, as I never conversed with the Duke on that matter."(1).

According to one Orleanist pamphlet of the time, "le Duc d'Orléans est donc appelé dans le Brabant, et voilà la cause politique de son absence(2)."

This gives the impression that the duke was going more or less directly to the Low Countries and thus shows the dangers of accepting rumours and hear-say as fact, for, of course, Orléans and Laclous set off for London, and not Brabant.

It is important to remember that they left Paris very soon after the events of the 5th and 6th October, for it is very possible that the rumours which came out at the Châtelet enquiry may have been caused, not by the march on Versailles itself, but by their departure for London. Lafayette had a meeting with the Foreign Minister Montmorin and on the 7th wrote to Orléans requesting an interview; at which he suggested a mission to London, the grounds being that the use of the duke's name by the rioters saddled him with grave responsibilities. It was intended by Lafayette that Biron, also implicated in the Versailles affair, should go to London too, Dard is probably quite right in suggesting that Biron and others pointed out to Orléans that "son départ semblerait une fuite et deviendrait un aveu."(3) The same day Orléans, who had initially agreed to go, changed his mind.

1. Mrs. Elliott, Journal..., p. 43.

2. Réponse aux ennemis de M^r le Duc d'Orléans, Motifs secrets et véritables de l'absence de ce Prince, Paris, n.d., p. 4.

3. Dard, p. 192.

The pro-Orléans historian Tournois says that "son refus eut l'approbation unanime de ses amis, tels que Mirabeau, Sieyès, Biron, Latouche, Sillery, Choderlos de Laclos, etc., qui considérèrent une telle offre comme une lettre de cachet d'un nouveau genre." (1) Tournois goes on to say that in finally accepting the mission Orléans accredited the calumnies of his enemies and left them the field. We can accept this statement by Tournois without it following that we must accept the notion of a plot involving Orléans, Mirabeau and Laclos.

As has already been implied, it is difficult to determine the precise role played by Mirabeau in these early days of October 1789. According to La Marck, "à la suite d'une conversation très-vive que M. de la Fayette eut avec M. le duc d'Orléans, après les événements des 5 et 6 octobre, ce prince fut obligé de passer en Angleterre, chargé, disait-on, d'une mission particulière du roi, mission qui n'eut jamais de réalité. Ce voyage contrariait beaucoup M. le duc d'Orléans, qui prévoyait bien que le public finirait par être informé du véritable motif de son départ. En effet, il était très-humiliant pour le prince, en cedant à l'impérieuse volonté de M. de La Fayette, de paraître reconnaître qu'il avait pris une certaine part aux provocations qui avaient amené les journées des 5 et 6 octobre. Il hésita donc pendant quelque temps, et le duc de Lauzun (Biron) fut chargé de consulter Mirabeau sur le parti que le prince devait prendre. Mirabeau était alors malade à l'hôtel de Malte, qu'il habitait à Paris;

1. M. Tournois, Hist. de Philippe d'Orléans & du parti orléanais, dans ses rapports avec la Révolution française, Paris, 1840, p. 158.

j'étais chez lui lorsque le duc de Lauzun vint le trouver et lui raconter ce qui s'était passé entre le duc d'Orléans et MM. de La Fayette et de Montmorin." (1) La Marck goes on to say that Mirabeau expressed it as his opinion that Orléans should not give in to Lafayette, and added that if Orléans would come to the National Assembly in two days time he would tackle Lafayette for him. This, says La Marck, Mirabeau agreed to do because "dès les premiers temps de la réunion des États-Généraux, Mirabeau avait pénétré que les idées de M. de La Fayette, si elles triomphaient, devaient conduire infailliblement à la république," and although Mirabeau personally "faisait peu de cas de M. le duc d'Orléans,... il aurait préféré cependant qu'il restât en France, parce que son éloignement, exigé, pour ainsi dire, par La Fayette, donnait à celui-ci une force et une importance qui pouvaient être dangereuses à la monarchie." (2) Biron said that Orléans would appear at the Assemblée. He did not do so, however, and Mirabeau never tackled Lafayette on this subject.

In a letter dated 14th October, but clearly incorrectly, since Orléans left Paris early that day, Mirabeau tells La Marck of another visit by Biron. It seems reasonable to suppose that this letter dates from the 13th. It reaffirms that Biron will not go to England:

"... il l'a refusé parcequ'il a de l'honneur. je ne sais pas encore s'il est bien sûr que les autres partiront. Le pauvre prince est leurré, ou veut le paraître, par l'espoir de conclure la quadruple alliance. Il est chargé d'une lettre du roi pour le roi d'Angleterre. Il n'y a pas une preuve contre lui; et quand il y en aurait, il n'y en a pas. Ceci devient trop impudent. Je vous l'ai déjà dit, cher comte, je ne courberai jamais la tête que sous

1. Corr. entre le Cte de Mirabeau et le Cte de La Marck..., I, pp. 126-7.
 2. Ibid., p. 127.

le despotisme du génie. . . À demain, dans l'Assemblée nationale.
Vale et me ama."(1)

This letter beyond all doubt refers to another interview which had taken place between Orléans and Lafayette on the 12th, the outcome of which was that Orléans agreed to cross the Channel on a mission the terms of which were outlined in a memorandum dated 13th October and signed by Louis and Montmorin(2). It would seem that it was on the 14th that Biron had arranged for Orléans to be at the Assembly, for we are told that "Mirabeau s'y rendait de bonne heure le jour indiqué; mais à peine y était-il arrivé, qu'il reçut de M. de Lauzun un billet qui lui annonçait le départ du duc d'Orléans pour l'Angleterre. C'est alors que Mirabeau, indigné, tint le propos dont on a tant parlé. 'On prétend que je suis de son parti; je ne voudrais pas de lui pour mon valet.'"(3)

Orléans and his party arrived at Boulogne on the 16th, and Orléans was promptly held by the municipal authorities(4), who sent a deputation to Paris to verify the party's passports on the grounds that it was suspected that Orléans was being exiled without the National Assembly's knowledge. Responsibility for this move has been attributed to both Lacllos(5) and Mirabeau(6). It seems clear that there was some notion

1. Corr. entre le Cte de Mirabeau et le Cte de La Marck..., I, p. 363.
2. Corr. de L.-P.-J. d'Orléans avec Louis XVI, la Reine, Montmorin, etc., Publiée par L.C.R., 2e édn., Paris, 1801, 2 vols., I, 68-80.
3. Corr. entre M. et La Marck, I, 128.
4. vide Orl.'s letter to Louis, in his Corr., I, 80.
5. Dard, p. 200.
6. Caussy, p. 122.

of denouncing Orléans to the Assembly, with the claim that as a member of it, he could not neglect his post for the sake of undertaking a private mission. This would have ensured that Orléans could not leave the country, despite Lafayette and as a result of this there would have been a hope that "une fois à Paris, sa popularité l'eût fait triompher de tous ses ennemis." (1) However, all this came to nothing. The Commune and the Assembly ratified the passports, and on the 21st October Orléans, with Laclos still in attendance, arrived in London.

All that emerges from the pamphlets and the testimonies at the Châtelet about Laclos and his part in the numerous acts of violence and intrigues of the early days of the Revolution is that there are no facts to prove his direct implication in any of them. That he worked for Orléans we know, and presumably, in so far as there really was an Orleanist party, he was in sympathy with it. But the implication of the Orleanists in these incidents is not proven, let alone that of Laclos. There are no facts whatsoever to support the idea of a Laclos who dressed up as a woman on the 5th October and marched with the women to Versailles, a black-hearted Machiavelli of a fellow, the "infernal Laclos" who was described in a pamphlet of the time as the "séducteur de la Présidente de Tourvel." (2) This shows upon what his evil reputation was based. It was only after the

1. Caussy, p. 122., Dard, p. 202., Exposé, O.C. 706-7 for Orleanist account

2. Domine salvum fac regem, Sur les Bords du Gange, 21 octobre 1789, p. 6. (This pamphlet is attributed to J. Peltier) Laclos, given in the Domine salvum (p. 5) as "Chaderno de Laclos", is defended in Le Pelletier crèvera dans sa peau, ou Adresse à l'Auteur de 'Domine salvum', par M.R., n.p. 1789, pp. 15-16.

October days and the departure to London that Laclos really began to attract the attention of the pamphleteers, who were to level the wildest and most ridiculous accusations against him. We have already mentioned one or two of their efforts and we shall have occasion to mention more, but as for facts, all the data which we have about him up to October 1789 are his nomination as commissaire to the electoral assembly of the nobles of Paris on the 21st April(1), and the fact that he was a member of the Club de Valois, along with the other associates of Orléans(2), and of the Club de 89(3). "Hors de là, tout est légende et calomnie."(4)

1. C. L. Chassin (Ed.), Les Élections et les Cahiers de Paris en 1789..., Paris 1888-9, 4 vols., II, 181 (25th May, commissaire for Calmers, II, 212) (vide also 131, 222-235.)

2. J.B.M.A. Challamel, Les Clubs contre-révolutionnaires, cercles, comités, sociétés, salons, réunions, cafés, restaurants et librairies, Paris, 1895, pp. 42-45, vide also Rulhière's testimony at the Châtelet enquiry.

3. C. Nauroy, Le Curieux, Paris, Oct. 1883-March 1888, 2 vols., I, 23.

4. Caussy, p. 112.

4. THE MAN OF INTRIGUE: WITH ORLEANS IN ENGLAND (1789-1790)

The memorandum given by Montmorin to Orléans was one of officialdom's masterpieces. It promised the duke much, but left the government adequate loopholes to prevent him from really achieving anything. In this section we shall attempt to discover to what extent Orléans really took this mission seriously, and to what extent he and Laclos indulged in plotting whilst they were in England. We shall also endeavour to ascertain to what extent Laclos was responsible for the duke's policy during this period, for Dard claims that he was entirely responsible for it. According to the memorandum,

"Le premier objet des recherches de M. le duc d'Orléans sera de découvrir si, et jusqu'à quel point, la cour de Londres a cherché à fomenter nos troubles, quels moyens et quels agens elle a employés.

Le second objet, qu'il importe au roi de savoir, est, si l'intention du roi d'Angleterre est de demeurer en tout état de cause, spectateur passif de nos divisions, ou d'en tirer avantage en provoquant la guerre."(1)

All this finds ironical reflection in the pamphlets of the day. In the apocryphal Adieu de Louis-Philippe d'Orléans, Duc d'Orléans, à la ville de Paris et à ses habitans(2) the duke is made to say, after admitting buying up all the corn he could find during the previous winter, that there is a threat that England and Prussia may combine to crush France. He adds that "ce ne peut être qu'un homme de confiance, connoissant les moeurs angloises, qui peut parer le coup. Qui pouvoit-on envoyer? moi, dont les courses immortelles, les chevaux, les chiens, les paris, les joquets, m'ont fait à

1. Corr. de L.-P.-J. d'Orléans..., I, 70-71.

2. n.p.n.d., pp. 13-14.

Londres une réputation si distinguée." In 1791 the pamphleteers were to say quite openly that "maintenant, la faction Orléanoise, est devenu le parti Anglois." (1) This idea was quite generally held, and although far from accurate it was strengthened by the exodus to England in October 1789. Another pamphlet says that "trahissant à la fois son roi et son pays, notre ennemi sous prétexte d'une mission extraordinaire et utile à l'état court publiquement mendier (sic) des secours étrangers pour nous asservir." (2) It adds that "sans la diligente prévoyance du Marquis de La Fayette, la France auroit eu son Cromwel." (3) These pamphlets would seem to imply that the mission was a figment of the Orleanist imagination. This is not so. The mission as such certainly existed, and the Orleanist pamphleteers made as much of it as they could, depicting the duke as the soul of generosity and charity, the hero of Ouessant, the hero of aeronautical experiments, the hero who dived into the Seine to save a servant from drowning: "ne sait-on pas qu'il est le seul Prince par ses liaisons avec ce Royaume (d'Angleterre) qui puisse remplir cette mission?" "Il est notre appui dans le Sénat François; mais il voit qu'il peut nous être plus utile encore sur les bords de la Tamise...., déjà la Manche est couverte de vaisseaux qui nous apportent des grains." (4) The mission certainly existed on paper; the memorandum of the 13th October proves that. What is more doubtful is whether it was ever intended to be

1. Il faut y faire attention ou bien tout est perdu, n.p.n.d., p. 25
2. Eclaircissemens sur la prétendue mission du duc d'O..., Paris, 1789, p.8.
3. ibid., p. 4.
4. Motifs du Départ de Mgr le duc d'Orléans, Paris, 1789, p. 7.

taken seriously. Gouverneur Morris's summary of the duke's chance of negotiating with the Court of Saint James's certainly seems more realistic than that of the Orleanist pamphleteers.

The memorandum offers Orléans a sprat, in case he should not bite at the idea of finding out whether London was financing riots in Paris. After all, he can hardly not have known that he was suspected of being in league with the English. It goes on to discuss the revolt in the Low Countries against Austrian rule. The rebels had appealed to Prussia, England and Holland, as well as to France. England, through her great commercial interests, was always very sensitive to happenings in this part of Europe, and the memorandum points out that the English aim must be one of three: to join Brabant with the United Provinces, to make it into an independent republic, or to place it under a non-Austrian prince. The French government cannot but have been aware that England would never tolerate a French prince in Brabant but nevertheless, perhaps relying on the duke's anglophile tendencies, and certainly upon his hatred of anything Austrian and his desire to do harm to Marie-Antoinette's interests, the memorandum continues:

"Si les provinces belges doivent changer de domination, le Roi aimera de préférence qu'elles aient un souverain particulier; mais la difficulté sera dans le choix. M. le duc d'Orléans concevra de lui-même que le Roi doit désirer d'y influencer, et qu'il importe à Sa Majesté que le prince sur qui il tombera lui soit agréable. M. le duc d'Orléans sentira sûrement d'autant plus combien cette matière est délicate et combien elle exigera de dextérité de sa part, que, d'un côté, les vues que la Cour de Londres pourra manifester, détermineront ou l'opposition du

Roi ou son assentiment et, de l'autre, qu'il est possible que le résultat tourne à l'avantage personnel de M. le duc d'Orléans."(1)

According to a pamphlet we have already quoted(2), when Orléans left Paris his real destination was Brabant, and he was only to make a brief stop in London, "pour s'assurer des dispositions de cette Cour: on se flatte qu'elles lui sont favorables." In point of fact, he never went to the Low Countries, and subsequent correspondance between Montmorin and Orléans, in which the Foreign Minister consistently procrastinates on this point, seems clearly to indicate that he was never intended to do so. This same correspondance shows, however, that Orléans was singularly persistent in writing to the Minister, which would seem to be quite foreign to his character. It is also true that the particular question of Brabant becomes merged with the far larger question of a reversal of alliances so far as France is concerned. The problem then arises whether someone else in the duke's camp was responsible for this, and if so, whether that person was Choderlos de Laclos.

Orléans's correspondance, including that with Montmorin, was published whilst Laclos was in Italy. One might expect Laclos to take an interest in this publication, and in fact whilst in Milan he did manage to borrow a copy. He wrote to his wife, asking her to try and purchase one in Paris (3). "Je n'ai pas été peu surpris," he writes, "de rencontrer ce recueil que m'a prêté icy le frère du Général Suchet, qui est l'un de ses

1. Corr. de L.-P.-J. d'Orléans..., I, 76-77.
2. Réponse aux ennemis de Mgr le Duc d'Orléans..., Paris, n.d., pp. 4-5.
3. Lettres inédites, p. 188. 26 brumaire anIX.

aides de camp." There is some bitterness in his remark that "ce recueil peut fournir un excellent article sur le degré de confiance que mérite l'opinion publique et sur la différence qu'il faut faire entre les matériaux d'histoire et les mémoires du temps." He recommends his wife to show the correspondance to Feydal, his ex-colleague on the Journal des Amis de la Constitution on these grounds, and one can only assume that this was in the hope that some article might be written to refute the accusations which had been levelled at him for years, to the effect that he had sold himself and his country to the English. Laclos vouches for the accuracy of the correspondance as it was published:

"Je peux t'assurer que toute la correspondance de Londres est parfaitement exacte, à quelques phrases ou quelques mots estropiés près, comme cela arrive presque toujours quand il n'y a pas d'auteur qui surveille le prote d'imprimerie, or il n'y avoit ni l'auteur de droit ni celui de fait."

The editor of the Correspondance claimed in a preface that he was publishing Orleans's letters from drafts which were in Laclos's hand. Laclos challenges this(1):

"Au surplus je ne crois point du tout aux minutes de ma main, toutes ont été brûlées, au moins je m'en crois sûr. Tout le registre doit être de la main de Clarke et si cela n'est pas ainsi, il me sera démontré qu'il y a une infidélité et qu'on a imprimé sur des copies livrées du lieu, quel qu'il soit, où existe l'original. Si j'avois été à Paris, j'aurois été m'en assurer chez le Rouge qui, comme tu le verras, offre de montrer l'original jusqu'au 1er brumaire an IX, mais peut-être n'a-t-il fait paroître le livre qu'après cette époque passée."

Voilà bien du bavardage sur une chose dont je ne m'occupois plus depuis longtemps, mais cela me prouve, de plus en plus, que le temps amène toujours la vérité; c'est dommage qu'il ne l'amène pas toujours à temps."

"Le temps amène toujours la vérité": this is a theme to which Laclos returned more than once.

1. Lettres inédites, p. 189.

L.I. /

He implies that he is either the "auteur de droit" or the "auteur de fait" of Orléans's letters from London. Of his claim that the copies on which the published correspondence is based must be in the hand of Clarke, Dard says that, "par un usage qui existe encore dans la plupart de nos ambassades, il apparaît donc que Clarke 'archivait' les minutes 'rédigées' par Laclos, qui étaient ensuite brûlées." (1) Now, the copies which were actually sent to Montmorin are in Orléans's hand-writing, and so it may seem that "le maître recopiait le secrétaire." (2) Nevertheless, it is taking a good deal for granted to assume in this way that the duke merely worked under Laclos's dictation. It is, perhaps, not impossible: we shall see that whilst in London Orléans clearly ~~considered Laclos's~~ considered Laclos's continued presence there important. What exactly Laclos meant by "auteur de droit" and "auteur de fait" will be discussed shortly. The inescapable fact is that, so far as public opinion was concerned at any rate, Laclos was now becoming a political figure in his own right. Unless it can be proved that Laclos in London acted as a cynical intriguer, this would not indicate that he was possessed by exceptional ambition, but rather that he was becoming more obviously the victim of a legend. He himself seems to have been deeply conscious of this, as we have seen in the letter to his wife about the Correspondance. He shows relief at the publication of the duke's letters, and sees this as a justification of his activities. This may mean either that he acknowledged responsibility for them but in no way considered them Machiavellian or treacherous, or that

1. Dard, p. 219, note 1.
2. Dard, p. 219.

he disclaimed any responsibility for them other than that of secretary and advisor. In any case he does not appear to have been alarmed at being associated with them, and he shows no concern whatsoever that the publisher should claim erroneously that the text he possesses is in Laclos's writing. Laclos had every justification for his attitude, whatever the motives behind it, for even if it could be proved that he was the guiding spirit behind Orléans's policy in London there would still be scant cause to consider him a Machiavellian opportunist.

To demonstrate this, it will be necessary to consider Orléans's mission to London, and more especially the correspondence which went on between the two capitals, in some detail. The crucial documents, apart from Orléans's letters, are the dispatches sent by the Marquis de La Luzerne, the French ambassador in London, to Montmorin in Paris.(1)

The author of the Réponse aux ennemis de M. le Duc d'Orléans..., written in defence of the duke's departure, took his mission to England seriously, even if very few other people did. The pamphlet has much to lament: as a result of Orléans's disappearance from the scene, "nos cruels aristocrates ne rencontreront plus de barrières... Le peuple se décourage, il ne se voit plus de protecteur au pied du trône, plus de défenseur puissant dans l'Assemblée nationale, plus de bienfaiteur dans ses misères..."(2) But there is one great consolation: "Ne crois pas

1. Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Corr. pol. - Angleterre, vols. 571-573.

2. Réponse aux ennemis..., p. 5.

pourtant qu'il t'abandonne," the pamphleteer exhorts the people. "Il ne le peut sans déshonneur, et tu ne peux l'en soupçonner sans l'outrager; mais, bientôt, souverain d'un peuple nouvellement libre, il t'ouvre les bras."(1)

The possibility of Orléans becoming Duke of Brabant was, we see, openly mooted. But this hope depended upon bringing about far more important changes in Europe, unless it could be done by simple bribery and intrigue within the Low Countries. It is significant that Orléans's (or Laclos's) letters to Montmorin make very little reference to Brabant as such. This scheme, even if Orléans once took it seriously, soon pales into insignificance, and the letters are almost entirely devoted to an infinitely more far-reaching project of the greatest import to Europe as a whole.

When it suggested to Orléans that in the event of a successful revolt in Brabant he might secure sovereignty over that territory, the French government was on dangerous ground, for it was going altogether against the interests of Louis XVI's brother-in-law and ally, the Emperor Joseph II of Austria. Naturally enough, the duke's mission aroused Austrian interest, and the emperor's ambassador in Paris, Mercy-Argenteau, endeavoured to set his master's mind at rest in a dispatch of the 18th November 1789, which read as follows:

1. Réponse aux ennemis...., p. 7.

"Votre Majesté est déjà informée des communications qui m'ont été faites relativement à M. le duc d'Orléans; jamais on n'a cru sérieusement ici qu'il pût devenir un personnage actif et intéressé à la révolte brabançonne; mais on voulait, en se débarrassant de lui, donner pâture à son imagination exaltée, et c'est dans cet esprit que les instructions ont été rédigées. J'ai pris au reste toutes les mesures possibles pour que rien n'échappe de ce qui pourrait avoir trait ici à un si important objet..."(1)

No later than the 3rd November, however, Orléans was writing to assure Montmorin that although he so far had no news to convey, nevertheless "je songe sérieusement à la mission que le roi m'a confiée,"(2) and only three days later he wrote again, asking for more authority.(3)

The opposition groups in France had been saying for long enough that it was high time to abandon the Austrian alliance for one with Prussia and England, and 1789 seemed a very opportune time to bring this about. Austria, the traditional ally, but above all the ally of the court and Marie-Antoinette, was at war with the Turks, and Russia was at war with both Turks and Swedes. Prussia, Holland and England therefore seized the opportunity to supply the rebels of the Low Countries with arms and money. Europe was waiting for an agreement between these three countries to carve up the Emperor's territories there. The Orléans mission seized upon this idea, and saw the possibility of France jumping on to the bandwagon. This was why, only a fortnight after his arrival in London, Orléans asked for new instructions and, even more significantly, stressed that it was impossible to act adequately in London without accurate inform-

1. Corr. secrète du Cte de Mercy-Argenteau avec l'Empereur Joseph II et le prince de Kaunitz..., 2 vols., Paris, 1891, II, 285.

2. Corr. de L.-P.-J. d'Orléans..., I, 86.

3. ibid., I, 87.

ation from Berlin. He suggested(1) that Biron and Heymann be sent to the Prussian capital. The duke for some time received no reply to this letter, and on the 13th and again on the 17th November he repeated his request for new instructions(2). His letter of the 17th goes into greater detail. He wants authority to take the initiative and open discussions aimed at producing a complete alliance with the English. He says that 'il paraît qu'on reconnaît enfin dans ce pays, que le véritable intérêt des deux nations est de rester fortement et perpétuellement unies, et d'imposer de concert la paix au reste de l'Europe.' He adds that "les circonstances sont telles que je ne serais pas sans espoir de succès, si étais chargé de substituer au traité de commerce actuel (1786), l'entière liberté de commerce entre les deux nations, et par conséquent l'alliance la plus étroite."(3)

The French government would not countenance such a scheme, particularly at a time when France was torn by dissension, and when it was thought in some circles that Joseph II might well be needed to help put down France's internal strife. Moreover, there was a fear that England planned to take advantage of France's weakness to declare war on her. Montmorin therefore brought Orléans back to the principal article of his commission, and asked him what he had discovered about English plots against France, at the same time refusing to send either Biron or Heymann to Berlin, on the grounds that Biron could not leave the Assembly and Heymann was needed in Alsace. He added that in view of Anglo-French rivalry in almost every field such a commercial treaty as Orléans suggested was quite impracticable(4). On the

1. Corr. de L.-P.-J. d'Orléans..., p. 87.

2. ibid., pp. 89 & 90.

3. ibid., pp. 91-2.

4. ibid., pp. 93-4.

20th November Orléans tartly replied that as La Luzerne had the same information as he on the subject of English plots and aid to factious elements within France, he had thought repetition useless.(1)

On December 10th Orléans protested that unless France acted speedily she would be left out of Anglo-Prussian plans for the Low Countries. He says that there is only one way to treat with England, but he cannot reveal what that means is, for it has been confided to him, "au moins pour le moment, sous le sceau du secret", although he could employ it, if he were given power to make some "ouvertures conditionnelles"(2). The nature of this mysterious plan is revealed in a letter to Biron on 2nd December in which Orléans suggests that one of his sons should marry an English princess, so that England should retain an interest in Brabant. In this letter the duke implies that Pitt is about to fall, "mais j'espère avoir trouvé les personnes qui décideront la volonté du roi... Je crois qu'un bon ambassadeur ferait ce qu'il voudrait pourvu qu'il eût carte blanche et un peu d'argent, pas même beaucoup."(3) This clearly refers to the Prince of Wales, with whom Orléans had long been friendly, and Dard suggests that the principal point of Orléans's plan may well have been that France should pay the profligate Prince's debts(4). It seems far more likely, as Carton de Wiart suggests, that Orléans's infallible

1. Corr. de L.-P.-J. d'Orléans...., pp. 99-101.

2. ibid., I, p. 113.

3. cf. Carton de Wiart, La Candidature de Philippe d'Orléans à la Souveraineté des Provinces belges en 1789 et 1790, Mém. Acad. Belg. Lettres XVIII, 7 1924 pp. 8-9, and op.cit., pp. 8-9. Lison, Un Précurseur de Tallyrand..., p. 589.

4. Dard, p. 233.

recipe called for the abandonment of one or more French colonies to England. But "la consigne française est le wait and see." (1) Orléans complained bitterly that this attitude was the result of Marie-Antoinette's influence. He asked La Luzerne, who reported the matter to Montmorin: "Croyez-vous que si nos Ministres, auxquels j'accorde extrêmement de probité, n'encensoient pas encore l'Idole (i.e. the Austrian Alliance), ils ne trouveroient pas moyen de se mêler des affaires de Flandre sans choquer la Cour Impériale; ils n'avoient qu'à inciter, même laisser faire l'Assemblée nationale; tout rejeter sur elle si les choses alloient mal, et s'en servir si elles alloient bien!" (2) This is as Machiavellian a sentiment as one could wish to come across, and greatly encourages Dard, who holds Laclos totally responsible for Orléans's actions (3). It is to be noted, however, that the passage occurs in one of La Luzerne's dispatches, and not in Orléans's Correspondance.

By the beginning of February it was too late. Holland, Prussia and England had drawn up an agreement over common action concerning the Low Countries. On the 6th March Orléans sent Biron and Liancourt a letter saying (4) that since the emperor's death the Low Countries affair could not legitimately be separated from the larger question of the entire Anglo-French relationship. La Luzerne, therefore, should either be employed

1. Carton de Wiart, op. cit., pp. 8-9.
2. A. E., Vol. 571, folios 292-3.
3. Dard, p. 235.
4. Corr. de L.-P.-J. d'Orléans..., I, 162-3.

elsewhere or given temporary leave of absence(1), so that "je restasse à la tête de la négociation, soit que j'eusse ou n'eusse pas le titre d'ambassadeur, avec un chargé d'affaire, autre que M. Barthelémy, qui me serait subordonné, et qui opérerait dans les mêmes vues et les mêmes principes que moi."(2) Dard argues that Orléans is here suggesting a post for Laclos. That may be so. On the 11th May, Orléans was to show that he considered Laclos's continued presence in London desirable by writing to Montmorin in the following terms:

"Comme cet officier me sera utile ici tout le temps que durera la mission que j'ai à y remplir, je vous prie de vouloir bien lui accorder un congé d'été avec appointemens, et la prolongation de(s) passeports nécessaires, pour qu'il soit autorisé et à ne pas rejoindre son corps cet été, et à rester en Angleterre: je vous en aurai une vraie obligation."(3)

Biron and Liancourt delivered Orléans's ultimatum of the 6th March to Montmorin, and later they delivered another one dated 3rd April, in which Orléans wrote that "la totalité des intérêts de la cour de France avec la cour d'Angleterre ne peut plus être traitée qu'ensemble, et par conséquent par une seule et même personne: voilà le principe, sera-ce par moi, sera-ce par M. de la Luzerne? voilà le point à décider."(4)

Orléans continued to press for La Luzerne's removal, but finally Montmorin was able to point out on the 31st May that friction was developing between England and Spain, and that the latter was insisting that France

1. Corr. de L.-P.-J. d'Orléans..., p. 165.
2. *ibid.*, pp. 165-6.
3. *ibid.*, p. 184.
4. *ibid.*, pp. 170-1.

should re-affirm the Family Alliance. Under these circumstances, this was scarcely the moment to change ambassadors in England(1). At the same time Montmorin insisted that Orléans should stay in England, for in Paris "les... circonstances sont exactement les mêmes que lorsque Monseigneur se déterminà à aller en Angleterre." (2)

On 7th June, Orléans protested to Montmorin that the Minister was going back upon previous agreements: "les arrangemens qui ont été convenus... entre vous et moi, par l'entremise de messieurs de Liancourt et de Biron." (3) He went on in scathing terms to express his amazement at hearing that the king of Spain should have the right to "concourir à la nomination des ambassadeurs de France." (4) It was now clear that he could no longer hope to bring about the Quadruple Alliance, and so, despite Montmorin's objections that his return would destroy all belief that he had ever been on a genuine mission and moreover would cause unrest in Paris, and despite a visit from Lafayette's agent Boinville, Orléans decided to return to Paris for the 14th July.

La Luzerne's dispatches to Montmorin throughout this period are a valuable commentary on the activities of Orléans and Laclos in London. On the 23rd November 1789 we find him describing the chilly reception accorded to Orléans by George III. He says quite openly that "il ne paroît pas que le Roi d'Angleterre ait pris la moindre humeur de ce que, pour se débarrasser

1. Corr. de L.-P.-J. d'Orléans..., pp. 7-8., II.
2. *ibid.*, II, p. 9.
3. *ibid.*, II, p. 13.
4. *ibid.*, II, p. 14.

du Duc, on avoit pris en France le parti de l'envoyer en Angleterre."(1)

He says that there is no sign that Orléans is conniving with the British government to excite unrest in France(2). La Luzerne consistently refuses to take seriously the idea of any such underhand relationship between Orléans and the British - for one thing, both King George and Pitt "ont une si mince opinion de M. le Duc d'Orléans; ils le croient si peu fait pour être chef d'un parti qu'ils ne mêleront certainement pas leurs affaires avec les siennes."(3) This evidence disposes of one of the legends concerning Orléans and Laclos.

Orléans in fact saw very few people, and they were all members of the circle of the Prince of Wales. Meanwhile,

"La Clos, qui seul compose le Conseil du Prince et possède à ce qu'il paroîtroit même, toutes ses affections politiques, ne sort presque pas de chez lui, et ne paroît pas jusqu'ici avoir la moindre intrigue extérieure. Je le fais suivre bien exactement, et je ne puis encore avoir aucun éclaircissement sur ce qu'il fait ici. Je sais qu'il écrit presque toute la journée, et qu'il reçoit beaucoup de lettres de France, soit pour lui, soit pour son maître, mais ce n'est pas par l'Angleterre que l'on peut découvrir ce qui s'y dit."(4)

La Luzerne remarks that Orléans certainly had no intention, when he arrived in London, of seeing the émigré Calonne publicly. The ambassador has, however, had Calonne followed and is sure that he and the duke have met in the evenings several times.(5)

According to La Luzerne's report of the 24th November Orléans does not

1. A.E., vol. 571, fol. 167.
2. *ibid.*, fol. 173.
3. *ibid.*, fols. 174-5.
4. *ibid.*, fols. 176-7.
5. *ibid.*, fol. 178.

mind whether or not he succeeds in his negotiation. The ambassador says that in his opinion the duke does not care about his mission in itself but considers it important "que l'on la crût assez importante pour qu'il eût pu déceimment quitter l'Assemblée nationale pour venir la traiter en Angleterre." (1)

Three days later La Luzerne says that Orléans "ne va jamais chez M. de Calonne que la nuit, lorsqu'il n'y a personne. Ses visites même ne sont pas très fréquentes et M. de Calonne nie d'avoir aucune relation avec lui." (2) In the same dispatch La Luzerne tells the Minister that he knows "par des informations particulières" that Orléans is now "fort mal avec Made de Silleri; qu'elle a fait tout au monde pour l'engager à ne pas se servir de la Clos qu'elle ne peut souffrir; que celui-ci est parvenu malgré elle à rester seul en faveur, et qu'il domine le Duc autant que l'on peut gouverner un homme aussi léger, personne n'ayant sur lui un crédit permanent." (3) This, however, as La Luzerne himself implies, is merely hearsay, and as such must be treated with circumspection. It may well be true that there had been a quarrel between the duke and Mme de Genlis, and that Laclos was more in favour with the duke than that lady at this date, but this cannot be whole-heartedly accepted as valid evidence that Laclos really was Orléans's evil domineering genius. This dispatch ends with the remark that Orléans is convinced that it was Mirabeau's doing that he was arrested at Boulogne: "la guerre paroît

1. A.E., vol. 571, fols. 189-190.
2. *ibid.*, fol. 202.
3. *ibid.*, fols. 204-5.

établie entre les alliés."(1)

La Luzerne says on December 8th that the danger of a change of ministry in England is receding(2). Pitt seems secure. It is significant that Orléans's letters seriously urge a treaty with England long after this date. This would seem to indicate that he was not pinning his hopes on a return to favour of the political friends of the Prince of Wales, the Whigs, and that he did not consider his role to consist of intriguing with the opposition party. He seems seriously to have hoped that France could be persuaded to ally herself with England. On the following day, the 9th, La Luzerne writes, "Nous suivons bien exactement sa conduite et celle de La Clos, ainsi que ses rendez-vous nocturnes chez M. de Calonne; ceux-ci cependant sont interrompus depuis quelquetemps."(3) La Luzerne seems to have been incapable of thinking, as were many of his fellow-countrymen when Talleyrand later went to London, that there was any possibility of serious intent or common sense behind the suggestion that England should be France's ally, instead of Austria. He repeats his view that Orléans "veut traiter à quelque prix que ce soit; et il aimerait mieux échouer dans sa négociation que de n'en pas faire du tout."(4)

The French ambassador shows quite clearly that he is influenced by the current gossip about the events of the 5th and 6th October. He is willing to accept the idea that Orléans, Mirabeau and Laclos were mixed up in these "horribles complots", but will not countenance the suggestion that they were directed by Pitt or financed by English money.(5)

1. A.E., vol. 571, fols. 210-11
2. *ibid.*, fol. 240
3. *ibid.*, fols. 248-9.
4. *ibid.*, fol. 290 (22 December 1789)
5. *ibid.*, vol. 572, fol. 9 (5 January 1790)

On the 29th January 1790 La Luzerne records that the Duke of Leeds has told Orléans that neither an English prince nor a French prince will become sovereign of Brabant, and so neither of their governments needs to concern itself with the Low Countries(1). La Luzerne is perennially outwitted by Pitt's caginess. He cannot guess what the policy of the British government really will be. It cannot be entirely coincidental that after his conversation with Leeds, Orléans, in his letters, seems clearly to have dropped all idea of ever becoming Duke of Brabant. He now concentrates on the overall European situation.

La Luzerne reports that "le vin, les chevaux, le jeu, les filles et Made de Buffon paroissent occuper uniquement ce Prince."(2) But this is on 21st May, when all hopes of Orleans's mission being allowed to achieve anything had virtgully disappeared. Moreover, there is just a possibility that there is a little personal pique in La Luzerne's remark: after all, Orléans was urging his removal. It would be foolish to pretend that Orléans was not a pleasure-lover or to deny that he saw rather more than his fair share of horse-races whilst he was in England, but the order in which La Luzerne places the last two items on his list rings of personal spite. Mme de Buffon was by no means worse than a whore, as this would imply. If the ambassador was capable of making this mistake, he was equally capable of underestimating the Duc d'Orléans.

1. A.E., vol. 572, fol. 114.
2. ibid., vol. 573, fol. 146.

The duke's mission failed, and the reasons for its failure are very similar to those which account for Talleyrand's failure when he went to London with similar aims in view in 1792. Although one would seriously doubt whether it is possible to justify writing an entire chapter describing Laclos as "le précurseur de Talleyrand,"(1) there is no doubt that the project of the Orléans mission was similar to that of Talleyrand, and it is of some interest to make a brief comparison of the two.

Gouverneur Morris writes on the 11th January 1792:

"This morning Mr. Monciel and Mr. Brémond call. The former tells me that he has conversed with Mons^r. Barthélémi upon the bishop d'Autun's Errand to London. He informs him that the Object is to make an Alliance with England in order to counter-balance Austria and the Offer to England is the Isle of France and Tobago. This is a most wretched policy."(2)

Moreover, the parallel with the policy of the Orléans mission did not pass unnoticed: "Mons^r. de Montmorin.... tells me that while the Duke of Orléans was in England he tried hard to obtain an Authority to offer a Treaty to England, which was of Course not granted. He tells me the Conversation he had on that Subject with the Bishop d'Autun who hopes, as he says, to turn out Pitt and thinks his Success certain if he could have the aid of the Duc de Biron."(3)

Talleyrand recommended not only the same policy as the earlier mission, but also the use of the same agents. He took Biron with him,

1. Dard, ch. IX, pp. 223 et seq.
2. Gouverneur Morris, A Diary of the French Revolution, II, 340.
3. *ibid.*, II, 343.

and employed Heymann in Berlin(1). The policy he advocated dates back some way. As early as 1786, the year in which the commercial treaty mentioned by Orléans was concluded between France and England, Mirabeau wrote to tell Talleyrand of an interview which he had had with the Duke of Brunswick, who had asked him what his reaction would be to the suggestion of an alliance between France, England and Prussia, "dont le but solennellement avoué serait de garantir en Europe, à chacun, ses possessions respectives." Mirabeau goes on to say that "cette idée, qui me roule depuis sept ans dans la tête, est trop grande pour n'être pas séduisante: elle immortalisera infailliblement le souverain qui l'exécutera et le ministre qui saura le seconder; elle changera la face de l'Europe, et totalement à notre avantage, car les traités de commerce les plus avantageux aux Anglais ne feront pas qu'ils soient alors autre chose que nos voituriers."(2) The commercial treaty of 1786 was criticised in France on the grounds that it seemed to be working too much in England's favour. Talleyrand and the anti-traditionalists defended it: after all, "they were living in the age of reason, and what could be more reasonable than to abolish tariffs between an agricultural and an industrial country, the one receiving freely the manufactured goods and the other the natural products of the neighbour?"(3) Calonne was one of the architects of this policy,

1. G. Pallain (Ed.), Corr. Dipl. de Talleyrand. La Mission de Talleyrand à Londres, en 1792...., Paris, 1889, pp. 19-21.

2. *ibid*, pp. xii-xiii. Letter of 29 July 1786.

3. Duff Cooper, Talleyrand, London, 1958, p. 24.

which Talleyrand clung to throughout his life. This is not without interest when we recall La Luzerne's interest in interviews between Calonne and Orléans in London.

In January 1792 Talleyrand, owing to his having sat in the Assembly, was precluded from receiving any official status. Officially the purpose of his mission was the purchase of horses for the French army, and nominally Talleyrand was under the orders of his intimate friend the Duc de Biron. Burke's Reflections had already appeared in London, (1790) and the English cant, which had repulsed Orléans, gave rise to loathing and contempt for such renegades and profligates as Talleyrand and Biron were held to be, men "who seemed to have been false to their King, their religion, and their caste." (1) Biron was immediately arrested for debt. Talleyrand received a barely civil welcome from George III; the Queen turned her back upon him: this again parallels Orléans's fate. The mission failed completely. France had nothing to offer of any value, and England had everything to lose. "The British Foreign Office has always been shy of the semi-official, and the task of Talleyrand, bearing only the dubious credentials of a tottering Government, was hopeless from the first." (2)

When Talleyrand returned to Paris the Girondins had come to power, and Dumouriez, the new Foreign Minister, sent him back to London at the end of April with the young Marquis de Chauvelin as titular head of the mission. On the 25th May the British government declared that it would adopt a neutral

1. Duff Cooper, Talleyrand, London, 1958, p. 44.
2. *ibid.*, p. 45.

stand with regard to the hostilities which had broken out between France and Austria. This was looked upon by Dumouriez as a triumph for Chauvelin and Talleyrand. But in fact neither of them was responsible for this declaration. England did not want war, and there can be little doubt that Pitt would have made the same decision whoever had been representing France in London(1). In 1792 a declaration of neutrality sufficed. "C'est qu'il ne s'agissait plus en France, comme en 1790, d'entraîner un gouvernement timide et défiant, mais de retenir un gouvernement débordé par les passions révolutionnaires. La peur des émigrés et l'esprit de propagande avaient déchaîné une guerre, qui devait changer le cours de la Révolution. Déjà nos armées menaçaient la Belgique et, quand elles y furent établies, l'Angleterre elle-même, la dernière, entra dans la lutte avec une passion lente et réfléchie, qui justifiait, par son retard, comme par son acharnement, les avances, aussi bien que les craintes de Talleyrand."(2)

Talleyrand and Orléans, then, shared the same policy, used the same agents (or wished to), and shared the same disbelief in the strength of Pitt's position. They were working in the direction of history, and Talleyrand despite his reputation for tergiversation, stuck to this policy throughout his career. "As early as 1786 he had welcomed the Commercial Treaty between England and France, and fifty years later his last public service was to secure an understanding between the Governments of Louis-

1. Diff Cooper, Talleyrand, London, 1958, p. 48.
2. Dard, pp. 243-4.

Philippe and William IV."(1)

The most significant difference between Orléans and Talleyrand is, of course, that the former had a vested interest in the form of the projected Dukedom of Brabant. Although after his conversation with the Duke of Leeds he appears to have set aside all real hope of obtaining this territory, there is no doubt that in the early days of his mission he cherished this idea, and actively set about trying to bring it to fruition. He had contacts in Brussels trying to rally the rebels to his cause, as Mrs. Elliott testifies(1).

Although the Vonckists, amongst whom Orléans's supporters were to be found, were still active in February 1790 - Orléans's conversation with Leeds had taken place towards the end of January, theirs was already something of a lost cause. On the 25th February de Proli, one of Orleans's agents, organised a demonstration at the church of Sainte-Gudule in Brussels, which involved the cry of "Vive le Duc d'Orléans" and the throwing of French cockades. The conspirators tried, but in vain, to lead the crowd to the town hall, and Van der Noot had no difficulty in restoring order(2).

Carton de Wiart claims (3) that Grace Dalrymple Elliott had herself been sent by Orléans to Brussels to help his cause. Mrs. Elliott denies this, saying that she never knew any details about what lay behind the duke's mission to England(4). She also says that when Van der Noot told her that he was aware of the fact that she saw much of the Duc d'Orléans

1. Duff Cooper, *op. cit.*, pp 41-42.

2. Mrs. Elliott, Journal, pp. 44-5.

3. Carton de Wiart, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

4. *ibid.*, p. 12.

5. *vide supra*, p. 178 Mrs. Elliott, Journal, p. 43.

in Paris, and mixed with the D'Arembergs in Brussels, she replied that "though I saw much of those people, yet I never had liked their revolutionary conduct either in France or Brabant; that I always was a royalist, and ever should be such; that I was neither a Vandernottist nor a Vonckist." (1)

What little hope remained to those of the rebels who were inclined to support Orléans's candidature soon disappeared, and in March Walckiers, a prominent Orleanist agent, fled to Paris. Van der Noot was triumphant. Even La Luzerne - who, after all, was himself a constitutional monarchist - was inspired to remark that "il paraît monstrueux d'imaginer dans le dix-huitième siècle un Gouvernement dans lequel le Clergé dominera." (2) Nevertheless, in 1830 Flanders was to accept Orléans's grandson, the Duc de Nemours, by national acclaim.

What was the part played by Laclos in all this? There is no evidence at all that he was directly involved in the sending of agents to Brabant. There is, on the other hand, obviously no doubt at all that he was to some extent involved in the mission as a whole. Dard makes him fully responsible for the entire Orleanist policy during this period. We must now examine what evidence there is that he played such a dominant role.

The most important evidence here is obviously the passage in Laclos's correspondence in which he remarks that the published edition of Orléans's

1. Mrs. Elliott, Journal, p. 47.
2. A.E., Corr. pol. - Angleterre, vol. 572, fol. 320, 26th March 1790.

letters from London had been produced without the help of either the "auteur de droit" or the "auteur de fait". This is, however, rather enigmatic. It may be taken to mean that either Orléans or Laclos was the "auteur de fait". If it means that this was Laclos's function, then we are faced with yet another problem of interpretation. It need mean no more that Laclos took notes at Orléans's dictation for the "registre", which is in Clarke's hand. This would make the duke the "auteur de droit", as the inspiration would have come from him. The position here is somewhat complicated by the fact that the letters which Montmorin received are all in Orléans's writing, which would make Orléans the "auteur de fait" in this sense.

It is, however, possible that Laclos meant the formula "auteur de fait" to signify the person who actually inspired the letters, whereas the "auteur de droit" was he who received public recognition as their author, namely Orléans. This would account for the official copies being in the duke's writing, and could be used as justification, though not as proof, of Dard's contention that "ainsi le maître recopiait le secrétaire."⁽¹⁾ It must be remembered that Laclos is discussing the printers' copy, which he contended was in Clarke's writing, taken from his notes which had since been burned, and not the actual letters which the Foreign Minister received; it is therefore possible that he was merely differentiating between his role and that of Clarke, who had the task of copying out his notes to act as a record, or even between the role of Clarke and that of Orléans... This is an exceedingly difficult passage to interpret, but it clearly remains possible,

1. Dard, p. 219.

on this evidence, that Laclos actually was the guiding spirit behind Orléans's letters. This passage, however, owing to its ambiguity, is not enough to prove the case.

We have already seen that Orléans, on the 11th May, asked Montmorin to renew Laclos's leave of absence from the army, since "cet officier me sera utile ici tout le temps que durera la mission que j'ai à y remplir." (1) This proves that Orléans set some store by Laclos's services as a secretary, but it proves no more than that. To show that Laclos was the brain behind Orléans's mission it would be necessary to prove not only that the duke was put up to making this application by Laclos, which is in itself highly possible, but also that he did it because he was aware that without Laclos he would be quite incapable of making any progress in London. This manifestly cannot be proved, and to say that it was the case is to make far too large an assumption.

Similarly, we have seen that shortly before this, on 6th March, Orléans suggested that La Luzerne should be removed and that he should be left in sole charge of French interests in London, "avec un chargé d'affaire, autre que M. Barthelémy, qui me serait subordonné, et qui opér^{ait}ait dans les mêmes vues et les mêmes principes que moi." (2) It is quite possible that the duke intended Laclos to have this post, and yet it is far from beyond the bounds of possibility to suppose that he may have intended it for, say, Biron, to whom the memorandum in which this passage occurs was addressed.

1. Corr. de L.-P.-J. d'Orléans..., I, 184.
2. ibid., 165-6.

Once again we are presented with a possibility, but only a possibility amongst others, and not with proof.

There is, in short, no direct evidence that Laclos controlled Orlean's thoughts and actions, as Dard claims. La Luzerne was in as good a position as anyone to study their relationship during these months, and yet the only time he refers to any such influence over the duke by his secretary is when he is recounting what he has heard "par des informations particulières" - in other words, through hearsay which may in itself quite well have come from France and not from anyone in London - concerning a breach between Mme de Genlis and the duke. He says that Laclos has replaced Mme de Genlis in the duke's favour. This is not startling news. It is true that gossip tells him that Laclos "domine le Duc", but even here there is a reservation, for it is only "autant que l'on peut gouverner un homme aussi léger, personne n'ayant sur lui un crédit permanent." (1)

The French ambassador brings no evidence that Laclos indulged in anything which could be called plotting whilst he was in London. He spent most of his time writing, and received many letters, for himself and for Orléans, from France. This can scarcely be considered a surprising or suspicious activity for the duke's secretary. La Luzerne admits that he does not know what the letters contain. The ambassador does not once mention Laclos's name in direct connection with Orléans's meetings with Calonne. When he associates Laclos's name with that of Orléans and

1. A.E., vol. 571, fol. 205.

Mirabeau in connection with the 5th and 6th October, he clearly has no evidence that any of them was implicated, and bases his remarks solely on current rumours.

In other words, there is nothing whatsoever to justify Dard's use of the name Laclos every time that of Orléans should be used, when describing the duke's mission to London. It is gratuitous to say of the plans for a close alliance with England that "Laclos... en insinuait l'idée à son maître avant son départ, en faisant luire à ses yeux des projets de 'quadruple alliance'"(1); or that Laclos "n'avait nulle envie de passer au service d'un duc des Flandres. Il savait que son maître n'était pas un homme à fondre un jour, comme un autre Guillaume III, de Bruxelles sur Paris, et c'est à Paris qu'il entendait rentrer"(2); or that "le renouveau d'ardeur du prince de Galles et de ses amis, au lendemain de l'arrivée à Londres du duc d'Orléans, était significatif et l'on y retrouve évidemment la main de Laclos, qui prétendait n'être pas moins actif à Londres qu'à Paris"(3); or that when Orléans gave vent to his spleen over the French government's temporisation and suggested to La Luzerne that the Government could pass off upon the National Assembly any blame for anything which might go wrong in the negotiations, the duke was merely acting as the mouth-piece for one of Laclos's Machiavellian plots(4); etc., etc. All that can be taken as fact is, quite simply, that Laclos

1. Dard, p. 224. (Quadruple alliance between France, England, Prussia and Holland)
2. *ibid.*, pp. 228-9.
3. *ibid.*, pp. 231-2.
4. *ibid.*, p. 235.

accompanied the duke to London as his secretary, and that his work was so efficient, or his company so congenial, that Orléans desired him to stay in London so long as the mission lasted. Once again, in the words of Caussey, "hors de là, tout est légende et calomnie", although even Caussey maintains that Laclos's function in London was to "inspirer les notes qu'Orléans envoie au ministre, et, cinq mois plus tard, lorsqu'il est bien certain que la Cour se moque d'eux, décider le prince à rentrer." (1) It is, however, significant that in the subsequent pages, right up to the plans for Orléans's return to Paris, Caussey is unable to mention one instance in which Laclos did in fact act in this way.

1. Caussey, p. 125.

5. THE MAN OF INTRIGUE: LACLOS AT THE JACOBIN CLUB

On the 3rd July, Orléans received a letter from M. de Boinville, an agent of Lafayette who had arrived in London as early as the beginning of December 1789 with instructions to go to Orléans and remind him that he had promised not to return to Paris before the dissolution of the National Assembly, and that it was only on this understanding that Louis XVI had given him a mission "qui sauve absolument toutes les apparences." Boinville was to tell the duke that should he decide nevertheless to return to Paris, "M. de Lafayette préviendrait son arrivée, se battrait avec lui, et le lendemain irait le dénoncer à l'Assemblée Nationale comme traître au Roy et à la Patrie." (1) This message was only to be delivered if Orléans showed definite signs of leaving London. Commenting on it in December 1789, La Luzerne, whilst considering it rather a rash step, said that "Il me paraît cependant, que vu le caractère de l'homme, cet acte de vigueur pourroit réussir." (2) In the interim, however, Lafayette seems to have revised this simplistic notion as to the best way of resolving the problem of ensuring the duke's continued absence from Paris. Boinville did not, on the 3rd July, threaten Orléans with a duel, but simply asked him to postpone his return to Paris for a short while, on the grounds that he would otherwise run the risk of being assassinated, promising that if the duke would only delay his return for a few weeks Lafayette could guarantee control of the situation in Paris and assure him of a

1. A.E. vol. 571, folios 244-5.

2. *ibid.*, folios 245-6.

brilliant reception. Otherwise, ill-intentioned people might once again make use of Orleans's name to stir up trouble. This was a blatantly obvious attempt to make Orléans the only prominent figure not present at the Fête de la Fédération on the 14th July. Orléans declared that he intended to be in Paris for this great occasion, but promised to defer his departure for a day or two, and to keep the Assembly and Lafayette informed of his plans. The following day he asked La Luzerne to sign an account of the interview with Boinville, to certify that it was an accurate report. "Ce charmant prince", La Luzerne told Lafayette, "a tiré de sa poche une note, qui avait l'air d'avoir été écrite à la hâte, mais qui, dans le fait, était fort adroite, et que j'ai reconnue par cette raison être l'ouvrage de Laclos." (1) And so, once again, Laclos is implicated by inference. The note in question claimed that "on avait voulu effrayer le prince par des dangers chimériques." La Luzerne refused to sign, but drew up another account in which no reference was made to these.

On the 3rd Orléans despatched a letter to Paris, which was read by La Touche to the Assembly on the 6th. In it, Orléans gave an account of Boinville's visit, saying that there appeared to be fears that certain subversive factions would use his name to stir up trouble. He then went on to declare that unless the Assembly explicitly instructed him to remain in London, he would return forthwith (2). The only reply Lafayette could

1. La Fayette, Mémoires, 6 vols., Paris 1837, II, 476.
2. Lettre de M. de duc d'Orléans, à l'Assemblée Nationale, sur son retour à Paris, ou Extrait de la Séance du 6 juillet 1790, (Paris), n.d., pp. 3-4.

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offer was that "j'ai cru devoir à M. de duc d'Orléans de l'informer que les mêmes raisons qui l'avoient déterminé à accepter sa mission pouvoient encore subsister..."(1) The tone here is remarkably conciliatory compared with that of Boinville's message for the duke, for Lafayette says that Orleans "accepted" the mission, and not that one was conjured up for him from nowhere. Lafayette pressed the matter home no further, and the Assembly, presumably seeing this as a private squabble between him and Orléans, passed to the order of the day, leaving the way open for the duke to return to Paris.

Orléans and Laclous arrived in the French capital not on "the 13th of July, 1790, at night"(2), as Mrs. Elliott would have it, but during the night of the 9th and the 10th July, and Orléans appeared at the Assembly on the 11th to renew his vow: "Je jure d'être fidèle à la Nation, à la Loi, au Roi, et de maintenir de tout mon pouvoir la Constitution décrétée par l'Assemblée Nationale et acceptée par le Roi."(3) An unknown hand has underlined the words "au Roi" and written in the margin of the Bibliothèque Nationale's copy of this speech(4), "En prononçant ce serment il affecta d'appuyer sur ce mot. Cela n'a pa(s) fait croire davantage à la fidélité de ce scélérat." At the end of the text the same hand has written "Quoiqu'on en dise il a été très fraîchement reçu à l'Assemblée N^{ale} et aplaudi par son parti seulement et par ceux...(?)... dans les tribunes. (sic)" The anonymous writer then tells us that Orléans received a very frigid welcome when he visited the king and queen. It is indeed possible

1. Lettre de M. le duc d'Orléans, à l'Assemblée Nationale....., p. 5.
2. Mrs. Elliott, Journal...., p. 49.
3. Discours de M. L.-P.-J. Capet, ci-devant duc d'Orléans, prononcé par lui-même à l'Assemblée Nationale le 11 juillet 1790, (Paris), n.d., p.3.
4. B.N. Le²⁹ 1990.

that the tribunes at the Assembly were specially packed for the occasion, but there is no proof to be brought for Dard's astounding categorical statement that "Laclos s'était assuré des tribunes qui manifestèrent bruyamment." (1)

Laclos and Orléans had been back in Paris little over a fortnight when a pamphlet appeared against them, purporting to be a Lettre de M. Laclos, écrite de Paris à M. Forsh à Londres (27 juillet 1790) (2).

This "M. Forsh" is none other than Forth, with whom Orléans had been connected during his mission in London and who, La Luzerne tells us, had previously been sent by the British Government to hold talks with Maurepas and Vergennes. La Luzerne goes on to say that "cette liaison est d'autant plus fâcheuse, que ce Forth voit souvent M. Pitt, et que tout ce que fera et dira le Duc lui sera rendu sur le champ." (3)

Orléans had in point of fact known Forth for years, and it was he who rented 35, Portland Place for the duke on a visit in 1783 (4). The pamphlet makes Laclos say, "Quant à moi, je suis à Paris depuis quinze jours, et, je vous l'avoue, je voudrais n'y plus être. Qu'y faire? ma destinée est actuellement tellement liée à celle de M. d'Orléans, que je ne peux plus le quitter. Maudite ambition? où m'as-tu conduite! (sic)" (5). If this at first seems to offer some shadow of support to Dard's ambition theory, one can only ask why, if Dard must base his case upon the evidence of hostile pamphleteers, he does not accept this

1. Dard, p. 253.

2. n.p.n.d.

3. A.E. vol. 571, fol. 210. 26th Nov. 1789.

4. Castalot, Philippe-Egalité, Le Prince Rouge, Paris, 1958, p. 130.

5. Lettre ... à M. Forsh..., p. 1.

pamphlet's contention(1) that Laclos actively opposed Orléans's return from London, since he considered that there was not yet sufficient popular enthusiasm in France for the duke. There is certainly no less evidence to support this view than can be brought in defence of that of Dard and Caussy.

According to the pamphleteer, Laclos and Orléans were met at Dieppe by cries of "À la lanterne, à la lanterne!"(2) and the fictitious Laclos adds that Orléans fainted at the sight of a lantern in the courtyard of the Palais-Royal(3). He goes on to complain of the cool reception accorded to the duke at the Assembly, at court, and at the Fête de la Fédération(4), and utters a threat directed principally against Lafayette's National Guards:

"Ah, Messieurs, vous ne vous contentez pas de déranger et de faire manquer nos projets du mois d'octobre dernier, vous voulez encore nous insulter. Eh bien! après tout, que vous importe que ce soit Louis ou Philippe qui soit sur le trône de France?... Votre constitution? Eh bien! si nous réussissions, ce dont à la vérité je commence à désespérer, nous l'arrangerons alors à notre guise, et suivant nos intérêts..... Je saurai me venger; et vous et votre general, vous reconnaîtrez que Laclos a encore plus d'un tour dans son sac."(5)

Here we have once more the accepted Laclos, the cloak-and-dagger conspirator who can boast that he is responsible for the unrest in the provinces(6)

1. Lettre... à M. Forsh..., pp. 1-2.
2. Lettre... à M. Forsh..., p. 5.
3. ibid., p. 6.
4. ibid., pp. 7-11.
5. ibid., pp. 11-12.
6. ibid., p. 15.

and that he has been able, with the aid of "les guinées que Fox et Pitt nous ont prêtées"(!), to purchase the services of many useful agents, and to hide a large quantity of pikes in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine(1).

More important than all this, however, is that "Laolos" here says that when Orléans decided to return to France, "je m'occupai... de l'exposé que nous avons depuis jeté dans le public."(2) This is a reference to the Exposé de la Conduite de M. le Duc d'Orléans dans la Révolution française, rédigé par lui-même, à Londres(3). M. Allem includes this work in his edition of the Oeuvres Complètes, "comme une oeuvre qui est probablement de Laolos, en appendice aux oeuvres qui sont incontestablement de lui."(4) M. Allem takes the view that despite the fact that the title of the work claims Orléans as its author, it is unlikely that the duke himself wrote it. He bases this view upon two texts. The first of these is a passage from an undated letter by Mme de Genlis to the Duc d'Orléans, in which she says, "Ah! si vous m'eussiez chargée de faire la brochure qui précéda votre retour d'Angleterre... Elle aurait eu aussi un bien grand succès. Comme cet écrit est maladroit et manqué!"(5) M. Allem contends that Mme de Genlis would not have adopted such a tone had she not been certain that the Exposé was not the work of Orléans himself. He is inclined to agree with Dard's view that even if "l'auteur des lettres de Valmont à Mme de Tourvel ne se dévoilait" in the

1. Lettre... à M. Forsh, pp. 18-19.
2. ibid., p. 4.
3. n.p.n.d. (Paris, 1790) O.C., pp. 696-710.
4. O.C., p. 924.
5. Corr. de L.-P.-J. d'Orléans, II, 71

very style of the Exposé, "le dépit de sa rivale, Mme de Genlis, le désignerait assez pour l'auteur de cette pièce."(1) The second text cited by M. Allem is from the Correspondance littéraire(2), where we read of the Exposé that "M. de Laclos ne l'aurait pas mieux fait, dit-on", and M. Allem adds that "c'était dire qu'on pensait, et peut-être même qu'on savait, que c'est Laclos qui l'avait fait."(3) M. Allem is not entirely convinced, however, and he is right to show caution and relegate the Exposé to the appendices. After all, his interpretation of the passage from the Correspondance littéraire is a little free. All this is assumption, possibly correct assumption, but no more than assumption. It is quite feasible that Mme de Genlis would never have written as she did unless she was sure that Orléans was not responsible for the Exposé, but even if one accepts this one still has to make another assumption before one can agree with Dard that the real author was Laclos. Whilst it is arguable that Meister's report signifies that there was a widespread belief that this was the case, a belief is not proof, and it may well have been inspired simply by the evil reputation Laclos had acquired as the author of Les Liaisons dangereuses, and by the fact that Laclos did accompany the Duc d'Orléans to London. In brief, yet again we are presented with a possibility but not a proof.

1. Dard, p. 257.
2. Ed., Grimm., Meister, etc., August 1790, XVI, 65, XV, 142.
3. O.C., p. 924.

It is, however, interesting to examine this publication in which, according to Dard, Laclès was asking the French people to play Mme de Tourvel to Orléans's Valmont. Although the Exposé sets out to justify the duke's actions throughout the course of the Revolution up to July 1790, showing how he led the way in issuing the Instructions, in becoming an elector and a deputy, in joining the Third Estate, and how he eschewed the seeking of personal power by staying at home during the events which preceded the fall of the Bastille and by refusing the presidency of the National Assembly, it is largely intended as a refutation of the accusation that he was responsible for the events of the 5th and 6th October, for, in the words of Caussey, "de même que l'occasion du voyage avait été l'affaire du 6 octobre, sa conclusion fut la procédure du Châtelet sur ces événements." (1) We have already discussed the worth of these accusations in discussing the events themselves. Not only does Dard accept the Exposé as the work of Laclès. He also says that "c'est un de ses meilleurs morceaux. Jamais Valmont ne prit avec plus de naturel des airs de petit saint." (2) Once again he confuses Laclès with Valmont. He also overestimates the value of the work, no matter who may have written it.

In the Exposé, Orléans begins by saying that he has always believed that the motives behind his actions were reasonable and just. The love of freedom has always and instinctively been his "goût dominant." (3) It

1. Caussey, p. 141.
2. Dard, p. 255.
3. O.C., p. 697.

was this love of freedom which inclined him to England, "cette terre natale de la liberté"(1); which led him to issue the Instructions, "que je faisais rédiger à mesure par l'un des Secrétaires des Commandements, en y joignant un ouvrage du plus fort de nos publicistes"(2); and which led him always to anticipate the desires of his fellow-citizens.

In the first "époque" into which Orléans divides his life, he says that "je suivais, sans trop en chercher les raisons, l'impulsion de mon penchant, celle de la voix publique et de l'exemple. Il est bien vrai qu'on me dirigeait d'une manière conforme à mon goût, mais enfin on me dirigeait, et je ne puis pas dire que la conduite que je tins alors fut réellement me conduite. Livré à moi seul, eût-elle été meilleure ou pire? C'est ce qu'il ne me convient pas d'examiner."(3) Nowadays, he continues, he alone is responsible for his actions. Dard (4) takes this first "époque" to be the period when Mme de Genlis was in supreme favour at the Palais-Royal. Holding Laclos to be the author of the Exposé, he adds, "Ainsi se présente le règne impérial de Mme de Genlis, sa grande rivale; celui de Laclos avait été autrement actif et scabreux. Et voilà Laclos hors de cause sous couleur de flatter son maître."(5) Unfortunately, however, the issue is not as simple as Dard makes out. The text of the Exposé does not read, "Depuis, ma conduite fut entière-

1. O.C., p. 698.
2. *ibid.*, p. 699.
3. *ibid.*, pp. 697-8.
4. Dard, pp. 255-6.
5. *ibid.*, p. 256.

ment le résultat de mes idées et l'effet de ma volonté", as Dard makes it read. This implies a clear-cut division into two parts, which Dard holds to represent the "reigns" first of Mme de Genlis and then of Laclos. In point of fact, the author of the Exposé explicitly divides the life of the duke into three episodes(1). Immediately after the passage which Dard claims to be a description of Mme de Genlis's ascendancy, the text reads:

"À la seconde époque, je n'avais d'autre motif que de ne pas vouloir contredire, par une démarche publique, les sentiments que j'avais publiquement professés.

Mais, à la troisième époque(2), ma conduite fut entièrement le résultat de mes idées et l'effet de ma volonté."(3)

Thus, Dard's simple division will not stand, and it is no more justifiable to see this last passage as an example of Laclos's self-effacement in the interests of the duke's reputation than it is to see the passage about the drawing up of the Instructions as an example of Laclos advertising himself.(4)

Although the Exposé laments that the duke's motives have been universally misunderstood, and that "chacun a voulu deviner mes sentiments et mes pensées; et, comme il arrive d'ordinaire, au lieu de les chercher en moi, chacun m'a prêté les siens"(5), and that not only has personal ambition been attributed to him but also the determination to wade through blood to the throne, it says that Orléans found adequate recompense for these slanders in the love of the people, as it was expressed at Boulogne, for instance: "la résistance ne se manifestant qu'au niveau des louanges et

1. O.C., pp. 697-8
2. My italics.
3. O.C., p. 698.
4. vide Dard, p. 255.
5. O.C., p. 696.

des bénédictions, il était difficile de ne pas être impatienté, mais il était impossible de ne pas être attendri."(1) The work ends with an appeal to the Comte d'Artois to return from Italy: "J'aime à croire que... ce Prince reviendra jouir de la partie la plus précieuse de son héritage: l'amour que la Nation la plus sensible et la plus aimante a voué aux descendants de Henri IV."(2) This, though ostensibly an appeal for general reconciliation, is in fact quite clearly a rather naive and clumsy attempt to discredit Artois still further by comparison with the Duc d'Orléans, who says of himself that, "tandis que, par ces basses manoeuvres, on cherchait, en France, à profiter de mon absence pour me perdre l'affection des bons citoyens, je m'occupois à Londres des moyens de me rendre utile à ma patrie(3)", and that if recent events have rendered the success of his mission impossible, "je m'empresserais de me réunir à l'Auguste Assemblée dont j'ai l'honneur d'être Membre, et de concourir avec elle à l'achèvement d'une constitution si désirable et si désirée."(4)

One cannot, however, agree with Dard that "l'auteur des lettres de Valmont à Mme de Tourvel...(se dévoile) à de pareils traits", or that if Laclos is indeed the author of the Exposé it is one of his best works. It is a transparent piece of propaganda which presents the duke as a man of "sensibility, a man with a golden heart whose only personal interest

1. O.C., p. 707.
2. *ibid.*, p. 709.
3. *ibid.*, p. 709.
4. *ibid.*, p. 710.

in the Revolution is "celui de vivre libre et heureux au milieu de la France heureuse et libre."(1) The pathetic pretence that the Exposé was initially intended only for the duke's personal satisfaction and for that of his children and his friends, and that it was only later that he considered it "convenable de le rendre public"(2), can have deceived hardly anyone, and one is obliged to say with Meister that "dans une circonstance aussi grave, un Bourbon devait parler tout à la fois avec plus de franchise et de dignité."(3) In short, through spite or otherwise, Mme de Genlis was right in describing this work as "maladroit et manqué". We do not know who wrote it. It is impossible to accept Dard's facile assumption that it was Laclos. Even if Dard is right, the Exposé adds little or nothing to Laclos's reputation as a writer.

That it was popularly held that Laclos was responsible for the Exposé is undeniable. One pamphlet, in the form of a letter from Orléans to Laclos, with hostile introduction and footnotes by an unknown "editor", says of the Exposé that "cet écrit, tronqué, défiguré, par l'infidèle de la Clos, auquel Philippe l'avait envoyé, ne peint qu'en profil l'ineptie connue du héros d'Ouessant, et la futilité de sa justification", thus implying that Laclos had at least some hand in its composition.(4) The editor says that he owes the letter he now pub-

1. O.C., p. 710.

2. Ibid., pp. 697-710.

3. Corr. lit., XVI, 65.

4. Lettre du Duc d'Orléans, ou Supplément à l'Exposé de sa conduite; rédigé par lui-même, n.p.n.d., p. 2.

lishes to "une heureuse infidélité, et à une brouillerie survenue depuis, entre le prince et son abominable agent." Once again it is inferred that Laclos tried to persuade the duke not to return to Paris, and once again it is suggested that Laclos returned to Paris before Orléans. There are no grounds to accept this idea. The duke here says that he is enclosing an accurate version of the Exposé in his own hand, and orders Laclos to distribute it. This, of course, would contain accounts of all the acts of cowardice which the duke's enemies attributed to him, as well as, no doubt, dwelling upon the licentious private life of the duke.

Another pamphlet(1) takes the form of a "friendly", and far from unintelligent, criticism of the Exposé. It has evident royalist sympathies, but the violence of argument is remarkably controlled. The writer points out (2) that one must be permitted to have doubts about the importance of Orléans's mission. Not only is Orléans unpopular with George III because of his friendship with the Prince of Wales, but also Orléans, a friend of Fox, would have to deal with Fox's rival and enemy, Pitt. Thus he would seem the person least likely to be entrusted with a serious mission to London. Moreover, his life in England - wine, woman and horse-racing - seems to bely all idea of any such mission. The writer then turns to more direct criticism. In the Exposé Orléans says(3):

1. Observations sur les attentats attribués à M. de Dac d'Orléans..., Paris, 1790.
2. pp. 30-2.
3. O.C., pp. 699-700.

"Dans toute démarche un peu importante, je ne me suis jamais décidé qu'après avoir été pleinement persuadé que j'avais droit et raison, et si quelque fois j'ai été dans l'erreur, cette erreur, d'après ma persuasion, n'en était pas moins une vérité pour moi. Or, quand l'opinion du public s'est trouvée contraire à la mienne, j'ai pensé, avec quelque raison, qu'il s'était moins occupé que moi de la question, et qu'il m'avait jugé sans m'entendre; j'en ai donc été peu affecté."

The pamphleteers answer to this is simple and to the point:

"On observe qu'il n'est aucune action blâmable, aucun forfait, qu'on ne peut excuser et justifier avec une pareille doctrine. Quel est l'homme qui, dans toute démarche un peu importante, ne se persuadera pas qu'il a pleinement droit et raison?"(1)

Mme de Genlis was indeed right in classing the Exposé as "maladroit et manqué."

From a statement made by Laclès whilst he was in prison during the Terror to the Comité de Surveillance of the Montagne section of Paris, we learn that the salary which he received from Orléans was reduced at some date during 1790 from 6000 livres to 4000(2). This may have been caused by loss of favour in the duke's eyes or, more simply, by a diminution in Orléans wealth and the transference of much of the remains of it to England(3). It would be remarkable if the duke could thus reduce the salary of a man who dominated him to the extent to which we are led to believe by the pamphleteers and Dard.

According to Dard, "lassé des vaines intrigues où il s'épuisait depuis neuf mois, Laclès jette enfin le masque et se lance ouvertement

1. Observations sur les attentats..., p. 14.
2. Document reproduced by Edouard Champion from the Archives Nationales in his edn. of De l'Éducation des Femmes, Paris, 1903, p. 118.
3. vide Dard, pp. 213-4.

et à corps perdu dans la politique. Il n'avait plus rien à attendre que de la révolution. Dans l'ordre actuel, sa carrière militaire était brisée."(1) One may well deplore the sensationalist language in which this observation is couched, but nevertheless what Dard says is substantially true, in so far as for the first time we have some real facts about his political activities. It remains true, however, that these facts have to be extracted from a mass of legends and assumptions. We shall see that there is no real evidence whatsoever that, as Dard claims, "Philippe d'Orléans était moins que jamais le complice, mais bien plutôt le prisonnier de ce terrible homme (i.e. Laclès)."(2)

On the 7th December 1790 Laclès asked the War Minister to extend the leave of absence which he had been enjoying since the 1st October 1788 until the amount due to him as a pension upon retirement could be settled. This was agreed to and Laclès was able to consider himself free from military commitments. The sum was eventually determined and from the 1st June 1792 he began to receive a retirement pension of 1800 livres.(3)

What were the relations between Orléans and Laclès during this period? According to Dard, "Laclès, qui s'était emparé comme d'une proie de ce malheureux, était bien résolu à ne pas le lâcher."(4) It was common knowledge that Louis XVI was in close contact with the émigrés and the Austrians, and rumours were rife that the king was preparing to

1. Dard, p. 258.

2. *ibid.*, p. 259.

3. E. Champion (ed): De l'Éducation des Femmes, Paris, 1903, p. 118.

4. Dard, p. 261.

flee the Country. Scarcely anyone was yet thinking seriously in terms of a republic, and it seems reasonable to suppose that it had not escaped those in the entourage of the Duc d'Orléans that in the event of the throne's suddenly becoming vacant the duke might find himself called at least to the Regency. If the Comte de Provence left France with the king, Orléans would become the obvious choice, whilst if the Dauphin went too it was even conceivable that Orléans might found a new dynasty. If these ideas were in the minds of the duke's supporters, our task is to determine whether Laclos played any significant part in furthering them.

Dard asks whether Laclos had any accomplices, and answers his own question by saying that "il est impossible d'en douter." (1) This begs innumerable questions. It assumes that Laclos was at the head of a conspiracy, and was thus in a position to have accomplices. This cannot be proved. The whole question of the Orleanist conspiracy is so vague as to make it impossible to point to this or that figure as having participated in it. Dard suggests (2) that Danton, Manuel and Camille Desmoulins were involved. There is no proof of this, although it is not entirely beyond the bounds of possibility. Nor is there proof that Marat was at any time in alliance with Orléans. According to Dard, Marat, immediately after the death of Mirabeau, exhorted the French people not to "prostituer son coeur " but to "garder ses larmes pour ses défenseurs intégrés tels que Lameth, d'Aiguillon, Laclos, d'Orléans, Dubois de Crancé." (3) In fact, what l'Ami du Peuple

1. Dard, p. 262.
2. *ibid.*, p. 264.
3. p. 264.

says is, "Mais garde-toi de prostituer ton encens, garde tes larmes pour tes défenseurs intègres" - with no mention of any of the names given by Dard(1). Yet on this basis Dard says that "Laclos savait diriger la presse et organiser une émeute. Il avait exploré des bas-fonds inaccessibles à la postérité..."(2)

Exactly when Laclos became a member of the Société des Amis de la Constitution is open to some doubt, but it was clearly quite soon after his return from London - Dard suggests it may even have been before. By the 30th November 1790 he was a member of the committee which dealt with correspondence, and was editor of the Journal des Amis de la Constitution. It is worth noting that at this stage the meetings of the society were not held in public, and that membership was restricted by means of the sizeable subscription which had to be paid. The society had been founded by members of the Constituent Assembly and was always very careful to respect the decisions of the Assembly and looked upon itself as the defender of the spirit of the Constitution.

From his return to Paris until July 1791 Laclos played quite a considerable part in the activities of the society, not only as editor of its journal but through speeches from the tribune. His first overt political intervention during this period takes, however, neither of these forms. It is an open letter to Mirabeau, the Lettre de M. P. Choderlos, ci-devant de Laclos, à M. Riquetti, ci-devant Comte de Mirabeau, sur son opinion du 7 septembre relativement aux électeurs(3). On the 7th September 1790 Mir-

1. L'Ami du Peuple, No. 419, 4th April 1791.
2. Dard, p. 264.
3. n.p.n.d. O.C., pp. 593-8.

abeau had suggested to the Assembly that "à compter de la prochaine nomination d'Électeurs dans chaque Canton, les fonctions d'Électeur seront incompatibles pendant deux années avec toute autre fonction publique."

His motive was a desire to "détruire, au moins, de diminuer les factions, les brigues, les cabales... d'empêcher qu'on ne donne son suffrage à l'homme puissant, qui les échangerait pour des services, au despote qui les achèterait avec de l'or;... d'éviter la plus dangereuse Aristocratie, celle des hommes avides contre les Citoyens paisibles." (1) Laclès maintains that to fulfil this desire he would recommend exactly the opposite approach. Expressing his liking for a fortiori argument, he says that "je vais prouver au contraire qu'il serait sage de borner ce concours (aux fonctions publiques) aux seuls Électeurs." (2)

He points out that Mirabeau's suggestion entails the notion that "les suffrages des Assemblées primaires ne sont, dans le fait, que des titres d'exclusion à toutes les places." Forty thousand citizens will be excluded automatically from office, and Mirabeau can be sure that if his scheme is adopted ambitious men with no scruples will take care not to stand for these elections and in consequence will have a better chance of gaining public office. It would be far more sensible to allow only electors to fill public offices, for this system "offre l'inappréciable avantage de ne donner aucun Fonctionnaire public qui n'ait été honoré, à l'avance, de la confiance de ses concitoyens. Il concilie, autant qu'il est possible, les droits du Peuple et les règles de la prudence." Even supposing that

1. O.C., p. 593.
2. Ibid., p. 594.

intrigue and corruption did come into it, at least if Laclos's system were adopted they could work upon men who to some extent had the confidence of the people, and not upon men who had been explicitly rejected by the people: "or, ce qui importe au Peuple, c'est bien moins d'avoir celui qu'il désire que de n'avoir pas celui qu'il rejette."(1)

Laclos's attitude on this question was calculated to please many of the members of the Jacobin club, which included in its ranks many members of the Assembly. More than this, his attitude, although based upon rather dangerous reasoning, was more sensible than that of Mirabeau, for the type of exclusion advocated by the latter was bound to place public affairs in the hands of novices.

The first number of the Journal des Amis de la Constitution bears no date. As it was a weekly publication, however, and as the second number is dated 7th December 1790, it would seem reasonable to suppose that the first appeared on 30th November, and not the 21st as Dard suggests(2). It contained a prospectus and a resolution of the society, signed by Duport, Chabroud and Feydel, and dated 31st October, which reads as follows:

"La Société a arrêté qu'un de ses membres sera autorisé à publier périodiquement la correspondance des Amis de la Constitution, sans autre approbation que celle de l'authenticité de la correspondance; et le présent arrêté sera imprimé à la tête de chaque numéro.

La Société a décidé que ce Membre sera M. DE LACLOS."

A good deal was thus left to the editor's discretion, and the prospectus went on to say that the Journal would give "un tableau historique et rais-

1. O.C., p. 596.
2. Dard, p. 265.

onné des travaux de l'Assemblée nationale depuis l'ouverture des États-Généraux jusqu'à l'entier achèvement de la constitution," and in addition, "la comparaison de l'état de choses sous l'ancien régime avec celui qui doit exister sous l'empire des nouvelles lois." The cover bore a fleur de lis,, surrounded by two oak branches, along with the society's device: Vivre libre ou mourir. "La couronne civique," says M. Allen, "est comme une affirmation des droits des citoyens, même envers la royauté qu'ils acceptent comme forme de gouvernement ainsi que l'indique la fleur de lis; l'ensemble peut passer pour un symbole de la monarchie constitutionnelle." (1) The Avertissement included in the first issue (2) hammers its point home in its opening sentence: "Le but principal de cet ouvrage est de faire aimer la Constitution; le moyen qu'on emploiera sera de la faire connaître." M. Allen has collected in his edition of the Oeuvres complètes such articles from the Journal as can be identified as Laclos's. We shall consider these articles in conjunction with Laclos's speeches at the Jacobin club.

In the first number of the Journal there appeared a note concerning the Cercle Social (3). Various publications, and in particular the Courrier de Lyon had printed a notice stating that an organisation had been formed to which all the revolutionary societies throughout the land were called upon to rally, the Confédération Universelle des Amis de la Vérité, which held its meetings in the grounds of the Palais Royal. Laclos warns his readers of the true nature of this organisation, which is headed by Bonneville and

1. O.C., pp. 896-7.
2. O.C., p. 598.
3. O.C., pp. 598-9.

the Abbé Fauchet, the man responsible for the Cercle Social and its newspaper, La Bouche de Fer, which declared as its goal the foundation of "la confédération universelle de la vérité." Laclos's article states that Bonneville and Fauchet "semblent vouloir établir que l'Assemblée nationale est demeurée bien en deçà du terme où elle devait atteindre. Leurs travaux tendent à diriger l'opinion populaire vers une Constitution qu'ils fonderaient non sur l'égalité des droits, mais sur l'égalité absurde des propriétés." (1) It is hardly necessary to point out that "l'opinion populaire" is not the same as "l'opinion publique".

It would seem that Laclos's polemic against the Cercle Social was not confined to articles in the Journal. Camille Desmoulins gives an account of a speech made by Laclos at the Jacobin club on 29th November 1790. There is no official record of this speech, and Desmoulins's is the only account upon which we can draw (2). How accurate it is is open to question. Desmoulins recalls that the Jacobins had always upheld the right of all citizens to form societies or clubs. He continues,

"D'après ce décret constitutionnel, quelle a dû être la surprise des véritables amis de la Constitution de voir, à la séance de lundi, aux Jacobins, s'élever une si violente tempête contre la Société dite: Cercle social."

Laclos, in his speech,

"a vu, dans le Cercle social, une Société rivale qui tendoit à affaiblir celle des Jacobins, et à partager la France en deux sectes. Il a accusé le directoire du Cercle social du crime de plagiat, de supposition de nom, et de publier que le club des Amis de la Constitution et celui de 89 s'étoient fondus dans le sien, et étoient venus perdre

1. O.C., p. 599.

2. Révolutions de France et de Brabant, no. 54. Reprod. in Aulard, La Société des Jacobins, 6 vols., Paris, 1889-97, I, 392 et seq., and O.C., 899-901.

leurs noms en se jetant dans l'océan de la grande confédération universelle, a l'embouchure du cirque (du Palais Royal)."

According to Desmoulins, Laclos went on to say that the Cercle, "en pressant les conséquences du principe de l'égalité des droits, faisait découler la loi agraire." He accuses Laclos of self-contradiction, of having first of all accused the Cercle of "principes relâchés", and then accusing it of the opposite. He continues:

"(Laclos) a conclu par proposer, comme une chose infiniment importante, une adresse à toutes les Sociétés affiliées des Amis de la Constitution pour leur dire de se bien garder de confondre le Cercle social avec la Société des Amis de la Constitution."

Desmoulins says ironically of Laclos that "comme je lui crois une profondeur de politique dont je ne me pique pas," he did not at first intervene in the debate. But finally, after other speakers had supported Laclos, Desmoulins asked Chabroud, who was presiding, how he could sit back without defending a society of which he was a member. Chabroud then proposed an amendment to the effect that the message to the affiliated societies be couched in general terms, without naming the Cercle social. This amendment, however, was rejected, and when Desmoulins himself rose to attack Laclos, he was howled down.

In later issues, the editor of the Journal seizes upon every opportunity to attack the Cercle social, several times referring correspondents back to the note in the first issue(1). In reply to a letter from the Politiers society enquiring about the Cercle, Laclos refers the Poitevins back to earlier notes and continues,

"Nous devons ajouter, en fidèle historien, que, depuis quelques semaines,

1. Journal des Amis de la Constitution, e.g. No. 10, pp. 433-39. (1st Feb. 1791)

ce cercle de la Vérité a encore changé de forme. Les jours qu'on n'y prêche pas le partage ou la communauté des propriétés: 1° on y mange; 2° on y boit; 3° on y danse; 4° on y joue. Chacun y paie son écot, excepté les demoiselles du Palais-Royal."(1)

The notions of the Cercle social, if they could ever be put into practice, could lead only to a kind of utopian communism, and never was Laclos to show himself remotely in sympathy with such principles.

A hostile pamphlet, La Jacobinière: parade comme il n'y en a pas(2), which describes Laclos as a man whom "l'on retrouve toujours dans les liaisons dangereuses"(3) - another indication that much of his reputation rested upon his having written this novel -, gives an account of a speech made by Laclos to the Jacobins on 17th February 1791(4). The passage deserves to be quoted at length as an example of the pamphleteer's art:

"Dimanche donc, j'arrive, et Laclos est à la tribune. Tout ce que la scélératesse a de plus odieux, la bassesse de plus vil, l'hypocrisie de plus faux, la barbarie de plus cruel, fit le fond de son discours sur les émigrants. On peut plutôt imaginer que dire jusqu'où il porta la fureur contre la maison régnante. Là, je ne puis pas rire, j'étais bourrelé par l'indignation. d/

Je me déridai un peu quand il fut à l'exposition de ses moyens: 'Il faut, disait-il, que personne ne puisse sortir de France; que personne ne puisse sortir du point où il se trouve; il faut qu'une paralysie générale frappe tous les habitants de l'empire; il faut que ni hommes ni bêtes ne puissent branler, et ensuite, attendu les dangers où nous sommes, nous ferons arborer le drapeau rouge au-dessus de la salle de l'Assemblée nationale; nous le ferons arborer dans les quatre-vingt-deux autres départements, et, lâchant sur ce signal toutes nos troupes légères, nous ferons tuer, massacrer, égorger tous ceux qui nous gênent ou qui nous haïssent, c'est-à-dire les sept huitièmes et demi de la France; nous n'oublierons pas le roi, sa femme et son fils, et tous les rejetons de sa famille, excepté mon cher élève, mon très honoré maître, qui aura alors une belle place, et nous, nous liant avec Messieurs de la Société frater-

1. Journal des Amis....., no. 12, p. 532. (15th Feb. 1791)
2. (Paris), n.d.
3. p. 13.
4. pp. 24-5. O.C., p. 902.

nelle, nous repeuplerons notre pays de petits citoyens bien jacobites que nous élèverons dans la crainte et le respect de notre nouvel empire.'

Il dit, et, descendant de la tribune, il trouva l'ami Barnave qui l'attendait pour l'embrasser."

It goes without saying that this account cannot be taken at face value. It is an interesting example of the technique of the eighteenth-century political pamphleteer, and shows a complete disregard for probabilities or even possibilities. Even setting aside the more obvious excesses, it is interesting to note that the author of La Jacobinière makes Laclos propose an alliance with "Messieurs de la Société fraternelle," whom he was in fact combatting with all his might ... M. Allen rightly says⁽¹⁾ that all one can legitimately extract from this pamphlet is that Laclos apparently "fit une proposition contre l'émigration et propose, en cas d'infraction, des sanctions."

It is nevertheless true that only two days earlier, in the twelfth number of the Journal, it was deemed quite legal and even natural that the king's aunts should leave the country. In reply to an anonymous note denouncing preparations for the departure of these ladies, Laclos says that "la Société a reçu plusieurs avis de cette nature. Peut-être étaient-ils dictés par de bonnes intentions; cependant il est permis d'en douter... Sans doute, il serait mieux que les tantes du roi restassent auprès de lui, et au milieu de la nation française, ne fût-ce que par reconnaissance pour les bienfaits qu'elles en ont reçus; mais personne n'a le droit de gêner ni leurs principes ni leurs démarches; elles sont comme tous les citoyens sous la protection de la loi." Dard holds that Laclos was responsible both for the note in the

1. OLC., p. 902.

Journal and for the speech described in La Jacobinière (not in Les Sabats Jacobites, as Dard incorrectly states), and that he was in fact playing some complicated kind of double game, appearing moderate in the Journal and actively furthering the Orleanist cause within the confines of the Jacobin club. This is, to say the least, a somewhat tenuous line of reasoning. It is difficult to see that it was in the interests of the Duc d'Orléans to prevent the royal family leaving France, in any case. The suggestion that such a speech as Laclos is supposed to have made was intended to exasperate the king even more and to have the effect of convincing him that his cause was lost if he remained in France, is equally weak. Dard's case that "c'est ainsi que (Laclos) dissimulait ses manœuvres secrètes derrière son ardeur révolutionnaire"(1) simply will not do, and is quite unfounded. In view of the tone of Laclos's other political writings, one would incline to the view that the note in his Journal represents his genuine opinion on the matter of emigration, whether or not - and this is extremely unlikely - it was intended to advance the Orleanist cause. The account of the speech in La Jacobinière is highly suspect, and one would wish for a more reliable report of it before attempting to base any argument as to Laclos's views upon it.

The next occasion on which we hear of Laclos speaking at the Jacobin club is also reported in a hostile work, Les Sabats Jacobites(2). Louis XVI had been ill, but was recovering. On 16th March it was proposed that the official bulletin on the state of his health be read to the Amis de la Constitution.

1. Dard, p. 285.
2. Les Sabats Jacobites, vol. I, no. 8, pp. 122-5.

The Sabats Jacobites, in a parody of this session of the Club, describes

Laclos's intervention in the following terms:

"Le sensible, le délicat, le candide auteur des Liaisons dangereuses, le génie familial du grand Philippe, Laclos enfin, monte à la tribune.... 'Et de par tous les diables, dit-il énergiquement, nous avons bien besoin d'entendre ce bulletin! morbleu! il veut absolument en revenir..... Mais je lis dans les yeux de plusieurs d'entre vous qu'ils voudroient célébrer bassement ce retour à la vie avec une fastueuse ostentation; je vois qu'ils seroient même capables d'en rendre grâces au ciel, comme sous le règne du despotisme. (Ici de grands cris de VIVE LE ROI! Prévèrent que tous les Jacobins ne sont pas initiés dans les mystères sacrés du directoire, comme M. Laclos, et qu'ils n'ont pas encore acquis cette force républicaine qui fait détester le meilleur des rois, le plus tendre des pères, et le plus honnête homme du royaume.)

Croyez-moi, Messieurs, prenons des sentiments plus conformes à nos principes; ne nous avilissons pas par un royalisme indigne de nous...."

Laclos, we are told, then went on to say that instead of having the Te Deum, they should marry four young girls of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine - "choisissons-les orphelines de la Bastille". According to the pamphleteer,

"La majorité, comme de raison, appuie une si belle motion, la minorité bataille pour le Te Deum.... Pour la contenter, la majorité veut bien y consentir. 'Eh bien! dit l'immortel Laclos avec une complaisante résignation, puisqu'il vous le faut, chantons le Te Deum; mais que ce soit sans frais, car, en vérité, la chose n'en vaut pas la peine; et qu'on ajoute à la dot des quatres filles à marier tout ce qu'on auroit pu ajouter au luxe religieux."

The club accepted this amendment.

This account is quite unreasonable in many respects, and is clearly intended as a blanket denunciation of the Jacobins in favour of the royalists. It is quite impossible to place any trust whatsoever in it. The only facts we have are that the Jacobins established a fund to be used in providing dowries for girls orphaned in the taking of the Bastille. The society established this fund "pour témoigner sa satisfaction de la convalescence du roi." (1)

1. Journal de Perlet, 19th March 1791. O.C., p. 904.

It was essential to the constitutional monarchist policy of the Jacobins that certain royal prerogatives be abolished. They urged that ambassadors should no longer be nominated by the king, but elected by universal suffrage. According to hostile writers, Laclos was an ardent supporter of this scheme. Beffroy de Regny's Le Lendemain, ou Esprit des feuilles de la veille states on its issue of the 31st March that one M. Tournon had suggested to the club that ambassadors should continue to be nominated by the king, but that there should be a safeguard in the form of "un comité de vérification nationale et un comité de surveillance. Le sieur Laclos, qui lui a succédé, a vomé une énorme quantité de bile contre le roi." Les Sabats Jacobites also give an account of this meeting. Here we are told that Laclos, urging the principle of universal suffrage, proclaimed,

"J'ai frémi, Messieurs, à l'Assemblée nationale, lorsqu'on n'a pas craint d'appeler les Français les sujets du roi. Des sujets sont des esclaves, et des hommes libres ne sont sujets de personne.

Applaudissements unanimes, trépignements, cris de joie...."

On the 4th April, Le Lendemain gave its version of the meeting of the Amis de la Constitution held on the 1st. We read that Menou denounced Montmorin as "un ministre vicieux, inconstitutionnel et contre-révolutionnaire... Le motif de cette accusation était que M. de Montmorin n'a point choisi tous les nouveaux ambassadeurs parmi les Jacobins, et l'on sent que ce crime est irremissible." According to Le Lendemain, Laclos "n'a pas manqué cette occasion de faire observer combien il étoit intéressant... de faire nommer les ministres par le peuple, car il ne voit plus ni liberté, ni constitution, si tous les ministres, intérieurs et extérieurs, ne sont pas jacobites."

On the 8th the same newspaper remarks that Bonnacarrère, just appointed pleni-potentiary by the king, renewed his oath before the Jacobins. "M. Laclos", we are told, "a fait une longue et plate complainte sur ce que le choix des ministres étoit attribué au roi. Effectivement, c'est bien mal servir les vues de M. Laclos." Of the same occasion, Les Sabats Jacobites say(1), "M. de la Clos qui aime beaucoup mieux faire enrager les vivants que de prévenir la postérité sur ce qu'elle doit penser des morts, coupe la parole à M. Baiuzat (who was speaking about the death of Mirabeau) et recommence ses éternelles doléances sur le choix des ambassadeurs."

It is unfortunate that we know no more about Laclos's views on this matter than what is reported in such hostile journals as these. However, prejudiced as these accounts are, there is nothing in them to permit us seriously to entertain the notion that Laclos was indulging in any Machiavellian intrigues on behalf of his employer. In so far as we can separate fact from fancy in these reports, Laclos's position seems to be one of orthodox constitutional monarchy.

The Correspondance hebdomadaire of the nineteenth issue of the Journal des Amis de la Constitution(2) includes a note in which Laclos refers to what can, in modern jargon, only be described as the colour-bar. The affiliated society of Saint-Malo had sent the Jacobins in Paris two documents, firstly a letter announcing that a hundred and eighteen prisoners were being sent from Martinique, having been captured in a civil war there, for whom

1. I, no. 14, p. 222.
2. 5th April 1791.

the authorities requested exemplary punishment in the name of the colony, and, secondly, "une adresse de ces personnes à la Garde nationale de Saint-Malo: Ils disent qu'ils sont patriotes, qu'ils ont marché contre les aristocrates, qui, de concert avec les nègres et les mulâtres, tant libres qu'esclaves, exerçaient à main armée les plus terribles vexations." "On voit", continues Laclos, "qu'il y a, dans nos colonies, deux sortes de patriotes, et ceci nous rappelle une lettre de Saint-Domingue à un des membres de la ci-devant assemblée générale, actuellement en station à Paris: Oui, mon ami, nous devons maintenir la constitution de toutes nos forces. L'Assemblée nationale a formellement décrété que tous les hommes blancs sont égaux en droits."

These communications gave rise to a note in which Laclos shows that he is well aware of the gravity of the problem which they pose. "Notre constitution," he says(1), "a deux sortes d'ennemis en France: les uns veulent une démocratie et point de roi; les autres veulent un roi et point de démocratie." The spokesmen of the former group are Robert and Brissot; those of the latter are Despréménil and Armand. In America, however, the constitution has a third type of enemy: "c'est le parti de la démocratie blanche. Ceux-ci sont disposés à tout: ils consentiront à se faire démocrates, à se faire royalistes, peut-être même à demeurer français, pourvu qu'on leur laisse des ilotes." This complaint has a very familiar ring today. Laclos says that these three parties are all interested in destroying the constitution, and are trying to force the Assembly into either legalising the "préjugé barbare" which draws a distinction in

1. O.C., p. 600

the colonies between black men and white, or pronouncing a decree condemning this distinction. In the first case, "l'Assemblée nationale déshonorerait tous ses travaux et se couvrirait de honte." In the second, it would be decreeing the abolition of slavery, which would mean that "les colonies se sépareraient de la métropole; nos ports se soulèveraient contre l'Assemblée nationale et quatre millions d'individus qui travaillent en France pour les colonies se trouveraient sans occupation et sans pain." (1) In either case, the inevitable result would be anarchy, "d'où (la France) ne sortirait que pour se placer sous le despotisme, suivant l'espoir des uns, ou pour se diviser en républiques confédérées, suivant l'espoir des autres." This serves to show the truth of the adage that "les extrêmes se touchent". Laclès has nothing to say to the absolute monarchists, since "leur système est tombé dans le mépris qu'il mérite." But to Brissot and the republican advocates of federation he says:

"Il ne suffit pas de connaître les forces; il faut calculer les frottements. N'imitons pas ces animaux qui étouffent leurs enfants à force de caresses."

Here Laclès shows himself as a middle-of-the-road revolutionary. He follows typically Jacobin reasoning when he insists that, above all, the Constitution must be upheld. Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say that he realised the great truth that race-hatred cannot be dispelled by legislation, but only by a change in the attitude of individuals, with the passage of time.

The next text which we have to consider (2) has to do with the freedom of the press, and is particularly interesting since it takes the form of a

1. O.C., p. 601.
2. O.C., pp. 601-2.

direct comment by Laclos upon pamphlets which accused him of being implicated in the riot which prevented the royal family's leaving the Tuileries to go to Saint-Cloud on the 18th April. Officially, Louis XVI wished to go there to convalesce, but no doubt he also desired the benefits of a refractory priest for his Easter confession and communion. An angry crowd surrounded the royal coach as it attempted to leave and, although the king persisted in his efforts for two hours, he finally had to abandon the attempt. It may seem that Laclos, if he was responsible for organising this riot, was, in preventing the departure of the king from the Tuileries, setting about clearing Orléans's path to the throne in rather a peculiar fashion. Dard, however, neatly sidesteps this objection. On the 18th April the Jacobins were discussing the organisation of the National Guard. Now the guards of the Oratoire section had, that very day, refused to intervene to help protect the king from the importunities of the mob, and so Louis could claim that the Constitution had been violated in this respect. According to Le Lendemain(1), Laclos intervened in the debate at the Jacobin club and claimed, "en beaux termes, que la garde nationale n'étoit point faite pour obéir à la loi. 'Par exemple, a-t-il dit, on publie la loi martiale, cette proclamation n'est pas de mon goût; si moi, garde national, je ne veux pas obéir, la loi ne doit pas m'y forcer.' Beau principe, et bien digne de Laclos."

Dard bases his case on another, and admittedly much more reasonable, version of this session of the club in the Journal de la Révolution(2), which states that "M. Choderlos de Laclos a défini la garde nationale: l'universalité

1. 19th April 1791.
2. 20th April, 1791.

des citoyens de l'empire, armés pour la défense de la liberté contre les attaques de l'intérieur, quelles qu'elles fussent, et organisés de manière à ce que chaque citoyen ne fût pas astreint à une obéissance servile envers ceux préposés pour le commander." Dard accepts this as an accurate account, and although it certainly is much more reasonable than that given by Le Lendemain, nevertheless it is not altogether above suspicion, particularly when we recall the stand taken by Laclos over the position of army officers (1). It is far from certain that Laclos regarded the mob as fulfilling the true function of the National Guard when it surrounded the royal coach, or that "c'était justifier l'acte accompli et s'applaudir secrètement de la situation du Roi, dont la conscience était maintenant à l'aise pour se libérer de ses serments, puisqu'on l'acculait à la fuite", as Dard suggests was the case (2). There is no proof that this is an accurate record of Laclos's speech, or that, assuming this to be the case, it was intended as a direct reference to the Saint-Cloud affair. Caussey does not believe that this was an Orleanist plot at all, still less that it was organised by Laclos. He points out that there was one person who had far greater cause than the Orleanists to keep the king in Paris - and in the absence of really convincing evidence one cannot take the view that the king was prevented from leaving for Saint-Cloud as an encouragement for him to leave the country altogether! - it was he who had left the mob along on the 18th April as he had done on the 6th October 1789, he whose praises were sung by all

1. of infra pp. 125-126.
2. Dard, p. 287.

the pamphleteers who attributed these affairs to the Orleanists: Lafayette(1). The only way to make a choice between Dard's contention and that of Caussy is to toss a coin. There is no real evidence.

There were, however, accusations in plenty. Laclos himself mentions three pamphlets: Non, d'Orléans, tu ne régneras pas; A Toi-même Laclos; Compte rendu au Conseil de M. d'Orléans, par M. Laclos, sur la position actuelle de ses affaires(2). There were others(3), and they deserve some consideration.

In the extremely violent Non, d'Orléans, tu ne régneras pas, the duke, along with Laclos, his "précepteur en scélératesse", is held responsible for Louis XVI's being prevented from going to Saint-Cloud, and the riot is seen as an attempt to have the king assassinated(4). The mob-leader Rotondo is reported to have said that "la quinzaine de Pâques verroit de SUPPLEMENT de la journée du 6 octobre"(5), while Sillery, dressed as a lackey, and Laclos, this time "déguisé en jockey", urged the mob on(6). The author of À toi-même, Laclos, declared that "jusqu'à ce que le gibet nous ait vengés de toi et de l'inférieur d'Orléans, je te poursuivrai sans cesse.... Je souhaite que le déshonneur dont tu as souillé ma patrie soit lavé dans ton sang."(7) This pamphleteer also sees the riot as an attempt to assassinate Louis, but attributes Rotondo's remark to Laclos: "Tu t'es vanté, oui, toi, toi-même, que la quinzaine de Pâques seroit, pour toi et les tiens, l'anniversaire des

1. Caussy, pp. 174-5.
2. O.C., p. 601; Paris, n.d.; n.p.n.d.; Paris, n.d.
3. vide infra, pp. 137-140.
4. Non, d'Orléans..., p. 2.
5. ibid., p. 5.
6. ibid., p. 6.
7. À Toi-même, Laclos, pp. 3-4.

5 et 6 octobre 1789"(1). Whether either of them ever said anything of the sort is open to question: it is far more likely that the pamphleteers wished to emphasise the evil plottings of the Orleanists for their own purposes. In the apocryphal Compte rendu au Conseil de M. d'Orléans, par M. Laclos..., the duke's secretary is made to say to his fellow-conspirators, "Vous savez que j'ai suborné la garde nationale.... J'ai perdu La Fayette; et je crois que ce succès seul est capable de faire la réputation d'un grand homme. Enfin j'ai amené les choses au point que si c'est homme qu'on appelle roi, se fut déterminé à sortir de son château, j'étais sûr de m'en défaire sans qu'on pût connoître la main qui dirigeoit la machine....."(2) He continues by saying that "si Monseigneur (i.e. Orléans) étoit homme à se mettre hautement à la tête d'un parti armé, nous aurions bientôt fait; mais je le lui propose pas, parce que je sais qu'il ne pourroit effectuer ce projet, quand même on lui en feroit sentir la nécessité; il faut du courage pour cela, et Monseigneur ne brille pas par ce côté-là avec son éclat ordinaire..."(3) The Compte rendu concludes with Laclos announcing that "je vous laisse(sic) un momen(t); je descends dans le jardin encourager nos gens; tâchez, pendant ce court espace, de vous déterminer."(4)

Laclos's attitude towards these three publications is perfectly reasonable, and even dignified. He describes them as "un échantillon des politesses dont les médisants régalaient de temps en temps les patriotes pour les dégoûter de la liberté de la presse." He suggests that perhaps some new Beucher d'Argis is trying to embarrass Orleans and himself by rigging something on the lines of

1. À toi-même, Laclos, p. 2.

2. Compte rendu..., p. 2.

3. *ibid.*, p. 3.

4. *ibid.*, p. 4.

a new Châtelet enquiry. Nevertheless, he declared that "nous persistons à penser que la liberté de la presse doit être indéfinie; et qu'une loi même e/ contre les libelles et les libellistes nous paraît plus dangereuse qu'utile, en ce qu'elle deviendrait trop facilement l'occasion ou le prétexte de détruire le seul palladium de toutes les libertés."(1)

We have already said that, besides those mentioned by Laclos, there were other pamphlets which accused him of deep designs of a conspiratorial nature about this time, and indeed of direct implication in the Saint-Cloud affair. They are of no historical value whatsoever, as a quick glance will suffice to show, but they are interesting in so far as they show the nature of the accusations against Laclos, and also give some indication of what gave rise to them, his authorship of Les liaisons dangereuses.

À moi, Laclos, un mot (2) warns Laclos that his "patron" is totally incapable of doing anything by himself, and tells him that he is a fool to take so many risks for such a spineless man. It closes with a little fatherly advice: "Adieu;... sois sage, calomnie sourdement, excite la populace, tu sais ton métier; mais au-moins que ce soit si secrètement qu'on ne puisse s'en appercevoir, sans quoi, si cela t'arrive encore une fois, je ne réponds plus des suites. Adieu, et crois-moi pour la vie ton fidel(sie) ami."(3) The Lettre de M. Laclos à M. le duc d'Orléans, du café du rendez-vous, place du Carousel, ce lundi 18 avril deux heures après midi(4), from which we have already had occasion to quote, purports to show Laclos at the

1. Journal des amis de la Constitution, 3rd May 1791. O.C., pp. 601-2.

2. n.p.n.d.

3. p. 3.

4. n.p.n.d. 5. p. 1.

height of the action on the day of the Saint-Cloud affair, promising to enable Orléans to "jouer de nouveau les scènes des 5 et 6 octobre 1789, mais avec plus de succès." He says that he is writing from a café, "d'où, comme de la tente d'un général, partent tous les ordres nécessaires dans un si aimable moment." (1) He says that Sillery is disguised as a lackey, and that Lafayette has been lucky to escape with his life. Rotondo is urging that Orléans be made regent. The fictitious Laelos refers to the use of the fountains and water-jets of the Palais Royal as signals to the duke's supporters. The Instructions données par M. Laelos, à l'ordre, le 25 avril, 1791 (2) shows Laelos supposedly continuing his plotting after the Saint-Cloud affair, and continues upon the same theme: "Les eaux du Cirque ne joueront point; le grand bassin seul jouera." (3) This pamphlet consists of a string of conspiratorial orders. For example: "... le sieur Rotondo, chef de la 2^e division, se transportera chez les sieurs Marat, Fréron, Desmoulins, Fabre d'Églantine, et chez tous les autres révolutionnaires journalistes à nos gages; là il leur fera la leçon, et sur-tout leur ordonnera après avoir déclamé, suivant la coutume, contre le roi et la reine, de redoubler les injures contre le général (i.e. Lafayette)." It ends with the following instruction: "Pour mot d'ordre: Êtes-vous sûr. Oui je suis sûr." (4)

Perhaps the most interesting of these pamphlets is the one which purports to be a Lettre de M. le duc d'Orléans, à M. le chevalier de Laelos, sur ce qui s'est passé les 12 et 13 avril à Paris (5). Although Dard implies that this

1. p. 1.
2. n.p.n.d.
3. p. 1.
4. pp. 2-3.
5. n.p.n.d.

letter, supposed to have been written by the duke in London, and sent to Laclos in Paris, refers to the Saint-Cloud affair, it clearly dates from 1790, as the reference to Orléans's mission shows. Nevertheless, we will consider it here, for even though it does not refer to this particular affair, it does show quite clearly how Laclos had come by his Machiavellian reputation. It implies that Laclos returned to Paris from London before the duke, although there is no evidence that this in fact happened. It is perhaps not altogether impossible that he had a brief holiday in Paris, but if so he certainly returned to the English capital, as has been indicated in an earlier chapter. In this publication the duke warns him that he should not indulge in any plotting during his employer's absence from Paris: "Songez, mon cher Laclos," he is supposed to write, "qu'après avoir fait deux tentatives inutiles en juillet, et en octobre, il ne faut pas être assez gauche pour en risquer une non moins inutile en avril." (1) The duke goes on to say (2) that "nous lisions dernièrement Agnès (i.e. Mme de Buffon) et moi, vos liaisons dangereuses, mon cher Laclos; Agnès aime Mme de Merteuil à la folie; et j'avoue pour mon compte que Valmont me fait toujours un nouveau plaisir. Il falloit sans doute tout votre esprit pour mettre ces deux personnages en action sans que l'un fit tort à l'autre. Une révolution seroit-elle plus difficile à faire qu'un roman? C'est ce que vous me feriez croire lorsque je songe au peu de fruit que j'ai retiré d'une entreprise qui m'avoit pourtant paru aussi bien combinée qu'elle pouvoit l'être." Orléans goes on to say that if he scolds Laclos this is true evidence of his attachment. The pamphleteer throws as much mud as he possibly can, making Orléans

1. Lettre de M. le Duc d'Orléans..., p. 2.

2. ibid., p. 3.

say that he would be jealous of Lacllos if a prince could permit himself so to be, for Mme de Buffon has said that "si elle n'avoit pas un amant comme moi,.... c'est un mari comme vous qu'elle auroit voulu avoir...."(1) The duke ends by assuring Lacllos that "je n'aurai jamais d'autre Ministre que vous."(2)

It goes without saying that these publications cannot be accepted as proof that Lacllos was an unscrupulous conspirator. They do prove, however, that the royalists and the supporters of Lafayette took pleasure in attacking him, and they were no doubt encouraged in this by the fact that Lacllos had accompanied Orléans to London. It is possible, though, that the author of the last pamphlet was unaware of this, which once again shows the folly of taking any of these manifestly partisan pamphlets at their face value. The work of this writer, on the other hand, serves as an indication that in the absence of proof against Lacllos, his and Orléans's enemies were prepared to prejudice him in the public eye by linking Les Liaisons with his political life. This, of course, proves nothing, except that the legend that Lacllos was a Valmont had gained currency. Once this idea was accepted, it was easy to represent him as thoroughly unscrupulous in matters other than those of love. There is scant evidence that Lacllos was any such Machiavellian figure in political matters, and when we come to examine his private life we shall see that the legend appears to be completely divorced from reality.

Lacllos, then, despite such scurrilous attacks upon him, defended the absolute freedom of the press. As early as the 26th April he had spoken

1. Lettre de M. le Duc d'Orléans...., p. 6.
2. ibid., p. 7.

at the Jacobin club in defence of this liberty, before he mentioned the three pamphlets attacking him personally(1). He made another speech on the same topic of the 9th May(2): "on a beaucoup parlé contre les placards. Mais le seul homme qui ait le droit de m'empêcher de coller ma pensée sur un mur, c'est le propriétaire de la maison. Ce droit, cette liberté indéfinie, tient à la souveraineté du peuple, qui ne peut être aliénée et qui existe dans chaque individu."(3) On the 12th May Le Lendemain noted that Laclès, Lépider and Robespierre had defended the freedom of the press, and satisfied itself with the sure comment that "ces Messieurs ont tout perdu si on arrive à distinguer la liberté de la licence."

Du Perfectionnement et de la Stabilité de la Constitution(4), an article which appeared in three parts in the Journal des Amis de la Constitution during the months of May and June(5) is a clear exposition of the constitutionalist monarchist view, and in it Laclès emphasises the importance of the right of petition, which he always considered one of the essentials of the sovereignty of the people.

He begins by recognising that, to many people, the idea of perfecting the Constitution may at first sight seem to exclude that of rendering it stable. It seems that to ensure the perfection of the Constitution, one must reserve the right to modify it, or even change it altogether, which,

1. Journal de la Révolution, 28 April 1791. O.C., p. 907.
2. ibid., 12 May 1791; O.C. pp. 602-3.
3. O.C., p. 602.
4. O.C., pp. 603-16.
5. No. 27, 31 May 1791; no. 28, 7 June; no. 29, 14 June.

of course, militates against stability. Those who support this view, however, take the line that "ce droit est inaliénable par sa nature;... le céder à perpétuité serait se rendre volontairement esclave;... s'en dessaisir jusqu'à une époque plus ou moins éloignée, c'est passer un bail d'esclavage à terme plus ou moins long; enfin, ils en déduisent que les législatures suivantes auront les mêmes droits que l'Assemblée nationale actuelle; que toutes seront également des corps constituants revêtus des mêmes pouvoirs."(1) All this, says Laclos, is very reasonable, and yet the view of those who place the stability of the Constitution first is equally reasonable. They say that the worst government is no government, and the worst Constitution that which would throw the citizens into a state of perpetual doubt concerning their rights and duties, and "confierait leur existence politique au caprice biennal d'un petit nombre d'individus." "Ils ajoutent, et cette considération mérite d'être pesée, que, si l'on ne peut nier que la souveraineté réside essentiellement dans la totalité de la nation, il ne serait pourtant pas vrai de dire que chaque individu concourt à l'exercice de ce droit."(2) Thus they argue that subsequent Assemblies should not be empowered to tamper at will with Constitutional decrees, but should only be given constituent powers at certain fixed intervals.

Laclos says that since these two ways of thought are reasonable, there must be some means of reconciling them.(3) Despotism exists if the same small number of individuals wield both legislative and executive powers. On the other hand, however, if these powers are not exercised the result is

1. O.C., pp. 603-4.
2. O.C., p. 604.
3. O.C., p. 605.

anarchy. The period when a Constituant Assembly is sitting is, by definition, always one of crisis, and Laclos holds in consequence that such a body can be useful only when a nation wishes to change its constitution in its entirety, in which case it would come into being by the very force of circumstances, whether or not there was legal provision for it.

He next lays down three principles to guide the nation, aimed at preserving its rights and at the same time avoiding the danger of anarchy:

- "1° De ne conférer le pouvoir constituant aux législateurs que partiellement, et pour des objets déterminés;
- 2° De prévaloir les législatures contre l'esprit d'innovation en leur interdisant la faculté d'exécuter par elles-mêmes les changements qu'elles auraient été dans le cas de résoudre;
- 3° Et enfin d'entourer la manifestation du vœu national de toutes les précautions qui peuvent en garantir l'authenticité et la réflexion, en lui assurant toutefois les moyens d'être émis dans tous les temps, et avec une entière liberté." (1)

Enlarging upon these three points, Laclos says that the expression of the national will should be particular - that is to say, should apply only to one specific question at a time. The legislatures should have constituent powers only in respect of specific demands made in a legal manner. The legislature during the session of which a particular expression of the national will is made should be permitted to consider only two questions:

- "1° Le vœu est-elle ou n'est-elle pas légalement manifesté?
- 2° Y a-t-il ou n'y a-t-il pas lieu à délibérer sur le changement demandé?" (2)

Once it has been decided that the demand is legal and merits discussion, it should be handed on to the subsequent Assembly.

1. O.C., p. 608.
2. O.C., p. 608.

One large problem was how to guarantee the authenticity and serious nature of the expression of the will of the nation. "Nous tirerons la solution de ce problème," says Laclos, "du droit de pétition." He agrees with the Assembly's ruling that this right "est individuel et ne peut être exercé par aucun corps politique ni par aucune société agissant comme telle"(1), for a petition is the expression of the will of its signatories, and if a political body were to petition it would be ignoring the will of the minority within itself, and this principle is quite alien to the whole idea of a petition. Moreover, in such a body the persuasive influence of orators could be excessive. "Il n'est pas de même du droit de pétition considéré comme individuel: chacun signant une pétition il l'adopte, il en fait son avis personnel, et la seule action de signer appelle la réflexion."(2) However, this does not mean that a political assembly or club should not discuss a petition, provided that its members sign it purely as individuals, and not as representatives of that assembly or club.

This is not, however, the best way to circulate a petition. That other great right, the freedom of the press, is here very important. As a result of this, anyone can initiate a petition, perhaps under the surveillance of a magistrate, and as a result "le vœu d'un seul individu" can become the national will.(3)

Adoption of Laclos's suggestions would mean that there would be two kinds of Assemblies: ordinary and constituent. The next Assembly, Laclos

1. O.C., p. 610.
2. O.C., p. 609.
3. O.C., p. 614.

points out, would fall into the first category, but it would be able to decide that a particular constitutional demand merited discussion, and hand it on to the following Assembly, which would thus become constituent, so far as that specific demand was concerned. Practical details, such as the number of signatures necessary before a petition had to be considered, Laclès leaves for others to decide.

Laclès declares that some such "appel au peuple" as he suggests is the best way to preserve the nation's sovereignty(1), but before he concludes he takes the opportunity of attacking republicanism and those who seek to substitute "l'autorité démocratique" for "gouvernement représentatif, le seul qui nous paraisse admissible dans un royaume tel que la France. Et, en effet, parmi les partisans les plus chauds du républicanisme, ceux qui ont quelques lumières n'osent encore le présenter que comme une théorie qu'ils prétendent plus parfaite (opinion que nous n'acceptons pas) mais enfin qu'ils avouent être inapplicable à nos idées, à nos mœurs, à toutes les circonstances qui nous environnent."(2)

There can be no denying that Laclès felt very deeply about this question of the right of petition. On the 14th June he made a speech calling on the Jacobins to discuss the whole question, but apparently with no success, for they passed to the order of the day.(3)

Laclès the soldier also showed himself at the Jacobin club. On the 2nd June the members were discussing the state of the army.(4) One Thierry

1. O.C., p. 616.

2. O.C., p. 615.

3. O.C., p. 620; Journal des Débats des Amis de la Constitution, no. 10.

4. Journal des Débats des Amis de la Constitution, no. 2.

suggested that, since an individual oath from the officers was insufficient to ensure their loyalty, the army in its existing form should be abolished and the men allowed to elect their own officers. Another member, Anthoine, then spoke up in similar vein, saying that "conserver dans notre constitution un corps entier sur d'anciens règlements, ce serait laisser subsister une vieille miraille dans un bâtiment de nouvelle construction." He denounced the haughtiness of the officers, and declared that "il faut détruire l'esprit militaire." Nevertheless, he excepted from the proposed disbanding of the commissioned ranks the officers of those corps "où il faut avoir des connaissances spéciales, l'artillerie et le génie." It was at this point that Laelos intervened(1), reminding his fellow-members that he had been appointed "commissaire pour le rapport de l'armée". He then made a reference to Anthoine (who had been loudly applauded), which ensured a stormy reception for what he had to say: "J'ai été précédé par un opinant qui a laissé peu de choses à dire: j'en dirai donc moins que lui, car je ne dirai pas d'injures." This brought shouts of protest from the floor, but Laelos insisted that there was nothing personal in his remark, since Anthoine had "distingué d'une manière honorable deux corps dans l'un desquels j'ai l'honneur de servir depuis trente-deux ans." This brought forth cries of "Au fait, au fait", and he went on to attack the suggestion that three "dictateurs patriotes" - two words which to him did not seem to go well together - be appointed to "examiner chacun des officiers et les licencier ou les contenir à leur gré." This project struck him as "invraisemblable". He was intrigued to know whence these three men would be taken. Even if they were all taken from the ranks of the Amis de la Constitution he would not be happy, for, as he

1. Journal des Débats des Amis de la Constitution; O.C., pp. 617-8.

put it, "cette idée de dictature me paraît... incompatible avec le patriotisme." He thought that a better way of ensuring the loyalty and efficiency of the army could be brought about "par le dédoublement des corps, et en prenant d'autres mesures que je ne puis vous développer que de concert avec vos autres commissaires."

Laclos must have been well aware that the alarm of Thierry and Anthoine was not without some justification. The loyalty of many officers of aristocratic origin to the new régime - and the exception made by Anthoine in favour of the engineers and the artillery in this respect is significant - was more than suspect. But the views he had heard expressed also smacked of egalitarianism run riot. To run an army one must have discipline, and Laclos was too much of a soldier not to know this, despite his practice of taking lengthy periods of leave - a quite general practice, incidentally. He was fully aware that Thierry's suggestion that the men should elect their own officers was utterly ludicrous. The idea of setting up three "dictateurs patriotes" is an example of the now familiar pattern of attempting to force people to be equal if one cannot bring equality about the other way. It may well have been suggested in all sincerity, but, as Laclos saw, it contained a contradiction in terms. The inevitable result of that type of practice is a dictator pure and simple.

Laclos made another speech to the club on the following day, the 3rd June, this time on royal prerogative of mercy(1). Dubois de Crancé brought the matter up, saying that "si on accorde au roi le droit de faire grâce, il est

1. Journal des Débats....., no. 3; O.C., p. 619.

par là au-dessus de la loi et la responsabilité des ministres est anéantie."

He was prepared to admit that some such prerogative of mercy should exist, but he maintained that it should belong to "la nation représentée par la législature." All the other speeches made on this subject opposed the prerogative of mercy, no matter who was considered to be the sovereign power, and on this occasion Anthoine and Laclos were in agreement. The nearest thing to such a prerogative which Laclos was prepared to sanction is described by him as follows:

"Je désirerais donc: 1^o que l'on ne pût faire grâce que dans le cas où les jurés auraient prononcé coupable, mais excusable; 2^o que, d'après le jugement rendu, le corps législatif prononcât le décret de clémence; 3^o que ce décret fût porté à la sanction du roi, de sorte qu'en cas de refus de cette sanction, la grâce ne serait accordée qu'à une autre législature. Car, je le répète, ni la législature ni le roi ne peuvent faire grâce. Le souverain seul a ce droit, et l'acte de souveraineté n'est complet que dans un décret de la législature sanctionné par le pouvoir exécutif."

And so Laclos remains stalwartly a constitutional monarchist.

Thus far in his career at the Jacobin club we have seen no real sign, and certainly no proof, that Laclos was actively plotting for a change of dynasty to place Orléans upon the throne of France. His attitude was one shared by many Frenchmen of the time, and was only conservatively revolutionary. We have seen that he placed great stress upon the importance of the right of petition, and in the next chapter we shall consider what is perhaps the gravest accusation laid at Laclos's door: that after the flight of Louis XVI to Varennes he attempted to exploit this right to obtain power for his employer by means of a petition calling for the removal of the king.

6. THE MAN OF INTRIGUE: LACLOS AND THE PETITION OF THE CHAMP DE MARS.

We now come to the chapter in Laclos's career which Dard calls "la suprême partie." (1) The flight of the royal family to Varennes took place during the night of the 20th-21st June 1791. They were brought back to Paris on the 25th. Various suggestions have been made concerning the rôle played by Laclos immediately after these events (2). The account we shall give differs in several respects from the generally accepted version of events originating from Dard; it seems, however, to be both the most probable and the most reasonable which can be drawn from the facts at our disposal.

It can scarcely be thought accidental that Orléans chose this particular time to apply for membership of the Société des Amis de la Constitution (3). He was presented on the 23rd June by the Duc de Montpensier and five members whose names we do not know. The Duc d'Orléans requested that the club out short the formalities of admission in his case, but there should be no attempt to make capital out of this suggestion for, as Dubois-Grancé pointed out at the time, deputies at the National Assembly needed only to be presented to be offered membership of the society. No sooner had Orléans been admitted than Laclos rose to make a speech concerning the recent events (4). "Le départ du roi," he said, "n'a servi qu'à nous déployer le tableau imposant de la conduite du peuple de Paris. L'arrestation du roi nous a prouvé que

1. Dard, ch. XI, pp. 297 et seq.

2. vide Dard, *ibid.*; Gaussy, pp. 189-236; Allem, *O.C.*, pp. 909 et seq.

3. Madelin, *Danton*, trans. by Lady Mary Lloyd, London 1921, pp. 75-92.

4. *Journal des Débats*..., no. 15.

4. *ibid.*, *O.C.*, pp. 633-4

la conduite du peuple des départements était au niveau de celle du peuple de Paris. Reste le retour du roi. Depuis trente-six heures, je réfléchis au parti que devra prendre l'Assemblée nationale à ce sujet, et j'avoue ingénument que mes réflexions ne m'ont encore rien fourni." He urged the club to open a debate on this matter.

Thus Laclos broached the subject of the position of the king before the Jacobins. It was, of course, a matter which had to be discussed, and the news of the arrest had only just come through. Perhaps the fact that Laclos tackled this subject in the presence of the newly-admitted Duc d'Orléans would indicate that he was speaking not quite so "ingénument" as he pretended. However, all he does at this stage is to call for discussion, which would inevitably have come sooner or later, and there is no question here of his openly suggesting a regency or any other steps.

The Jacobin club did debate the position of Louis on this day, and again on the 24th, when it welcomed Drouet, Guillaume and Gaudin, who had participated in the king's arrest. On the 26th they honoured the National Guards who had arrested Louis at Varennes, going on to discuss the type of inscription which would befit a proposed monument to these heroes. Laclos, no doubt in an attempt to bring the debate down to the serious question of the constitutional crisis itself, remarked that "la seule mesure qui, selon moi, puisse convenir, est le concours renvoyé au temps le plus court possible."⁽¹⁾ This suggestion was approved, and the closing date for this trivial competition was set three days from then.

1. Journal des Débats..., no. 16.

Laelos's first major contribution to the controversy raging around the head of Louis XVI took the form of the article Mesures à prendre relativement aux circonstances, which he wrote in collaboration with Lepidor fils, and which appeared in the thirty-first number of the Journal des Amis de la Constitution(1). This article begins with a vigorous indictment of the king's action:

"Le roi a tenté de sortir de son poste. Il a choisi pour faire cette démarche dont la suite naturelle paraissait devoir être la plus horrible guerre civile, le moment où la Constitution touchant à sa fin, les espérances de tous les bons citoyens allaient être comblées. Il semble avoir fui pour ne pas être témoin du bonheur d'un grand peuple."(2)

The writers go on to ask whether, in view of this fact, France must destroy the Constitution and with it the monarchy. There are two groups of people who hold this to be the case, the republicans and the anarchists. Lepidor and Laelos, however, have always felt that "un roi est excellent à la France." This they have always believed, still believe, and will always continue to believe, not through prejudice or delusion, but "parce que l'institution de la monarchie légale, de la monarchie inviolable, peut seule nous garantir de l'usurpation." Thus, since it is to the future that they look, "le roi a pu commettre la plus funeste imprudence, peut-être même la plus lâche perfidie", without shaking their opinion. They therefore set out to "montrer aux bons comme aux mauvais citoyens leur salut dans les vrais principes", emphasising that a distinction must be made between the "mesures relatives à la royauté" and "celles relatives à la personne royale."(3)

1. 28 June 1791 (not, as M. Allen claims, 18 June); O.C., 620-32.
2. O.C., p. 620.
3. O.C., p. 621.

The writers begin by considering the institution of monarchy as such. It was an unfortunate fact that the Constituent Assembly had never been able to take upon themselves all the powers that should have been theirs. The Assembly had found the monarchy established in the minds of men, "soutenue par l'illusion et respectée, non comme une fonction utile, mais comme la prérogative d'un individu." Sooner or later, of course, the reign of reason and law had to take the place of that of prejudice, but it would have been fatal to rush things. As a result, the Court was enabled to exploit the situation and maintain a state of war between the king and the Assembly, with the further result that the defenders of the royal person had come to be at loggerheads with the real "partisans de la royauté", those who supported the Constitution.(1)

Another unfortunate fact was that the Assembly had found itself obliged to make use of the agents of the executive power of the Ancien Régime, and that the king had been given power to delay the execution of constitutional laws by the use of the suspensive veto. Moreover, the Assembly was supported only by the strength of public opinion, whereas "la cour disposait encore de l'armée, non pas totalement à son gré, parce que les soldats se sont montrés citoyens, mais suffisamment pour semer la division."(2)

What is the lesson to be drawn from all this? "Disons le donc hautement," write Lépidor and Laslos. "En principe, du moment où le corps constituant s'est rassemblé, la royauté aurait dû disparaître; car on ne

1. O.C., p. 623.
2. O.C., p. 624.

pouvait considérer le roi que sous deux points de vue: ou comme individu, ou comme fonctionnaire public. As an individual, the king is merely an ordinary citizen; as a public servant, "le roi n'exerçait qu'en vertu d'une délégation présumée, mais dont les clauses allaient nécessairement être changées, puisqu'il s'agissait de refondre le pacte social et d'établir une nouvelle division des pouvoirs." The king should have been left provisionally in his post until the Constitution had been completed, for the sake of public peace and order, but only on the clear understanding that the Assembly had the right at any time to alter the extent of his powers. Thus it is true to say, the writers argue, that at the time of his flight Louis possessed only "une fonction précaire et indéterminée", and that he was "plutôt roi désigné que revêtu du pouvoir royal." Once the Constitution was completed, the Assembly had the right to call him to the throne as the first of a new dynasty(1). The Assembly should now proceed to the exercise of its right to suspend the king. "Nous n'en donnerons pas les raisons. Malheur à qui serait assez lâche pour ne pas les avoir senties!"(2)

The Constitution should be drawn up in its entirety and then presented to the king, who should be told, "Vous êtes libre, non de demeurer roi en refusant de vous conformer à la loi qui vous confère une existence politique, mais de rester dans la classe des simples citoyens si vos facultés, si votre opinion, si votre goût même vous donnent quelque répugnance." To offer the separate articles to the king designate for his approval, as had been done so far, was sheer folly; above all, it was to "accorder quelque crédit au

1. O.C., pp. 624-5.

2. O.C., p. 626.

plus dangereux des systèmes, en faisant croire qu'une constitution qu'on, dans la réalité, n'est autre chose qu'un contrat entre la Nation et la Nation, peut être considéré comme un contrat entre la Nation et son magistrat suprême."(1)

The functions of the monarchy should, then, be suspended until the Constitution was complete. Laws should be laws, without royal acceptance or sanction. The executive power should be placed in the hands of temporary agents, and Lépidor and Laclos consider that the ministers should be retained as these temporary agents, "tant qu'ils ne se seront pas rendus coupables." The reasons they give are that the ministers are already conversant with France's internal and external problems, and are not of the royal house, and therefore "aucun préjugé ne les soutient, aucune illusion ne les environne. Ils ne peuvent obtenir la confiance publique que par une conduite irréprochable."(2) It is worthy of note that here Lépidor and Laclos make not the slightest reference to the possibility of a regency.

Turning to the steps to be taken against the person of Louis XVI, Lépidor and Laclos point out that provisional steps have already been taken: Louis has been suspended, and is under careful guard. They add that "il faut avoir une âme de courtisan pour ne pas sentir combien il était juste et convenable d'en agir ainsi," but go on to say that the principles and reasons behind these facts should be stressed. That the Constituant Assembly always had the right to suspend the king has already

1. O.C., p. 627.
2. O.C., p. 628.

been sufficiently demonstrated(1). As for his being under guard, amongst the articles of the Constitution already decreed there is one which makes the monarchy hereditary in the dynasty which possesses it, and Louis is the first of this dynasty. "Nous ne savons pas ce qu'il faudra définitivement prononcer à son égard, mais, jusque-là, il est dans l'attente d'une fonction qui s'ouvrira aussitôt après l'achèvement de la constitution. La nation a donc intérêt, il a donc intérêt lui-même d'être présent lorsque la charte constitutionnelle sera terminée."(2)

The king's flight cannot be considered a form of abdication. Matters are not so simple as that. "Il a quitté la royauté du moment, mais il n'a pas renoncé à la royauté constitutionnelle."(3) Indeed, for the present it is impossible for him to resign all claim to the constitutional monarchy, since this does not yet exist. Louis could always say, once the Constitution was complete, that certain articles had been added which removed all the objections he had had to the unfinished Constitution at the time of his flight. In this event, Louis XVI would have to be put back on the throne.(4)

Finally, Lépidor and Laclos consider what further steps should be taken against Louis, and decide that "à cet égard il n'y a pas lieu à délibérer pour le moment." Only two aspects of recent events can possibly be said to be Louis's personal responsibility: his flight itself and the letter he left behind. The flight is sufficient to lead to the suspension of Louis, but no more. As for the note, it has no legal value, being merely addressed to

1. O.C., p. 629.
2. O.C., p. 630.
3. Laclos's italics.
4. O.C., p. 630.

"un simple serviteur du roi" and neither "proclamé ni même signifié aux différents corps politiques." It is no more than "une suite de plaintes que fait un individu quelconque" and "La dignité du peuple français ne lui permet pas de délibérer sur une aussi misérable pièce." Moreover, there is a constitutional decree which declares that no validity attaches to any document bearing the king's signature unless it has been counter-signed by a minister, which is not the case with this document. Hence the only possible conclusion is that "l'écrit signé Louis XVI est de lui considéré comme individu, mais non de lui considéré comme roi; que cet écrit enfin est l'opinion d'un particulier et non celle d'un magistrat." (1)

Laclos was soon to change the emphasis so far as the steps to be taken against the person of Louis XVI are concerned, as we shall see. Dard and Allen both suggest that this article was one move in a deliberate campaign to have Louis XVI replaced by the Due d'Orleans, either as regent or as the founder of a new dynasty. (2) Obviously it would be foolish to pretend that Laclos was enamoured of Louis XVI. The article certainly shows that neither Lépidor file nor Laclos would have laid any claim to the possession of "une âme de courtisan", and in this sense M. Allen is quite correct in saying that Laclos was "partisan d'un roi mais non de Louis XVI." Although Laclos was certainly not a partisan of the person of Louis, there is little cause to maintain that he was at this stage at the head of a plot to engineer a change of dynasty. Dard and Allen base their case on a passage where Lépidor and Laclos say that "de nouveaux faits peuvent détruire toute cette

1. O.C., pp. 631-2.

2. Dard, p. 304. Allen, O.C., p. 910.

partie de notre système relative à la personne du roi, et l'ensemble des faits ne peut être connu qu'après l'entière confection du procès fait aux complices de l'évasion du roi; d'où nous concluons définitivement que la seule mesure proposable en ce moment est celle d'ajourner toute décision, non sur la royauté, mais sur la personne désignée pour être roi, jusqu'après le jugement définitif du procès important auquel sa fuite a donné lieu."(1) The most that can be made of this passage is that Lépidor and Laclous mean in fact precisely what they say, and that they reserve judgement until some decision has been made by the representatives of the people. It was the apparent unwillingness of these representatives to arrive at a definite decision that later impelled Laclous to advocate more positive action.

We have already mentioned that on the 23rd June, when Orléans was admitted to the Jacobin club, Laclous requested a discussion of the crisis brought about by the flight to Varennes. Lépidor père on that occasion maintained that the king's flight did not mean that monarchy must be overthrown. The Constitution must first of all be completed, and then Louis would become either king or an ordinary private citizen, according to whether or not he accepted it.(2) This moderate view was precisely the one expressed five days later by his son and Laclous in their article. Laclous and his collaborator were, above all else, determined to fight off the republican threat, which was becoming more and more serious as it became apparent that during the king's suspension France was being governed, in all but name, as a republic. A certain amount of controversy, has however,

1. O.C., p. 632.

2. Journal des Débats..., no. 15.

been caused by Danton's intervention in the Jacobin debate of the 23rd June, in which the president of the republican Cordeliers said that Louis must be either a criminal or an imbecile. He preferred to think him an imbecile, in which case what was needed was not a regent but a "conseil à l'interdiction". It has been suggested(1) that Danton was in fact in the pay of Orléans and was trying to prepare the way for the duke to take over the kingdom, whilst at the same time trying to avoid upsetting his republican friends. There is no proof of any such connection. Aulard rejects the idea outright(2), whilst admitting that Orléans may have hoped, as indeed he was entitled by his position to hope, that he would be a member of any such Council. This, of course, is very far from meaning that Laclès was in any way involved, in any case. If the entire Jacobin meeting were a "put-up job" one might be able to claim that Laclès was here leading Orleanist plotters into action, but this is, manifestly, both extremely unlikely and quite impossible to prove, particularly in view of the fact that a few days later Laclès was to append his name to opinions similar to those not of Danton, but of Lépider.

There can be no doubt whatsoever that there was talk at this time of Orléans becoming regent. On the 25th June the Journal de Perlet published a manifesto which called for a petition to establish a regency. It pointed out that in view of the flight of Monsieur and of the Comte d'Artois, the obvious choice for regent was the Duc d'Orléans, of whom it said that "il n'a pas démerité de la patrie", and that "il a toujours marché dans le sens de la

1. Dard, p. 300; Caussy, pp. 192-3.

2. A. Aulard, Histoire Politique de la Révolution Française. Origines et Développement de la Démocratie et de la République (1789-1804), Paris, 1921, 5e edn., pp. 129-130.

Révolution." "On ne peut donc," continued the manifesto, "sans injustice et sans intercepter l'ordre naturel de la succession déjà décrétée, l'écarter de la régence; et en lui donnant un conseil, on fait disparaître tous les inconvénients, on l'environne de lumières suffisantes, et on affermit le respect du pouvoir exécutif qui ne peut plus subsister dans les mains faibles et dégradées du fonctionnaire actuel." On the 28th June, Orléans intervened personally, in a very disconcerting way for those who sought his appointment to the regency. A letter bearing the duke's signature appeared in almost all the newspapers, in which he said that he was prepared to serve his country to the best of his ability as a soldier, sailor, or diplomat, but that "s'il est question de régence, je renonce, dans ce moment et pour toujours, au droit que la constitution m'y donne." According to Mme de Genlis(1), it was she who drew up this letter, and Dard suggested(2) that it was part of a plot on her part to replace Orléans by Chartres in the public gaze, and to wreak personal vengeance upon Laclos. The first of these suppositions may well have some foundation.

On the 29th June Bouche was elected president of the Jacobins, and Anthoine and Laclos became secretaries. On the 1st July Laclos made an important speech. To understand its significance we need to know that ~~on~~^{at} the same session of the club Billaud-Varenne, incensed by the National Assembly's decree of the 25th June which ruled not that Louis XVI had forfeited his post, but that a guard should henceforth ensure his safety and make certain that he remained in Paris, had made a highly inflammatory republican speech.

1. Mme de Genlis, Mémoires, 10 vols. Paris, 1825, IV, 94.
2. Dard, pp. 302-3.

The Jacobins were highly outraged, and one member proposed that Billaud-Varenne be expelled from the society, although this was not approved.(1)

Laos began his speech(2) by saying,

"Les ennemis de la constitution se sont ralliés autour du grand événement qui nous occupe...: ils voient le peuple bien amoureux de la liberté; ils veulent l'égarer dans son amour.

Je crois qu'on doit commencer ici par sa profession de foi; voici la mienne.

J'ai juré de maintenir la constitution: je n'ai point entendu celle qui serait dans la tête de tel ou tel, mais seulement celle qui résulterait des décrets de l'assemblée nationale."

Thus Laos shows himself as an orthodox Ami de la Constitution, for the members of the society were always careful to support and respect the decrees of the Assembly, and were above all, in the words of M. Allem, "les Amis de la Constitution monarchique." (3)

To some extent Laos here repeats what he had said in the article of the 28th June. He once again emphasises that one must distinguish between the steps to be taken with reference to the person of Louis XVI and those concerning the monarchy as an institution. There is, however, one extremely important change. He reiterates that, so far as Louis is concerned, one must wait until "l'instruction du procès nous donne des lumières; car je vois que cette question dépend en grande partie de la résolution que prendra l'assemblée nationale." He points out that the existing courts, "même la haute cour nationale provisoire, ne peuvent juger que dans les formes anciennes, les preuves par écrit et l'application de la loi." This, he says, complicates matters considerably. "Ne pourraient recourir à la haute cour nationale et

1. Journal des Débats, no. 20.

2. Ibid., & O.C., pp. 634-7.

3. O.C., p. 911.

l'assemblée nationale ne pourrait-elle pas décider seulement si Louis XVI est ou n'est pas en déchéance? Combien ces deux mesures donnent ou peuvent donner de résultats différents! Je fais cette observation pour avoir le droit d'inviter les députés à opiner de préférence pour que cette grande cause soit renvoyée à la haute cour nationale déjà décrétée."(1)

Whatever might be decided about Louis, Laclos continued, the fact remained that the executive agent was not functioning, and therefore some provisional agent should be established. Now, in their article, Lépidor fils and Laclos had suggested that the ministers should, during the temporary absence of a king, fill this void. Laclos still maintains that temporary measures should be taken until the Constitution has been completed, but his ideas concerning the form these measures should take has changed radically: "Je crois que la méfiance généralement répandue demande qu'on apporte à cette mesure la plus grande célérité et qu'il faut nommer un régent."(2) Furthermore, during the interregnum, steps should be taken to change the Constitution in certain respects, so as to reduce the civil list and give the representatives of the people the sole right to summon the National Guard and appoint ministers and army officers, since "la nomination, telle qu'elle existe, est un moyen certain de perpétuer une noblesse réelle militaire, une caste séparée dans laquelle on choisirait nécessairement pour les grands emplois."(3)

Laclos further developed this new line of thought in another speech to the Jacobin club on the 11th July(4), in which he called Rousseau's Contrat

1. O.C., pp. 634-5.
2. O.C., p. 635.
3. O.C., pp. 636-7.
4. Journal des Débats..., no. 25; O.C., pp. 640-2.

Social to his aid to prove that "depuis la première séance de l'assemblée nationale, il n'a plus existé de magistrat pouvant se dire premier fonctionnaire public et que les circonstances seules nous avaient porté(sic) à laisser, pour agent de la royauté, celui qui en était investi." Another difference from Laolos's earlier attitude concerns the document left by Louis on the occasion of his flight. "Si l'on veut me nier cette proposition," Laolos here continues, "je dirai qu'il (Louis) a abdiqué par son mémoire du 21. Le roi dit qu'il a protesté contre tous les actes émanés de lui pendant sa captivité: s'il a protesté contre tous les actes émanés de lui il a protesté contre ses actes d'acceptation. S'il n'a pas accepté, il n'est pas roi."(1) Thus, those who seek to take action against the person of the king are wasting their time, since there is no such person. Laolos concludes his speech with a question which he promptly answers: "Qui est-ce qui doit être roi? La constitution nous le dit: c'est le dauphin."(2) As the dauphin was a minor, this implied the necessity of a regent.

These two speeches would certainly indicate that Laolos would, at the beginning of July, have liked the Duc d'Orléans to become regent of France, and it would obviously be ludicrous to suggest that he was in any way opposed to his employer's advancement. On the other hand, this is not to say that Laolos was the ringleader of some vast conspiracy designed to bring this about. In the early days of July his attitude certainly changed, but

1. O.C., p. 641.

2. O.C., p. 642.

it is quite possible to find other reasons for this than the Machiavellian intrigue which has been suggested. It should be noted that Laclos was by no means the first or only person to suggest a regency. We have already referred to Danton and the manifesto in the Journal de Perlet. Similarly, on the 24th June, Carra, in his Annales patriotiques, had called for a replacement for Louis. On the 27th the Abbé Danjou, a known Orleanist, declared at the Jacobin club that a council of regency should be set up, and that it should be presided over by "un lieutenant-général du royaume, et cette présidence dévolue au citoyen que le droit de la naissance porterait à la régence."⁽¹⁾ Both Danjou and the manifesto published in the Journal de Perlet, which actually named Orléans, went further than did Laclos.

Perhaps the greatest single influence behind Laclos's change of outlook, however, was the advance of republicanism. The king had been suspended, and so to all intents and purposes France was a republic. Condorcet, Brissot and others preached republicanism, and the Cordeliers voted for its establishment.⁽²⁾ Roederer announced that "on peut avoir une monarchie sans un roi héréditaire."⁽³⁾ It is significant that, as we have already noted, Laclos's speech of the 1st July was made in reply to a violently republican speech by Billaud-Varenne, and that that of the 11th followed soon after the lengthy speech Brissot delivered on the 10th and which it had been decided to print. Even those who had been in the habit of expressing republican ideals began to grow alarmed at the pace

1. Journal des Débats..., no. 17.

2. Dard, p. 298.

3. Profession de foi de M. Brissot sur la monarchie et le républicanisme, in Le Patriote Français, 5 & 6 Juillet 1791; O.C., p. 646; Aulard, Hist. pol. de la Rév. fr., p. 121. n. 2; Caussy, p. 204, n.1.

of events, and to take the line that, fine as such ideals were, France was not yet sufficiently mature politically to put them into practice. Such were, for instance, Carra and Brissot(1).

Thus, once again, despite his call for the nomination of a regent, Laclos cannot be shown to be at the head of an intrigue whose one aim was to bring Orléans to power. He consistently shows, during this period, great respect for legality and the Constitution and, above all, great horror of republicanism.

The next document which must be considered is a letter sent by the Jacobins to the affiliated society in Villeneuve-sur-Berg, in the Vivarais region(2). It is dated the 1st July 1791, and bears the names of Laclos and Boissy d'Anglas, as members of the Jacobin committee dealing with correspondence. Dard first published it in his work on Laclos, having obtained it from the Imperial Archives in Vienna. The version he used, which is the only known text of this letter, is a copy sent to the Emperor Leopold by the Duc de Polignac, as one of several documents intended to persuade the emperor to intervene on behalf of Louis XVI. Dard describes it as a "curieux document"(3), and that it certainly is. Indeed, since it is merely a copy, its authenticity is open to some doubt. Dard, however, accepts it without reserve, and suggests that the first (and most interesting) part of it, composed of general instructions, was probably sent at Laclos's instigation to all societies affiliated to the Jacobins(4). If the letter is

1. vide Aulard, op. cit., pp. 132-3.
2. O.C., pp. 637-40.
3. Dard, p. 314.
4. Dard, p. 310.

indeed genuine, it shows Laclos in a far more unsavoury light than any of his other writings and utterances.

Louis XVI is roundly denounced as the "traître-Roi", and his suspension until the election of a new National Assembly is described as "une mesure devenue nécessaire et qu'il faut faire goûter au peuple." The writers of the letter say that what they need to know is "de quel oeil le peuple a vu la fuite du Roi et son arrestation, et de quel oeil il verrait progressivement son interdiction, sa déposition, l'élection de son fils à la couronne, un conseil de Régence et même l'humiliation de la Royauté..." The people must be made to see that it is impossible to leave upon the throne "une bête brute, conduite par une femme ennemie née de la France, coupable d'adultère et du crime de trahison envers la Nation."⁽¹⁾ The first part of this outburst is in agreement with Laclos's new policy expressed on the very same day at the Jacobin club, but it is difficult to see why Laclos should use such violent language, which is quite foreign to his style of writing, or what is meant by "l'humiliation de la Royauté", which sounds more typical of the republicans than of Laclos⁽²⁾.

The letter goes on to say that "la première chose que fera la Régence sera un accord avec tous les mécontents et la reconnaissance de la relig-

1. O.C., p. 638.

2. There is a pamphlet, the apocryphal Lettre de M. Chaderlen de La Clos(sic), à M. Barnave (15 mars 1791) (n.p.n.d.), which adds one more legend to the many which accumulated around his name by making him an out-and-out republican. In this pamphlet, Laclos is made to say, amongst other things, "Tu sais, mon cher ami, que désespérant de faire quelque chose du feu (sic) duc, je me suis tourné entièrement du côté des Républicains", that Orléans "n'est qu'un enfant qui joue encore avec ses poupées", and that he wants a republic so that "nous puissions nous récompenser par nos mains des peines que nous nous serons données." (pp. 1-3)

ion catholique romaine comme la première des religions de l'État... Nous sommes déjà certains de l'approbation du Pape, moyennant quelques conditions toutes relatives à l'intérêt pécuniaire, et il chantera la palinodie au premier signe."(1) The writers then promise the abolition of all seigniorial dues, and say that "si l'interdiction du Roi a lieu, à plus forte raison sa déposition, l'Assemblée est décidée à faire présent au peuple de la totalité des redevances et de toutes les propriétés des royalistes. La Société m'ordonne de vous l'assurer."(2) Finally, the readers of the letter are assured that there is no danger to France from foreign powers, and they are called upon, in the name of patriotism, to commit arson, steal documents, issue falso statements, and perhaps even commit murder, for "les peuples", they are told, "sont en général très éclairés et très disposés à mettre la tête des Rois sous les pieds du peuple; cela ne sera pas long; cela sera plus court s'ils remuent."(3) These instructions and sly hints are indeed, as Dard says (4), such as "la fièvre révolutionnaire et les circonstances critiques n'excusent guère."

According to Dard, in this letter Laclos "sondait... la province sur sa prochaine pétition(5)." One would need to accept this letter as undoubtedly authentic before one could begin to agree with such a notion, and that it is genuinely the work of Laclos is far from proven. Its tone is not what we have come to expect from Laclos; its reference to "l'humiliation de la

1. O.C., p. 638.
2. O.C., p. 639.
3. O.C., pp. 639-40.
4. Dard, p. 315.
5. Dard, p. 315

Royaute" is not in accord with what we know of his policy; and the same may be said of its avowed aim to "mettre la tête des Rois sous les pieds du peuple." Above all, we have no original. It is true, of course, that if the letter were genuine, then one would not expect many copies to exist today. It might be possible to argue that any letter to an affiliated society would be secret and confidential, and could therefore be written in a more daring manner than, say, an article in the Journal des Amis de la Constitution. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the Vienna copy is the only text we possess. Even though one would not expect copies of such a letter to be left lying around by the score, one may perhaps be excused some suspicions concerning it. Furthermore, one might well be inclined to think that such a letter would not be an isolated instance, but rather that it formed one of a series. No other letter of a similar character bearing Laclès's name has been discovered, however. Despite all this, of course, it remains possible that the letter is authentic, and that the Duc de Polignac was lucky enough to stumble upon a copy, but one cannot forebear from expressing some serious doubts.

On July 12th Laclès once more took up the cudgels against the republicans, and more particularly against Brissot, although the latter was already moving away from the more extreme expression of republicanism. It is interesting to note Brissot's vacillations after the flight to Varennes, for these may well throw some light on his rôle in the drawing up of the Jacobin petition. On the 23rd June he wrote in Le Patriote français that "un roi, après un pareil parjure, et notre constitution sont inconciliables." On

the 26th he wrote that "on cherche à égarer les esprits sur le projet de faire de la France une république, sans penser qu'à cet égard l'Empire obéira bien plus à la force des choses qu'à celle des hommes." By the 29th, his attitude had changed somewhat: "Si vous conservez la royauté, que le Conseil exécutif soit électif par les départements et amovible... Je ne veux pas d'autre république que cette monarchie." In the 1st July issue of his newspaper he maintained that "les rois seront toujours des ennemis de la liberté publique", but seemed to have abandoned the possibility of abolishing monarchy in France. If public liberty was to be preserved, he told his readers, "vous devez et destituer (Louis XVI), et créer un conseil; 1° électif; 2° électif par des délégués du peuple, ad hoc; 3° amovible à certaines époques." On the 3rd July he commented "Appuyé" in reply to a suggestion in a letter from a reader that a "conseil électif" be given "à tous nos rois, même majeurs", or, in other words, that such a council be made a permanent part of the constitution. In the issues of the 5th and 6th July Brissot published a long article entitled Ma Profession de Foi sur la Monarchie et sur le Republicanisme. It is to this article that Laclès replied in the thirty-third number of the Journal des Amis de la Constitution on the 12th July, in his article De la Monarchie et du Republicanisme(1).

Laclès begins by saying that his principles and feelings are almost identical with those expressed by Brissot in his Profession de Foi, but that his conclusions are more or less directly contrary to Brissot's. He

1. O.C., pp. 642-55.

therefore reproduces Brissot's article in its entirety(1), before going on to give his own profession of faith(2).

Brissot opens his Profession de Foi by stating that the republicans have sworn not only to defend the Constitution, but also to perfect it, and then goes on to say that a misunderstanding has sprung up between the republicans and the other patriots because of the various interpretations which can be placed upon the word "république."

"Il faut donc," he says, "définir ce mot, dont les fripons abusent pour effrayer les ignorants.
J'étends par république, un gouvernement où tous les pouvoirs sont:

- 1° délégués ou représentatifs;
- 2° électifs dans et par le peuple, ou ses représentants;
- 3° temporaires ou amovibles.

Les États-Unis d'Amérique sont les seuls qui offrent l'image parfaite d'une pareille république..."(3)

The French republicans, according to Brissot, do not seek a democracy modelled on ancient Athens, Sparta or Rome.

He goes on to argue that five-sixths of the Constitution fulfil the requirements he mentions, and that the king, who is the sixth part, possesses the crown not as his personal property, "mais à titre de représentation," even though this representative nature of the monarchy has proved to be, in the case of France, little more than a fiction(4). Thus, the republicans, "loin de trahir leur serment de respecter la constitution, l'observent mieux

1. O.C., pp. 643-50.
2. O.C., pp. 650-55.
3. O.C., p. 644.
4. O.C., p. 645.

que leurs adversaires les patriotes monarchistes," and it is true that the division between the two parties is only the result of a misunderstanding. The way to reconcile them is to make the executive power really representative.

Louis XVI has rejected the Constitution and should therefore be deposed, for one can quite easily have, as Roderer says, "une monarchie sans un roi héréditaire"(1). The monarchy should be abolished in its hereditary form, for the people are dishonoured and bound towards ruination if they retain such an office, to which a fool or a rogue might at any time succeed. Moreover, "vous exposez la nation à l'anarchie, si vous rétablissez le roi actuel: personne n'obéira.... Ayez un autre roi, on se battra pour relever celui qui est détrôné... N'ayez plus de roi, et les mécontents ne peuvent plus s'attacher à aucun nom, et ils deviennent odieux à toute la terre, en voulant donner un tyran à une nation qui n'en veut pas."(2)

Brissot, however, can quite see that, for the moment at any rate, France is very unlikely to do away with the monarchy altogether. Nevertheless, Louis XVI must not be restored, for "un parjure est et sera éternellement un homme misérable et suspect". In the events of its being decided that Louis XVI should be replaced by his son, "il est ... nécessaire de lui donner un conseil électif et amovible; car l'institution d'un régent offre bien des difficultés." A regent drawn from the royal family would inspire no confidence, but to appoint a regent from elsewhere would be a

1. O.C., p. 646.

2. O.C., p. 647.

violation of the Constitution. If a council took the place of a regent, quarrels for the regency would be avoided, and one would not be entrusting a single - and suspect - individual with vast power. "On le confie à des officiers vraiment responsables, parce qu'ils sont dépendants du peuple."(1)

Brissot concludes his article by saying, "En un mot point de roi ou un roi avec un conseil électif et amovible. Telle est, en deux mots, ma profession de foi."(2) Laclès, on the other hand, says, "Et moi je veux un roi, un roi héréditaire et inviolable; et quant au conseil électif et amovible, quoique je veuille aussi l'élection et l'amovibilité des ministres, je ne suis cependant pas sûr de m'entendre avec M. Brissot."(3) To see precisely what Laclès means by this we must turn to his own profession of faith.

He opens with an eloquent passage in which he gives his reasons for desiring a monarchy: so as to maintain equality between the different departments; to avoid dividing French sovereignty into a number of small, partial sovereignties through federation, and hence to avoid the quarrels born of petty local pretensions which would inevitably ensue; to avoid the possibility of Paris becoming to France what Rome was to the ancient Roman Empire; and finally to ensure the preservation of equality between persons. He further desires a monarchy so that there shall be

"quelque chose au-dessus des grandes fortunes, quelque chose au-dessus des grands talents, quelque chose même au-dessus des grands services rendus, enfin quelque chose encore au-dessus de la réunion de tous ces

1. O.C., pp. 648-9.
2. O.C., p. 650. (All italics used in quotations from the Profession de Foi are Brissot's own).
3. O.C., p. 642.

avantages; et, ce quelque chose, je veux que ce soit une institution constitutionnelle; une véritable magistrature, l'ouvrage de la loi, créé et circonscrit par elle; et non le produit ou de vertus dangereuses ou de crimes heureux; et non l'effet de l'enthousiasme ou de la crainte.

Je veux une monarchie pour éviter l'oligarchie...; par conséquent je ne veux point de monarchie sans monarque; et je rejette cette idée prétendue ingénieuse, dont l'inique et perfide mérite est de déguiser, sous une dénomination populaire, la tyrannique oligarchie; et ce que je dis de la monarchie sans monarque, je l'étends à la régence sans régent, au conseil de sanction, etc., etc."(1)

Laclos, however, refuses to extend the inviolability which he demands for the monarch to the commission of "délits nationaux": the king must not be given the means to destroy liberty and equality(2).

Laclos repeats that there exists no king until the Constitution has been completed, and he emphasises the necessity of strictly limiting the arbitrary powers which the monarch will be given, by reducing the money granted him for the civil list and depriving him of the right to nominate ministers or military officers(3). Those faults to which Laclos points are not, he insists, inherent in the monarchical system. "Si notre constitution, purgée de ces abus que l'Assemblée nationale, a, dans ce moment, le droit et la puissance, et, par conséquent, le devoir de détruire; si, dis-je, notre constitution, purgée de ce petit nombre d'abus, ne nous maintient pas libres et égaux, il faut bien que je l'avoue, je ne sais ce que c'est que la liberté et l'égalité." He ends by challenging the republicans to prove as easily that they can secure France from the dangers which inspire him to call for a monarchy.(4)

Once again, then, Laclos enters the lists against the republicans. It seems infinitely more likely to suppose that it was this fear of the ills which he thought would befall France with the establishment of a republic,

1. O.C., pp. 650-51.
2. O.C., p. 652.
3. O.C., p. 652-55.
4. O.C., p. 655.

rather than his leadership of some dark and mysterious intrigue of which there is no concrete evidence, which was the principal motive behind his rejection of the idea of a council of regency and his call for the appointment of a sole regent. He certainly was opposed to Orléans's participating in any such council, and even to his appointment as a "garde de la royauté", the creation of which office had been proposed by Réal, and supported by Danton, at the Jacobin club on the 3rd July. At this meeting Réal said that the Duc d'Orléans would be the natural choice, had he not already published his renunciation(1). Anlard points out that in fact Orléans had merely renounced the regency. The Constitution had foreseen no such post as that advocated by Réal, and so Orléans would have been able to accept it without loss of face(2). Laeol certainly must have seen the dangers inherent in the creation of any such post as a "garde de la royauté", and, indeed, in the election of a council of regency. These posts would be temporary, and the person or persons appointed would be open to dismissal at any time. He must have seen that this could easily lead to the establishment of the republic which he dreaded, and he can scarcely have been unaware that some such scheme was precisely what was in the minds of republicans like Carra, who suggested in the Annales patriotiques of the 8th July that although France had made great strides, she had not yet achieved "cette homogénéité et cette force de caractère qu'il faut à des républicains confédérés ~~in~~ 83 départements". Carra continued by saying that the Constitution should be allowed to stand for some years under its

1. Journal des Débats..., no. 21.

2. Anlard Hist. pol. de la Rév. fr., p. 130, n. 3. It should be noted, however, that Orléans's renunciation of the regency was in no way legal or binding.

monarchical form, and that the dauphin should be proclaimed king, and given "un conseil électif d'exécution" of which the president should be changed every three months. Carra was sure that "si le jeune et nouveau chef du pouvoir exécutif forme son âme aux vrais principes de la justice, de la raison et de la vertu, il proposera de lui-même, dans l'âge mûr, la république française; si, au contraire, il est faux, méchant, ambitieux et amoureux du pouvoir arbitraire, comme M. son père et madame sa mère, la nation saura bien prendre alors son parti elle-même"(1). Laclès was anything but unreasonable in seeking to appose such designs, and a regency seemed the most obvious - and most legal - way of avoiding the anarchy with which he saw France threatened. Orléans was the obvious candidate for the regency, since Monsieur and the Comte d'Artois had fled the country. In this connection it must be repeated once again that it would be ridiculous to pretend that Laclès was not highly pleased at the prospect of seeing his employer in high places and, on the other hand, that this is a very different thing from portraying Laclès as an amoral and completely cynical master-mind forever planning, through Orléans, his own personal advancement and the realisation of all-consuming ambitions.

We now come to what has been thought to be the master-stroke in this intrigue, the petition for the overthrow of Louis XVI. The events which led up to it are, briefly, as follows. On the 15th July the National Assembly passed a decree which, by opening the way for prosecution of the king's accomplices in his flight but not of the king himself, seemed to

1. Quoted by Aulard, op. cit., p. 132.

recognise Louis's inviolability. The same evening, Biauzat interpreted this decree to the Jacobins(1), saying that "l'Assemblée a cru que, comme il n'y avait pas de loi existante sur ce délit avant l'évasion du roi, Louis XVI et sa famille ne pouvoient pas être mis en cause". It was soon seen, however, that the decree was ambiguous, and the Marquis de la Fayette pointed out that since the decree did not refer specifically to Louis XVI, but only to the king, they (the Jacobins) were at liberty to continue their deliberations about the fate of Louis. Robespierre then declared, "Il est possible que l'Assemblée ait eu l'intention de déclarer Louis XVI hors de cause; mais, si je regarde le décret qu'elle a rendu, je ne vois nullement qu'elle y déclare cette intention. J'ai demandé ce matin à l'Assemblée qu'elle s'expliquât franchement et ouvertement sur cet article. Elle n'a pas cru devoir faire droit à ma motion. Cela posé, je lis le décret et je vois qu'en y mettant en cause telle ou telle personne elle n'a rien décidé ni pour ni contre Louis XVI. La question à cet égard reste donc parfaitement en son entier."

Laos then spoke in a similar vein(2). "Sans doute," he said, "tous les citoyens et, plus encore, tous les amis de la constitution, doivent être soumis aux lois mais, certes, ils ne doivent rien aux intentions des législateurs(3). Je crois, moi, que si l'assemblée nationale n'a rien décidé sur Louis XVI, c'est qu'elle ne s'est pas crue assez instruite du vœu national." He then put forward a plan to make the Assembly aware

1. Journal des Débats..., no. 27.
2. ibid., and O.C., pp. 655-6.
3. Laos's italics.

of the will of the nation, and it is not surprising that this plan was based upon one of Laclès's dearest notions. He proposed that they draw up "une pétition sage mais ferme, non pas au nom de la société, car les sociétés n'ont pas ce droit, mais au nom de tous les bons citoyens de la société". Copies of the petition should be sent throughout the country to all the patriotic societies, "non comme sociétés, mais comme lieu(x) de rassemblement de tous les bons citoyens". All citizens, active and passive, women and minors, should be allowed to sign, "et l'on verra alors si l'assemblée nationale taxera une telle pétition d'être le vœu de quelques factieux, à moins qu'elle ne décide qu'il existe en France vingt-quatre millions neuf cent mille factieux qui veulent y faire la loi." In conclusion, Laclès called upon the Jacobins to form a committee to draw up such a petition.

Bianzat strongly opposed any such idea since, in his view, the Assembly had "décidé positivement que le roi ne pouvait pas être mis en cause." Danton, on the other hand, supported the petition just as strongly. The meeting was just about to adjourn, somewhat inconclusively, when a crowd, estimated to be some four thousand strong, invaded the hall. What happened next is to some extent shrouded in mystery. Certain facts, however, are clear. A spokesman from the crowd stated that they had decided to go to the Champ de Mars the next day and vow never to recognise Louis XVI as king. He urged the Jacobins to join them, "soit en corps, soit par une députation." Then, we are told(1), "plusieurs membres, entre

1. Journal des Débats,... no. 27.

autres M. La Clos, montent à la tribune pour justifier par la démarche du peuple la mesure proposé de signer une petition."(1) After some discussion, it was decided that a committee, the names of the members of which are not given in the Journal des Débats, should be formed to draw up a petition, which should be presented for the club's approval the following morning at eleven o'clock and then be circulated to all the patriotic societies, finally to be presented to the National Assembly.

According to Dard, Caussy, Allen and Braesch(2), Laclos was a member of the drafting committee, along with Brissot and others. They say, quite rightly, that Brissot had left the club before the demonstrators arrived, and that he was informed of his appointment early the following morning, to find the other members waiting for him. For what happened at this meeting these writers depend upon Brissot's own evidence. According to Brissot, his colleagues on the committee were "Laclos, Lantunat(3), Réal et deux autres dont j'ai oublié les noms". He says that no sooner had he arrived at the Jacobin club on the morning of the 16th July than Laclos asked him to draw up the petition. Brissot writes:

1. The possibility of Laclos having himself organised this interruption does not merit discussion (vide Dard 318 & note; Caussy, pp. 223-4).
2. Various suggestions have been made as to the composition of the committee: Dard, p. 319: Laclos; Brissot, Danton, Réal and Ducancel; Allen, O.C., p. 914: the same list as Dard's, with Laclos at the head, "naturellement"; Caussy, p. 225: Lantunat, Sergeant, Danton, Ducancel, and Brissot, to whom he adds Laclos, possibly in his capacity as secretary of the Jacobins; Braesch, Les Pétitions du Champ-de-Mars (15, 16, 17 juillet 1791), in Revue historique, mars-avril and mai-juin 1923, mars-avril, pp. 201-2: same list as Caussy, including Laclos as the proposer of the petition.
3. i.e. Lantunat (vide Braesch, Rev. hist., mars-avril 1923, p. 201).

"Je lui fis observer que ce soin appartient à lui seul qui en a fait la proposition, qui connaît l'esprit dans lequel elle avait été faite; Laclos me répond qu'il a mal dormi et qu'il ne sait ni parler ni écrire quand il n'est pas reposé; il me vante ma facilité d'écrire; on me presse; je cède, car je ne sais pas plus résister aux prières que me défier de leurs motifs, et il ne me vient pas même dans la tête que ce soit ici un nouveau chapitre des Liaisons dangereuses."

Brissot's account is certainly very persuasive. He goes on to say that the petition was completed within less than half an hour, and that Laclos invited him to read it to the assembled club: "Je refuse, mes affaires m'appellent chez moi; il s'en charge"(1). Mme Roland gives a very similar account of these events(2), but hers cannot be considered additional evidence for, as Braesch admits(3), she derived her information from Brissot.

There exists no official text of the petition printed by order of the Jacobins. Brissot, however, later claimed that Laclos added a clause to the original draft, to make the petition declare that its signatories

"... Demandent formellement et spécialement que l'Assemblée nationale ait à recevoir, au nom de la nation, l'abdication faite le 21 juin, par Louis XVI, de la couronne qui lui avait été déléguée, et à pourvoir à son remplacement par tous les moyens constitutionnels"(4).

Here there is a discrepancy between the story as told by Brissot and by Mme Roland. Brissot claims that he knew nothing about this clause until after the petition had been presented to the club(5), whereas Mme Roland says that when the petition was being drafted Laclos "proposa comme dernier article je ne sais quelle clause qui rappelait la royauté, et ménageait une porte à

1. Brissot, Mémoires, Paris, 1830-1832, 4 vols., vol. 4, p. 343.
2. Mme Roland, Mémoires, Paris, 1905, 2 vols., vol. 1, pp. 207-8, & vol. 2, pp. 284-5.
3. Braesch, in Rev. hist., p. 203.
4. Anlard, La Société des Jacobins..., Paris, 1889-97, 6 vols., vol. 3, pp. 19-26 gives complete text. My italics.
5. Brissot, Mémoires, III, 344.

d'Orléans; Brissot étonné la repoussa vivement, et l'autre fort habile l'abandonna avec l'air de n'en avoir pas pesé toute la conséquence; il sentait bien qu'il pourrait toujours l'y faire glisser..."(1) The account given by Mme Roland is far from convincing, for it seems clear that the Jacobins were at this stage fully prepared to accept responsibility for the petition since, despite the invasion of their premises by the mob, all the members of the committee were also members of the club(2). Now, at this time the vast majority of the Jacobins were constitutional monarchists, whereas Mme Roland gives the impression that her friend Brissot and his colleagues were engaged upon the preparation of a frankly republican petition. The only way to prove conclusively whether or not this clause was in fact added later by another hand would be to consult the original manuscript, which has, unfortunately, been lost.

According to Braesch(3), it was Laclos who read the petition to the Jacobins at eleven on the morning of the 16th July. There is no proof of this, nor indeed is there any evidence that Laclos was even present. The facts are that at this morning session, the petition - including the crucial phrase which certainly, as the Constitution stood, opened the way for Orléans to win the regency - was accepted by the Jacobins, and four representatives were appointed to read it from the four corners of the Autel de la Patrie on the Champ de Mars. The republicans in the crowd gathered there immediately saw the Orleanist possibilities of the Jacobin

1. Mme Roland, I, 208.

2. A. Mathiez, Le Club des Cordeliers pendant la Crise de Varennes et le Massacre du Champ de Mars, Paris, 1910, p. 121 & n.2.

3. in Rev. hist., mai-juin, 1923, p. 1.

petition and refused to sign it as it stood(1). The Jacobin representatives would not, however, tolerate any change in the petition, and referred the matter to the evening meeting of the club(2).

At this meeting, Laclos argued that the petition should be maintained as it stood, with the clause "par tous les moyens constitutionnels". He was not, however, as Allen implies(3), alone in taking this line. Indeed, the very fact that the clause was retained shows this, and according to Momoro it was retained by an almost unanimous vote. It was decided, however, (and Laclos was one of those who suggested this), that the petition should not be signed on the Champ de Mars. No alternative arrangements were ever made, for it was learned that the National Assembly had done away with the ambiguity of its earlier decree by issuing another formally recognising Louis XVI as king. This was the end of the petition, which now became illegal.

Much of this account of Laclos's rôle is based on supposition, and there is considerable evidence to justify our drawing a somewhat different picture from that with which we are presented by Brissot and those who accept what he says. The person in the best position to know who had been appointed to the committee was Anthoine, who at the time of the arrival of the mob was presiding over the Jacobins. On the 23rd August 1791, in the evidence he gave to the Tribunal of the Sixth Arrondissement enquiring into the massacre of the Champ de Mars, he stated that this committee was composed of Lanthenas, Sergent, Danton, Ducancel and Brissot, and made no

1. Aulard, Hist. pl. de la Rev. fr., pp. 150-1.

2. Journal des Débats...., 28.

3. O.C., p. 916.

4. Deposition to Trib. of 6th Arrt; in Mathiez, Club des Cordeliers, p. 303.

reference whatsoever to Laclos's having been appointed(1). This statement by Anthoine comes so soon after the event that it must be accepted.

Brissot, however, states quite categorically that Laclos was on the committee. Mathiez argues(2) that this was an "apologie intéressée que Brissot a dû inventer pour se disculper auprès des républicains qui concurent contre lui de violents soupçons quand ils entendirent la lecture de sa pétition au Champ-de-Mars". As for Mme Roland, we have already mentioned that she admits that her evidence came from Brissot himself.

If we assume that Laclos, although not a member of the committee, was present at the drafting of the petition, it is still difficult to believe that he inserted the constitutionalist phrase by trickery. After all, it did cause a considerable amount of discussion, starting at the Champ de Mars, and continuing at the Jacobin club in the evening, and was in fact accepted by the Jacobins. Braesch argues that Brissot, who had made a vigorously republican speech at the club on the 10th July(3), could not possibly have accepted the idea of an Orleanist monarchy only six days later. But, says Mathiez, "c'est précisément cette volte-face qui provoqua les violents soupçons des républicains réunis au Champ-de-Mars! M. Braesch oublie-t-il que le 'républicain' Brissot menaçait les républicains du glaive de la loi, un an plus tard, à la veille même de l'insurrection du 10 août? Et c'est ce saltimbanque, dont les contradictions furent innombrables, qui

1. Mathiez, Le Club des Cordeliers, p. 342.

2. Réponse aux articles de M. Braesch, in Revue hist., sept-oct. 1923, p. 88.

3. Patriote Français, no. 705 and supplement, 15 July 1791.

mériterait croyance"(1). Mathiez, as proof of Brissot's unreliability, refers to the evidence he gave to the tribunal of the Sixth Arrondissement, only a fortnight after the petition. Presented with a copy of the petition as it had been published in his own newspaper, Brissot was quick to point out(2) that this version did not contain the phrase inserted into certain copies by the republicans, to the effect that the signatories swore to recognise as king neither Louis XVI "ni aucun autre"(3). On the contrary, Brissot emphasised that he had "copié dans le Patriote la pétition telle qu'elle avait été adoptée aux Jacobins". He then added that he had played aucune part ni à l'impression, ni à la distribution ni à la signature de cette pétition, qu'il n'a insérée dans les feuilles(4) que comme l'auteur du journal du Patriote français et dans les termes qu'il vient d'expliquer..."(5) This means that he published the petition in the text which included the phrase later attributed by him to Laclès. Brissot's statement to the tribunal was, as Mathiez points out, very misleading, and it would seem to indicate that Mathiez is justified in saying that "le républicain Brissot s'entendait à pratiquer les restrictions mentales"(6), and "se gardait bien de dire 'à la rédaction'"(7). When, later, he was himself on trial, we are told(8) that "il avoue avoir rédigé la fameuse pétition", at the same time claiming that "Laclès, qui y travailla avec lui, y ajouta la phrase dans laquelle on insinuoit que Capet

1. Réponse aux articles de M. Braesch, p. 88.
2. in Mathiez, Le Club des Cordeliers, p. 261.
3. vide Bouche de Fer, 17 July 1791 (no. 95)
4. The petition was printed separately and placed in the newspaper as a loose insert.
5. in Mathiez, Le Club des Cordeliers, pp. 261-2.
6. Mathiez, Réponse aux articles de M. Braesch, in Rev.hist. sept-oct.1923,p.89.
7. Mathiez, Le Club des Cordeliers, p. 262, n. 1.
8. Bulletin du Tribunal criminel révolutionnaire, Paris, 1793, 2e partie, no. 46, 182.

étant censé avoir abdiqué par sa fuite, il falloit lui choisir un successeur; dans cette phrase, dit-il, les amis de la liberté crurent voir une intrigue de Laclos, homme d'affaire(s) de Philippe d'Orléans." Yet this phrase was in the text adopted by the Jacobins and which Brissot had earlier admitted publishing rather than the republican one...

There are one or two other points which should here be made. In the first place, Laclos could not claim any great originality or daring in proposing a petition. Braesch estimates that between the king's flight to Varennes and the massacre of the Champ de Mars there were at least seventeen petitions(1), which means that the one suggested by Laclos was the sixteenth. Secondly, before the tribunal of the Sixth Arrondissement Anthoine, admittedly blessed with hindsight, defined Laclos's proposal as a "pétition très légale" with which he, as president, tried to fob off the excited crowd, in the hope that this would satisfy them and prevent their doing anything rash(2). Even Bianzat, when called upon to give evidence, although he had opposed Laclos's suggestion in the Jacobin club, told the tribunal that Laclos's petition (by which he clearly means the original proposal and not the actual petition itself) "ne fut présentée que comme opinion pour préparer un décret à rendre relativement au roy... L'auteur et les souteneurs de cette motion ne dirent rien en la présence du déposant qui pût être pris comme improbation du décret rendu le même jour, mais comme préparatoire à un décret qu'il croyoient devoir être rendu par addition à celui-là"(3). Thirdly, Laclos was by no

1. Braesch, Les Pétitions du Champ-de-Mars (15. 16. 17 juillet 1791), Revue hist., mai-juin 1923, p. 13.

2. in Mathiez, Le Club des Cordeliers, p. 342.

3. ibid., p. 336.

means the only member to urge the Jacobins, at their evening session of the 16th July, to retain the disputed phrase and, as we have already pointed out, Momoro maintains that at this meeting "la pétition a été adoptée par la presque unanimité sans retranchement"(1). According to Braesch, however, Laclos's attitude at this meeting "suffirait... à lui faire attribuer la paternité du passage en question"(2), a somewhat rash assertion in view of the fact that all we know is that Laclos urged the retention of the phrase, that he was not the only one to do so, and that, moreover, according to Bonneville(3) - scarcely an Orleanist - Laclos made a speech in Brissot's presence in which he implicitly attributed the phrase to this so-called republican(4). Laclos's words, as recorded by Bonneville, were,

"Je pense que les Amis de la Constitution ne peuvent demander le remplacement du roi que par des moyens constitutionnels, ce serait renoncer au plus beau titre, celui d'Amis de la Constitution.

M. Brissot lui-même, Messieurs, qui est pour la république, a senti qu'il ne falloit rien brusquer, qu'on ne pouvoit aspirer à y parvenir que par les moyens constitutionnels."

Then, we are told, Laclos indulged in some loudly applauded praise of Brissot. It is unlikely that Brissot would have allowed these remarks about the necessity of using only strictly constitutional methods to pass if they were untrue.

Finally, reference must be made to the evidence given to the tribunal of the Sixth Arrondissement by Baudouin, who was printer both to the National Assembly and the Jacobins. He refers to a letter, which may or may not be one intended for circularisation with the petition, which was brought to him

1. in Mathiez, Le Club des Cordeliers, p. 303.

2. in Revue hist., mai-juin, 1923, p. 10.

3. Bouche de Fer, 20 juillet 1791 (no. 98).

4. Mathiez, Laclos, Brissot and M. Braesch, in Annales révolutionnaires, sept-oct. 1923, p. 411.

"vers les minuit" on the 16th July for printing. It was addressed to the societies affiliated to the Jacobins, and Baudouin says that on account of its style and content he refused to have anything to do with it, and that he told the representatives of the club that "il les déclaroit garants et responsables des malheurs que ladite lettre pourroit occasionner ainsi que les président et secrétaires qui signeroit ladite lettre." Baudouin went on to say that "ayant, le dimanche 17, le matin, témoigné à M. de La Clos sa surprise d'avoir vu sa signature apposée au bas de la dite lettre comme secrétaire, M. De La Clos lui avoit positivement affirmé que cette signature étoit un faux matériel"(1). Mathiez holds(2) that the letter in question undoubtedly contained the petition as an appendix, and it is certainly true that the Jacobins' original intention was for the petition to be sent out to the affiliated societies to be signed before it was presented to the National Assembly(3). The important fact here is that once the Assembly had destroyed the ambiguity of its earlier decree, Laclos, always on the side of the law, disowned this letter, whether or not the signature it bore was in fact a forgery. We shall have occasion in a very short while to consider Laclos's own claims on this last point.

The account of the Jacobin meeting of the 17th July is prefaced in the Journal des Débats(4) by a note which reads as follows: "La pétition arrêtée dans la séance de vendredi dernier n'ayant pu être rédigée à raison

1. Mathiez, Le Club des Cordeliers, pp. 250-52.
2. Mathiez, Réponse aux articles de M. Braesch, in Revue hist., sept-oct. 1923, p. 89.
3. vide Journal des Débats..., no. 27.
4. Journal des Débats..., no. 28.

de l'affluence du peuple qui avait inondé la salle, cet objet n'a eu aucune suite". In other words, now that the National Assembly had made the legal position clear, the club was beating a hasty retreat and disowning the petition altogether. Anthoine carried this policy through to the tribunal of the Sixth Arrondissement where, after saying that when the crowd invaded the hall "l'idée me vint de leur donner le change au moyen de la pétition de M. La Clos en identifiant cette pétition très légale avec l'objet irrégulier de leur demande", he added, "J'observe que la séance, ayant été précédemment levée, on ne peut pas attribuer les décisions dont j'y ai parlé à la société des amis de la Constitution et que, dans toute cette soirée, il ne s'est rien dit de contraire au respect dû aux lois"(1). There was, however, one very important sequel to these events: the deputies who belonged to the club left, and went over to the Feuillants. Pétion, during the meeting of the 17th, pleaded with the Jacobins to return the club "à sa première institution, à ses premiers règlements", in which case he felt sure that the schism could be ended. The Jacobins decided to circulate to the affiliated societies a statement which Laclos, amongst others, signed, and which he may have written in his capacity as secretary. In this statement the Jacobins declared that their members, "fidèles à l'engagement que leur impose le titre qu'ils ont pris d'Amis de la Constitution, jurent de nouveau de la maintenir de tout leur pouvoir et d'être, ainsi qu'ils l'ont toujours été, soumis aux décrets rendus par l'Assemblée nationale..."(2) A few of those who had left

1. in Mathiez, Le Club des Cordeliers, pp. 342-43.

2. O.C., p. 917.

returned, but the damage had been done, and the others baptised themselves the Société des Amis de La Constitution séante aux Feuillants.

On the 18th July Feydel pointed out that the absent deputies were the founders of the Jacobin club, and that as a result the club's premises and correspondence belonged to them. Laclès supported this view, and urged a speedy decision as to the best means of bringing about a reunion, failing which, he said, it would be necessary "qu'on remette entre les mains des membres dissidents les clefs du local et la correspondance entière"(1). The Journal des Débats goes on to say that at this point several deputies arrived, and that Feydel and Laclès "renouvellent leurs motions et proposent qu'elles fassent l'objet d'une députation que l'on enverra sur-le-champ à l'assemblée des Feuillants, au cas où les moyens de conciliation confiés au zèle des mêmes députés n'auraient point eu le succès désiré". Pétion, however, now argued that those few deputies who had not left the club were as much its founders as those at the Feuillants, and adding that "il semble bien étrange que ceux qui se sont retirés puissent être considérés comme tels, à un point qu'on propose de se soumettre, à leur égard, à des conditions aussi avilissantes." He concluded by advocating individual and private steps to bring about a reconciliation. An unnamed member then remarked that "il est bien étonnant que M. La Clos premier moteur de la pétition qui a servi de prétexte, si elle n'en a pas été la cause, à la scission, soit aussi le premier à proposer une démarche qui, malgré le masque de bien public dont il la couvre, ressemble plutôt à une démarche de vils esclaves qu'à une résolution d'hommes libres." So far

1. Journal des Débats, no. 29.

as we know, Laclos made no reply. Pétion, meanwhile, had left the meeting. When he returned it was to announce that he had spoken to several of the Feuillants, who had told him that they were prepared to welcome into their ranks "tous ceux des Jacobins qui voudroient se soumettre à la formalité d'usage pour la réception"(1). This virtually put an end to all hopes of a reconciliation.

The Journal des Amis de la Constitution appeared on the following day, the 19th July, and in it was a short article by Laclos entitled Supplément aux travaux actuels(2). Laclos opens this article by announcing the facts as they stand: "La question de savoir si le roi serait ou ne serait pas mis en cause vient d'être décidée. La négative a passé à une grande majorité." He then makes an oblique reference to the petition: "On sait quelle était notre opinion à ce sujet. On sait que nous désirons un ajournement, pendant lequel les informations seraient continuées." Principles, he says, have been misunderstood, and "on a pris pour une question de constitution une simple question de fait. En effet, à l'époque de la fuite du roi, la constitution n'existait encore ni dans le droit ni dans la réalité"(3).

France, at this time, was divided into two camps. The majority "ne voulait voir dans le roi qu'un fonctionnaire public, un premier magistrat," whereas "la minorité considérait, au contraire, Louis XVI individuellement et comme descendant des Bourbons. Elle prétendait devoir obéissance à sa personne physique, à sa volonté privée." Louis should either have sided

1. Journal des Débats..., no. 29.

2. Journal des Amis de la Constitution, no. 34; O.C., pp. 656-58.

3. O.C., p. 656.

openly with the minority or accepted a new role in a new France. "Par la première démarche, il se fût déclaré ennemi de la majorité nationale, mais, au moins, il eût agi loyalement; alors il eût été licite de le combattre, de le vaincre, mais non de le mettre en cause, à moins qu'il n'eût violé les droits de la guerre." Had he allied himself wholeheartedly with the national majority and become the "Foi des Français", he would have become obliged to attack the minority of public enemies. Then, and only then, would he have become inviolable(1). There was no middle way. "On ne peut pas être en même temps chef d'une minorité qui se voue à l'avilissement et d'une majorité qui combat pour la liberté. Louis XVI ne pouvait pas davantage attaquer la constitution, avec les armes des ROIS DE FRANCE et se couvrir personnellement de l'égide de ROI DES FRANÇAIS." Louis had not joined with the people, and so the question of his inviolability did not arise: "la loi ne s'appliquait pas à l'espèce." (2)

On the 21st July, the Journal de Paris published a letter from Laclès(3). One cannot ignore the note of genuine disillusionment present in this letter. "Depuis plus de deux ans," Laclès writes, "je suis poursuivi par des calomnies qui se renouvellent à peu près toutes les semaines." At least the latest slanders appear to come from experts in the art, since they have had "l'adresse de les lier à une opinion que j'ai énoncée au milieu d'une société célèbre." He goes on to say that to enter into an argument on such a matter is beneath him. He intends simply to state the facts of the case. This he begins to do by giving an account of his speech of the 15th July,

1. O.C., p. 657.

2. O.C., p. 658.

3. Journal de Paris, no. 202; O.C., pp. 658-60.

emphasising that "décréter qu'on ne jugera pas Louis XVI n'est pas la même chose que décréter qu'on ne verra pas une véritable abdication dans le mémoire(1) de Louis XVI." Sufficient proof of this is the fact that the National Assembly saw fit to follow the decree of the 15th July with the one it issued on the evening of the 16th(2).

Laclès repeats that he had considered that the Assembly had not decided anything concerning Louis because it did not feel conversant with the will of the nation. This was why he had proposed the petition. The only other occasions on which he had spoken on this subject, he says, were when he outlined the project to the crowd of citizens which had invaded the Jacobin club, "pour y faire une proposition qui ne fut ^{pas} agréée", and again on the evening of the 16th, when he had urged that the petition should not be signed on the Champ de Mars, "ni dans aucun rassemblement de citoyens, rassemblement qui faisait partie de la proposition des citoyens." (3) Thus, he denies that it was he who originally read the petition to the club on the morning of the 16th. He emphasises, however, that the disputed phrase concerning the constitutional replacement of Louis XVI was in the original text(4).

"Après avoir dit ce que j'ai fait," he continues, "il me reste à dire ce que je n'ai pas fait:

Je ne suis pas le Rédacteur de la pétition.
 Je n'ai pas signé la pétition
 Je n'ai pas concouru à donner aucune publicité à cette pétition.
 Je n'ai rédigé aucune lettre relative à cette pétition
 ou dans laquelle il fût question de son envoi." (5)

1. i.e. the note left by Louis for La Porte.
2. O.C., p. 658.
3. O.C., p. 659.
4. O.C., p. 660.
5. O.C., p. 660.

This last point, it is worth noting, bears out the evidence given by Baudouin to the tribunal of the Sixth Arrondissement.

Finally, Laclos refers to his motion to the effect that the premises and the correspondence of the Jacobin club should be handed over to the Feuillants. He says that he had put forward this motion because he considered it "la seule mesure... propre à faire cesser une division que je crois très dangereuse pour la chose publique." Since this motion was rejected, he says, "je prends aujourd'hui le parti de me retirer de cette Société, dont je ne cesserai cependant jamais de respecter les intentions patriotiques."⁽¹⁾ This is precisely what he did, and we find the same note of weary disenchantment in a letter which he wrote on the 12th August to Le Patriote Français, which newspaper published it three days later⁽²⁾:

"Monsieur,

On lit sur la couverture du numéro 35 du Journal des Amis de la Constitution, que les lettres, avis, etc., doivent être adressés à M. P. Choderlos. Cet avis, qui a été laissé sans doute par erreur, pourrait faire croire que je continue à rédiger le journal qui porte ce titre, mais qui ne se fait plus sous les auspices de la même Société. Or, je déclare qu'en me retirant de la Société séante aux Jacobins je n'ai jamais prétendu à être de celle séante aux Feuillants. J'ai voulu seulement, dans un temps où l'opinion varie sur les personnes d'une manière si étonnante, m'isoler entièrement et m'en tenir aux principes qui ne varient jamais.

P. CHODERLOS."

Laclos, then, went away to cultivate his own garden. As we look back over these, the most hectic days of his political career, it is clear that there is very grave reason to doubt the accuracy of the account of Laclos's role presented by Dard and Braesch. There is no doubt that Laclos supported the petition which was drawn up at his suggestion so long as it remained legal, but there is no trustworthy evidence that he indulged in treachery to

1. O.C., p. 660.

2. O.C., p. 918 (quoted in full by Allen).

add a clause behind Brissot's back. On the contrary, it seems extremely likely that Brissot was fully responsible for the text, that his subsequent attribution of it to Laclos was far from being disinterested, and that he may well have exploited the unfortunate reputation which had grown up around Laclos - his remark to the effect that he found himself unwittingly in the middle of a new chapter of Les Liaisons dangereuses is indicative of the type of emotion he was trying to arouse. It seems certain that Laclos was not on the committee with Brissot, although this does not entirely preclude the possibility of his being present at the drafting of the petition, perhaps as secretary of the club if not as proposer of the petition. Brissot's evidence is unreliable, as we have shown and, all in all, there is no evidence that Laclos put on his legendary mask of Machiavelli during these events.

Rumours were rife, and Laclos shows in his letter to the Journal de Paris that he was well aware of this fact - but then, ever since the publication of his novel rumours had sprung up whenever his name was mentioned. It would be foolish to try to rest a thesis on such foundations, if only for the reason that the choice of rumours is too great. For instance, the author of the Sabats Jacobites writes shortly after the Champ de Mars affair that "le grand Brissot vouloit établir en France la république sur les ruines de la monarchie, mais il eut la douleur de voir échouer son projet." The Sabats then give a list of the "Dignités de la république de Brissot, et noms de ceux qui doivent en être revêtus", an apocryphal document supposed to have been found among Brissot's papers. Orléans and Laclos both appear in this list, Orléans as "AMIRAL de la République" and Laclos as "CENSEUR de

la République!"(1) If one has to answer the question as to which is the more likely, a republican Laclos or a Brissot who was prepared to join the ranks of the constitutional monarchists(2), then the reply is obvious, and yet it is upon evidence which is basically unsound as that of the Sabats Jacobites that one must base any theory that the petition of the Champ de Mars was the master-stroke of a vast Orleanist conspiracy of which Laclos was the brain. There is, indeed, ridiculously little evidence to support any such notion. The petition seems to have expressed the will of the vast majority of the Jacobins, and one can only ask what sort of magic power Laclos is supposed to have possessed to enable him to persuade them to walk into what was nothing more than a cunningly laid Orleanist trap. At the end of Laclos's political career, then, we find ourselves obliged to say that whatever his influence in the Orléans household may have been, there is insufficient evidence to convict him of leading a sustained Orleanist campaign of conspiracy. At least one of Laclos's contemporaries, Garat, showed some degree of common sense on this point, when he wrote, "Voici toute la chaîne de la démonstration: les Liaisons dangereuses peignent des mœurs affreuses; donc leur auteur est un homme affreux, donc cet homme affreux a conçu, dirigé le plan d'une affreuse conspiration....; je voudrais qu'en paroles claires et courtes, on donnât quelque autre preuve de la conspiration de Laclos que son nom, sa place et son roman."(3)

1. Les Sabats Jacobites, Paris, 1791-2, 3 vols., vol. 2, no. 44, pp. 294 et seq.
2. vide Montjoux, Hist. de la Conspiration de L.-P.-J. d'Orléans, Paris 1796, 3 vols., vol. 3, pp. 142-3: "Brissot qui feignoit comme tant d'autres, de n'être pas orléaniste, et de vouloir une république, était réellement à cette époque un des hommes de d'Orléans. La pétition en est elle-même une preuve...."
3. Garat: De la Conspiration d'Orléans (written in 1797), in Bibliothèque des Mémoires relatifs à l'Histoire de France pendant le 18e siècle (ed. Barrière), Paris, 1862, vol. XXV, p. 430.

7. LACLOS'S SECOND MILITARY CAREER AND HIS IMPRISONMENT (1791-1794)

Laclos continued to live in the Palais Royal. We know that at the beginning of the period under review in this chapter he was still receiving 3000 livres a year from the Duc d'Orléans, although this source of income dried up on 1st October 1792(1). On the 1st June 1791 he began to receive a retirement pension of 1800 livres from the Ministry of War, and in 1792 he inherited from his mother an annual income of 1200-1400 livres. All this however amounted to only a modest total. Laclos himself states in March 1794 that "son revenu actuel est de 1000 à 1200 l., ayant vendu le reste dans le dessein d'acquérir un fond(s) d'industrie qui le met à même de faire vivre sa famille"(2). In the words of Dard, Laclos "vécut jusqu'au dix août dans la gêne entre sa femme, son frère et ses deux enfants qu'il chérissait"(3).

It is interesting to note that about this time many of the Orleanists renounced all political action. The duke's sons were in the army, as were Biron and Valence, Sillery's son-in-law. Latouche was in command of a naval squadron in the Mediterranean, and Orléans himself had sought, although without success, appointment to a commission in both the army and the navy. Caussy asks whether this "empressement au service militaire" denotes "le commencement d'une intrigue qui se dénouera avec la trahison de Dumouriez",

1. Cf. his statemtn after his arrest, dated "16 ventôse an II de la République" (6th March 1794), reproduced by E. Champion in his edn. of De l'Éducation des Femmes, Paris, 1903, pp. 118-9. His salary from Orléans had been 6000 livres in 1789, 4000 in 1790.

2. *ibid.*, loc. cit.

3. Dard, p. 333.

or merely an affectation of patriotism at the moment when "la Patrie est en danger"(1). He concludes, very reasonably, that "il est vraisemblable que, si les chefs de l'armée pensaient à un coup d'État militaire, d'Orléans ignorait tout et n'était pas d'humeur à les seconder"(2).

Laclos, although he had retired from the arena of national politics, continued to play a part in those of his section of Paris. We learn from the same official document concerning Laclos after his arrest that, "nommé commissaire à la Commune pour l'affaire du 10 août, il en a été rejeté par le scrutin épuratoire, motivé sur ce qu'il avait été un des auteurs de la scission de la Société des Jacobins, qu'il quitta pour se réunir aux Feuillants(3). Dans notre section, il fut un de ceux qui parla contre la Commune du 10 août. Nommé électeur, il n'accepta point; ce fut dans ce temps qu'il fut appelé à une fonction militaire"(4). The fact is that Laclos was included in Danton's list of thirty Commissaires du Pouvoir Exécutif appointed on the 29th August 1792(5). France at this time was being invaded, and Laclos was sent to Châlons to act as the government's representative with the decrepit marshal Lückner, who was old and, moreover, suspect. Laclos was given the pay of a "maréchal de camp" whilst fulfilling this function.

1. Caussey, pp. 238-9.

2. Caussey, p. 239.

3. We have shown that Laclos declared that he had no intention of joining the Feuillants.

4. Section de la Montagne, 16 ventôse an II; reprod. in Champion, op. cit., p. 120.

5. Dard, p. 335.

Servan, the Minister of War, wished Mœckner to be replaced by Kellermann, but Kellermann, because of the veteran marshal's popularity with the troops, would accept the command of the Army of the Centre only on the understanding that Mœckner was promoted generalissimo(1). Servan agreed to this, but made sure that Mœckner should be in a position to do only the minimum harm by his ineptitude. "Servan "le fait placer en effet à la tête de toutes les armées pour qu'il n'en puisse en commander aucune effectivement, et il l'éloigne du théâtre des opérations en l'installant à Châlons. Là, il ne pourra que donner des conseils aux généraux placés théoriquement sous ses ordres et, pour plus de sûreté, l'adjudant général Laclos lui est adjoint pour contresigner toutes ses lettres."(2) Laclos arrived at Châlons to take up his appointment on the 8th September.

At this time, "Châlons n'offrait plus qu'un vaste chaos où s'agitait une multitude rebelle à toute discipline"(3). The bands of irregulars gathered there quite surpassed Mœckner's comprehension. "Le vieux condottière," says Dard(4), "incapable de comprendre l'idée nationale et, encore moins, l'idée révolutionnaire, pensant d'ailleurs comme la plupart des Français qu'on traversait une crise, rusait... avec le monstre qui devait le dévorer." Nevertheless, the Prussian mercenary insisted upon taking his rôle seriously, and was determined to exercise his command. There appeared on the walls of Châlons a printed order, bearing Mœckner's name, which instructed those who were armed but not properly organised in a military fashion to return to their homes. This order applied to the majority of the volunteers. On the 10th September Laclos sent a report

1. 29th August 1792.
2. Libermann(H.), La Défense nationale à la Fin de 1792..., Paris 1927, pp.89-90.
3. A.Chuguet, Les Guerres de la Rév., vol. III, La Retraite de Brunswick, Paris, 1887, p. 37.
4. Dard, p. 349.

on this affair to Servan(1). In it he says that he has spoken to Lückner about it: "il s'est mis à pleurer, je n'exagère rien; il m'a juré, non pas une fois mais trente, qu'il n'avoit jamais signé cet ordre; il m'a dit, en propres termes, que l'on me montre ma signature et je donne ma tête; il m'a prié de vous écrire pour vous désabuser et vous tranquilliser à ce sujet: je lui ai répondu que j'allois au département me faire représenter l'original; il y a consenti; il m'en a prié." The result of his investigation, says Laclos, was that he was shown the original order and found that it did in fact bear Lückner's signature. "À présent, général," he adds, "je vous demande ce qu'on peut faire d'un pareil homme... Demain je reprendrai d'autres détails sur la même personne et je chercherai s'il y a un autre parti que la destitution qui puisse ne pas compromettre la chose publique."

On the 11th, Laclos again wrote to the ministry, this time to Servan's aide, Lacuée, and in this letter he made a concrete proposal concerning what should be done about the generalissimo. He acknowledged that Lückner still retained something of his popularity with the troops, but saw this only as an additional danger, "car ses serments et ses pleurs, qu'il me paroît prodiguer sans mesure, le serviront à merveille auprès des troupes, pour rejeter sur les autres les sottises qu'il fera." He further admitted that Lückner had some sound military ideas, and added, "par parenthèse", that he was "absolument de son avis, contraire à celui du général Kellermann, sur l'idée qu'a ce dernier d'attaquer en ce moment." But despite that, Laclos told Lacuée, "vous n'avez, j'ose vous l'assurer, de meilleur parti à prendre que de mettre le plus tôt possible M. le Maréchal en état de n'être pas pendu en arrivant

1. Archives historiques de la Guerre.

à Paris, de l'y mander aussitôt pour le consulter et de l'y garder jusqu'à la fin de la campagne; là, ses actions seront neutralisées et ses connaissances ne le seront point; là, et là seulement, il pourra être utile sans être dangereux. Je livre cet important objet à vos réflexions et vous demande en grâce d'en causer avec Servan".(1) Billand-Varenne, who had earlier crossed swords with Laclos during the crisis brought on by the flight of Louis XVI(2), was also a commissioner at Châlons, and whilst remaining suspicious of Laclos he shared the latter's views concerning Lückner: "Laclos n'est pas lui-même un être en qui on puisse avoir une confiance aveugle; mais Lückner est un hors d'œuvre, il fait pitié. Conserver cette machine étrangère ou elle est placée, c'est se changer d'une responsabilité terrible et compromettre le sort de nos armées."(3)

Servan agreed with Laclos that something must be done about the old marshal, and recalled Lückner, who left Châlons on the 20th September and arrived in Paris on the 22nd, still accompanied by Laclos. Servan invited him to "éclaircir le conseil de ses avis, ce qu'il pourra faire plus utilement dans la capitale qu'à Châlons, vu la fermentation qui règne dans cette ville."(4)

On the 20th September, the day before the abolition of the monarchy in France, the invading Prussian army was brought to a standstill and then forced to retreat. It has been suggested by Dard that Laclos was responsible

1. Letter to Lacuée, 11 Sept. 1792. Archives historiques de la Guerre.

2. vide supra, pp. 209-210.

3. Billand-Varennes to Danton, Révolutions de Paris, XIII, 492. Quoted by Libermann, op. cit., p. 91.

4. 34th session of the Conseil Exécutif, 22nd Sept. 1792, in Aulard, Recueil des Actes du Comité de Salut Public, Paris, 28 vols. 1889, I, 59.

for this victory(1), or that if he was not exactly "le véritable vainqueur de Valmy, il fut du moins à cette heure critique un des meilleurs agents de la défense nationale"(2). This suggestion originates with Henry Céard, who published two of Laclos's letters to the Ministry of War in 1885.(3) Céard based his claim of Laclos's over-riding importance in the victory at Valmy on his letter to Servan dated eleven o'clock in the evening of the 19th. We shall have occasion to refer to this letter as we briefly attempt to determine to what extent Laclos was the unsung hero of the day on which "the national army won its first victory"(4).

That he worked hard at his job whilst he was in Châlons there can be no doubt. In a sense it is true, as Chuquet says, that "le chef réel de ce rassemblement fut Choderlos de Laclos... Dès son arrivée à Châlons il craignit un désastre"(5). Hence his opposition to Mackner's plan to dismiss the volunteers - although it must be said that Laclos was far from being alone in his view on this point. It was he who set about organising the supply of provisions, and who put some of the volunteers under canvas. It was he too who set about bringing to fruition a favourite idea of Servan's, the manufacture and distribution of pikes(6). This, however, is very far from being such a rôle as could be described as instrumental in

1. Dard entitles his 12th chap. Le Vainqueur de Valmy.
2. Dard, p. 362.
3. in L'Intermédiaire des Chercheurs et Curieux, 25 sept. 1885.
4. J. M. Thompson, Fr. Rev., p. 314.
5. Chuquet, Retraite de Brunswick, p. 37.
6. Laclos to Servan, 12 sept.

bringing about victory.

Nevertheless, he did have tactical ideas of his own, and on the 14th September he sent Servan a Projet de dispositions à prendre en cas d'échec(1), designed to avoid a pitched battle in an untenable position. Laclos realised that, in France's present state, a victory with heavy losses would have been as disastrous as a defeat. He recommended a war of attrition: the three French armies should retreat towards Paris, and "devront chasser en avant d'elles toutes les subsistances et brûler celles qu'elles ne pourroient amener. Il seroit bon aussi qu'elles menassent avec elles des brigades de pionniers manies de pioches pour dépaver les routes et répandre les pavés sur toute la largeur du chemin. Si on a du temps, on coupera les routes par des pavés."

Nevertheless, Dard admits that "la jonction des armées françaises qui devait assurer à Valmy le triomphe de la Révolution et la délivrance de la France fut d'abord tout à fait étrangère aux prévisions de Servan et de Laclos"(2). When Beurnonville joined Dumouriez with 10,000 troops, Laclos was positively annoyed, describing this as "une malheureuse suite de l'insatiable manie du général Dumouriez d'attirer tout à lui. Quand il étoit au camp de Maulde, il lui falloit toutes les troupes de la France... Il les faudroit à Moulins ou à Bourges s'il y commandoit."(3) On the 14th, Dumouriez found himself in trouble, his flank having been turned by the Prussians, and there was a grave risk of panic spreading throughout the French forces. Dumouriez, therefore, had to be assisted as quickly as possible. "Dès lors Laclos n'hésite plus et, de concert avec Servan,

1. Reprod. in full by Gaussey, p. 247, n. 1.

2. Dard, pp. 357-8.

3. Laclos to Servan, 11 Sept. 1792.

travaille de toutes se forces à la jonction"(1). On the 19th, in the letter by which Céard set particular store, Laclos was able, with obvious relief, to tell Servan, "La réunion est faite. Je recois à 9h. $\frac{1}{2}$ du soir un courrier de M. Dumouriez; il n'a pas été attaqué.... J'espère qu'enfin je dormirai cette nuit sur l'une et l'autre oreille." This, however, does not mean that the junction of the armies was the realisation of some long-thought-out plan of Laclos's. Far from it: as we have shown, the contrary is true.

Moreover, the campaign, as we have said, ended victoriously for France on the 20th September. At eleven o'clock on the evening of the 19th, in this same letter, Laclos was able to write that "il est fort pressant d'arrêter un plan à terminer glorieusement la campagne." On the following day he left for Paris with Lückner, and it was in Paris, on the 22nd, that he heard the news of the victory. This scarcely indicates that Laclos had the situation completely under control, or that the victory, won in his absence, was the result of any plan of his. The concentration of troops which made victory possible was brought about largely by accident. Indeed, accident played a considerable part in the victory. As Dard himself says, "Dans cette étonnante campagne, chacun marcha de surprises en surprises. Un dieu capricieux déjoua tous les plans, confondit toutes les combinaisons et, pour les acteurs les plus avertis, pour les spectateurs les plus pénétrants, se plut sans cesse à faire triompher le hasard."(2)

As a result of all this, one cannot but agree with Chuquet when he writes of Céard's claims for Laclos that "le rôle de Laclos n'a pas eu

1. Dard, 358.
2. Dard, p. 361.

Laclos, accompanied by his wife, set off for Toulouse, which Servan had chosen as his headquarters, towards the end of October. There he was for a while virtually commander-in-chief, for Servan was still confined to his sick-bed. He had very little to command, however, for although the Army of the Pyrenees had officially come into existence, Laclos discovered that it was little more than a paper army(1). The Convention sent six commissioners out to look into matters, and in their honour the citizens of Toulouse ceremonially planted a tree of liberty in the Place Rouaix on the 19th November, under the presidency of the generals Laclos and Dubouquet. A contemporary account of this ceremony informs us that "les citoyennes Dubouquet et Laclos vinrent attacher à cet arbre auguste des rubans tricolores avec une grace qui donna un nouveau prix à cette marque de leur civisme"(2). One of the commissioners was Carnot, and he protested most vigorously to the Convention about the lack of troops and provisions of the Army of the Pyrenees(3).

Finally, on the 23rd November, Pache, the new Minister of War, ordered Laclos to divide his army into two, taking one half of Perpignan whilst Dubouquet took the other to Bayonne, so that the two principal passes through the mountains should be guarded. Laclos immediately wrote to the minister to oppose this plan, declaring that whatever orders he might receive, he would obey "avec autant de soin que de zèle, convaincu que

1. vide Dard, pp. 365-7.

2. Journal universel et impartial de la Haute-Garonne and Affiches de Toulouse, no. 94, 24 nov. 1792. Correspondance de Carnot (ed. Charavay) I, p. 263.

3. Dard, p. 368.

l'obéissance aux fonctionnaires publics est éminemment une vertu républicaine", but at the same time saying that he felt justified in objecting, "avec la franchise d'un homme libre", to the present plan(1). He saw tactical risks in separating the two halves of the army in this way, and suggested to the Minister that he must be well aware of the "parti qu'a tiré le maréchal de Beauveau d'un débouché plus central, pour traverser les mêmes montagnes dans la guerre pour la Régence." Apart from the tactical risks, there was a political risk, for Spain would inevitably be alarmed by such a disposition of French troops, and as a result would speed up her preparations for war. He therefore suggested that the troops be kept in the centre and that Toulouse be retained as French headquarters. Servan, who had chosen Toulouse in the first place, supported him in this, and Pache gave way. Dard points out that when war finally broke out between France and Spain, in March 1793, "le premier soin de Beurnonville, qui remplaçait Pache, et de Servan, fut de faire occuper le défilé central du Val d'Aran, que le coup d'oeil militaire de Laclos avait aussitôt désigné à l'attention du ministre"(2).

After the retreat of the Prussians, "une folie héroïque"(3) seized France, and her armies crossed the frontiers in all directions, except in the direction of Spain. The Army of the Pyrenees, still sadly lacking in numbers and supplies, alone seemed neglected. Pache, quite sensibly,

1. A.A.G., 26 nov. 1792.
2. Dard, p. 369.
3. Dard, p. 369.

hoped that there would not be war with Spain, for he did not wish to see the whole of Europe united against France. Laclos, on the other hand, had written as early as the 19th November that in his view "il importe à la gloire et même à la sûreté de la République française de déclarer la guerre au gouvernement espagnol." On the 1st December he returned to the same question, writing to Pache:

"Voulez-vous la guerre avec l'Espagne, hâtez-vous de rassembler une formidable armée vers les Pyrénées. - Voulez-vous la paix avec l'Espagne, hâtez-vous plus encore de former une armée encore plus formidable vers les Pyrénées.

Êtes-vous sûr d'avoir la paix avec l'Espagne seulement, hâtez-vous d'assembler une formidable armée vers les Pyrénées; vous la dirigerez aisément vers l'Italie et elle sera, au besoin, une auxiliaire déterminante pour la Turquie.

Enfin, Êtes-vous sûr de la paix avec toutes les puissances méridionales, hâtez-vous encore de rassembler une armée vers les Pyrénées, car elle ne sera comptée pour rien par les Puissances du Nord, et cependant, si elle est organisée vers la fin de février, elle sera ou pourra être en mesure d'agir efficacement en Allemagne dans les premiers jours d'avril, et ce surcroît inattendu de forces peut et doit décider les succès les plus efficaces."

Pache noted on this letter, "Mérite la plus grande attention", but by the 7th March 1793, when Barère succeeded in persuading the Convention that Spain meant war, Laclos was no longer with the Army of the Pyrenees.

It was about this time (the end of 1792) that Laclos heard that he had been appointed to the Governor-generalship of French possessions in India. His brother, who had spent a good part of his life in India, was appointed by Monge(1) "chef de la partie des colonies" at the Admiralty, and may well have played some part in the negotiations which resulted in

1. Gaussy (p. 256) suggests Monge as a possible original of Valmont.

Monge's requesting Pache, on the 30th November, to have Laclos recalled to Paris(1). On the 13th December, before leaving Toulouse, Laclos, along with Carnot and Servan, was present at a patriotic theatrical spectacle in which the following words were sung to the tune of the

Carmagnole:

"Le grand Inquisiteur attend
Notre sans-culotte Servan
Qui l'endoctrinera
Et bientôt lui fera
Danser la Carmagnole.
Vive le son,
Vive le son
Du canon.

Brave homme, l'Espagne à ta voix
Prendra l'égalité des droits;
Tous la méditeront
Et bientôt ils sauront
Danser la Carmagnole (etc.)

Ne prends à ce peuple ignorant
Que ses croix et ses saints d'argent.
Fais aux moines tonsus
Autour de leurs agnus
Danser la Carmagnole (etc.)

De tous ces hommes que voilà,
Amis, Laclos s'en va déjà;
Il va, au delà des mers,
Faire aux peuples divers
Danser la Carmagnole (etc.)

Il est auteur, guerrier, françois,
Que de titres à nos regrets!
Partout on l'aimera,
Car partout il fera
Danser le Carmagnole (etc.) (2)

1. Garat: De la Conspiration d'Orléans (Bib. des Mém. relatifs à l'Hist de Fr. pendant le XVIII^e Siècle, (vol. XXV, p. 430, written in 1797) says "Je sais, et je le sais avec certitude, qu'à la fin de 1792 and en 1793, Laclos a sollicité pendant plusieurs mois, and avec beaucoup d'instance, pour être chargé d'une expedition à Pondichéry."
2. Journal universel et impartial de la Haute-Garonne..., no. 100, 15 déc. 1792. Corr. de Carnot, (ed. Charavay), I, 307.

When Laclos returned to Paris he occupied his old apartment in the Palais Royal, and so he was no doubt once again in contact with the Duc d'Orléans. There is no evidence of any real collaboration between the two of them, however. Laclos's ideas on foreign policy had changed since the days of his mission to London, and in the report of the session of the Comité de Défense Nationale held on Friday the 25th January 1793 we are told that

"Le citoyen Laclos, conformément à l'invitation qui lui a été faite, se rend au Comité; le ministre de la Marine (i.e. Monge) s'y rend également. L'un et l'autre transmettent leurs réflexions et leurs avis sur les moyens les plus avantageux et efficaces de faire la guerre aux Anglais.

Le citoyen Laclos pense que le meilleur parti à prendre est d'embarquer d'Europe des forces imposantes pour l'Inde.

Le ministre est d'un avis contraire.

Le comité discute les raisons pour et contre et se réserve une nouvelle et plus ample conférence." (1)

The discussion was renewed on the following day (2), but no decision was taken. According to Dumouriez (3), "il s'agissait, dans cette expédition de Laclos, de s'emparer du cap de Bonne-Espérance et du Ceylan pour ensuite se joindre à Tippoo-Sahib et tomber sur le Bengale." Such a grandiose plan, obviously, called for a considerable number of troops and warships, and was more fitted to a man of the calibre of Napoleon than to Laclos.

Laclos sought appointment to the rank of lieutenant-general, pointing out "l'utilité publique d'investir d'un grade éminent l'homme revêtu des pouvoirs et de la confiance de la République auprès des princes de l'Asie."

1. Anlard, Recueil des Actes du Comité de Salut Public, vol. II, p. 9.
2. *ibid.*, II, p. 14.
3. Dumouriez, Mémoires, 2 vols., Hambourg et Leipzig, 1794, I, 105.

Pache agreed to this, but made the promotion conditional upon Laclos's embarking upon the expedition, saying that it would take effect from the moment that he was at sea and opened his sealed orders(1). The expedition never took place, and Laclos's fortunes from this point on took an unhappy turn.

Towards the middle of March, Paris was rife with rumours that the manoeuvres of Dumouriez's army were part of a plot whereby he was to march on Paris and re-establish the Constitution of 1791, which, of course, legally meant that Orléans would become regent for the Dauphin(2). One result of this was that on the 31st March a warrant was issued for the arrest of Laclos, amongst other ex-Orleanists including Mme de Genlis(3). On the 4th April Orléans was himself arrested.

The warrant issued for Laclos's arrest was put into effect on the following day, and he was thrown into the Abbaye prison. His first taste of prison life was not of long duration, however, for on the 10th May he was removed by order of the Comité de Sûreté Générale of which Alquier, his friend of La Rochelle days, was president. Nevertheless, he was not given complete freedom by any means, but was placed under house arrest in his apartment in the Palais Royal, now the Palais Égalité, and obliged to pay the wages of his guard(4).

Laclos's next move was to turn his attention to a project which he had already brought to the notice of the Conseil Exécutif Provisoire on

1. A.A.G. Laclos dossier.
2. J.M. Thompson, The French Revn., pp.342-4; Gaussy, pp.260-1; Dard, pp.381-4.
3. Aulard, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 591-2.
4. Reprod. in Champion's edn. of De l'Éd. des Femmes, document XV, p. 137.

the 28th March, only four days before his arrest, but which had been in his head ever since 1786 and his work of fortifying the Ile d'Aix(1). The official report of the meeting tells us that the Conseil, having been informed that Laclos "a proposé de donner des moyens nouveaux pour augmenter l'effet des boulets de canon, arrête que le ministre de la guerre invitera ce citoyen à se concerter avec lui pour faire faire au plus tôt les expériences nécessaires, pour vérifier l'avantage de cette découverte et en tirer tout le parti possible pour la défense de la République"(2) Dalbarade, who had succeeded Monge at the Admiralty, instructed that these experiments should be carried out at La Fère, and on the 20th August Laclos, still officially under arrest, was allowed to leave Paris to supervise the experiments. On the 6th September he was given orders to leave for Rochefort to continue the experiments begun at La Fère(3) in collaboration with Berthollet and Guyten-Morveau. On the 20th September he resigned his commission as a general, ostensibly on the grounds of ill-health but probably really to avoid imminent dismissal(4). Laclos then requested the use of "le parc et les bâtiments du petit château de Meudon" for his experiments, and on the 9th October this suggestion was passed on by Dalbarade to Paré, the Minister of the Interior, and subsequently accepted.(5).

On the 4th November, however, as Laclos was about to set out from the Palais Royal for the Butte Montmartre, "où il devoit trouver le ministre de

1. *ibid.*, document V, p. 124.
2. Anlard, *Recueil des Actes.....*, II, pp. 556-7.
3. in Champion, *op. cit.*, document XIII, p. 134.
4. A.A.G. Laclos dossier.
5. in Champion *op. cit.*, document VII, p. 127 and document IV, p. 123.

la Marine et deux membres du Comité de Salut Public pour une expérience de guerre fort importante"(1), he was shown a warrant for his arrest and imprisonment in La Force, "ou toute autre maison de détention". The magistrate and his companions searched Laclos's apartment in the "Palet égalité"(sic), and sealed his desk(2). Marie Poquet, Mme Laclos's waiting-woman, was entrusted with the task of ensuring that the desk was not tampered with, and was given 20 sols a day for her pains. Laclos was soon transferred to Picpus.

The experiments with which Laclos had been concerned and which, although they were never completed, were reasonably successful as far as they went, were with the boulet creux, or hollow cannonball. These were intended primarily for use against ships, although land targets were also used in the experiments. The principle was the same as that of the mortar, and had up to that time been put into practice only against infantry. In naval warfare the solid cannonball alone was used, and its chief disadvantage was that the type of hole it caused was easily blocked; indeed, says Caussy(3), "il y avait à bord de chaque vaisseau des disques de bois de divers calibres que des équipes de calfats adaptaient pendant le combat aux trous creusés par les boulets." The hollow ball, on the other hand, would splinter and cause far more serious damage, and in the view of Patrice Mahon, himself an artillery officer(4), "ces expériences de la Fère méritent... d'être citées comme

1. Report of the Section de la Montagne, 4e région, *ibid.*, document I, pp.114-5; and *ibid.*, doct. III, a letter from Chappatte, Dalbrade's aide, to Laclos, fixing appointment for this experiment, 3.11.93, p. 122.

2. *ibid.*, doct. I, pp. 114-5.

3. Caussy, p. 263.

4. P. Mahon, Les Services de Choderlos de Laclos, in Le Carnet de la Sabretache, no. 100, 30 avril., 1901, p. 236.

réalisant pour la première fois l'emploi contre les obstacles de l'obus...., et comme inaugurant la longue série des recherches consacrées depuis à cet important sujet." Rabbe's view is somewhat jaundiced: "la chose fut abandonnée, et elle est aujourd'hui au nombre des inventions oubliées qui nous reviendront un jour de l'étranger."(1)

Conditions in Picpus were, normally, by no means harsh. It was a place in which were confined "les suspects plutôt que les accusés véritables", and the prisoners there "jouissaient en droit de la liberté promise aux suspects, c'est-à-dire qu'ils n'avaient point de gardes et que leurs parents et amis pouvaient entrer dans la prison, et en sortir aussi aisément que de chez eux."(2) But, of course, during the Terror conditions were not normal, and Laclos's position was by no means a comfortable one. On the 31st October twenty-one Girondins, including Brissot, Sillery, Carra and Fauchet went to the guillotine, to be followed on the 7th November by Philippe Égalité. Laclos may well have expected to follow Brissot and Orléans, since his name was inextricably intertwined with theirs in connection with the petition of the Champ de Mars. This did not happen, however, although the threat hung over him for the first three months, and he was allowed very little contact with the outside world.

On the 26th December Mme Laclos wrote to the Comité de Sûreté Générale(3) to say that her tenure of the apartment in the Palais Royal was due to expire

1. Rabbe, etc., Biographie universelle & portative des contemporains...., Paris, 1834, v. III, p. 27, col. 2. This was echoed by Arsène Houssaye, Galerie du 18e s., 3e série, Paris, 1858, pp. 236-7

2. Caussy, p. 275.

3. in Champion's de L'Éd. des Femmes, document XIV, pp. 135-6.

on the 1st January, and that she could not afford to pay the increased rent demanded by her new landlady, "la citoyenne Saint-Val, l'aînée" (who had come into possession of the apartment as a result of the confiscation of Philippe Egalité's property). Mme Laclos therefore intended to leave the Palais Royal, and requested that the official seals be removed and that any incriminating evidence, if such should be found, be placed before the proper authorities. As a result of this, Laclos was brought out of Picpus on the 29th December to attend the lifting of the seals. In the official report of this event(1) we are told that the desk was opened and that the papers which it contained, "dans lesquels il ne s'en est trouvé aucuns suspects", were inspected. They were found to include a letter from Bouchotte, the Minister of War, dated 21st September, accepting Laclos's resignation as brigadier-general, and another dated 1st October from Boncourt, of the Fifth Division of the Ministry for the Navy and the Colonies, accepting his resignation from the post of "gouverneur des Établissement du Cap". Laclos was then taken back to Picpus, after requesting that these facts should be carefully noted in the official report. Mme Laclos remained at the Palais Royal, and indeed she did not leave it until the spring when, on the 2nd May 1794, she was obliged as an "ex-noble" to leave Paris for Versailles(2), where she took up residence at 13, Rue de la Chancellerie.

The first evidence we have that Laclos was able to communicate with his family from prison takes the form of a note which he sent to his wife on 8th April, 1794 after more than three months in prison. The tone of this letter seems almost casual:

1. in Champion's De L'Éd. des Femmes, document XVIII, pp. 141-2.
2. Lettres inédites, p. 31, and L. de Chauvigny's footnote.

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"19 germinal.

Du Corridor Challier, no. 7.

J'envoie, ma chère amie, le commissionnaire savoir de tes nouvelles, et te donner des miennes sans avoir d'autre objet à remplir. Mais par occasion je le charge d'un petit cadeau. Mes cheveux me gênoient pour attacher la boucle de ma perruque, je les ai fait couper ce matin, et j'ai pensé que peut-être ils te feroient plaisir. À mon âge, ils ne repousseront plus et il m'a paru juste qu'avant les premiers cheveux de tes enfants, tu eusses les derniers de leur père. C'est un petit monument de tendresse que je te prie de conserver. Je t'aime et embrasse du meilleur de mon cœur.

À la citoyenne Choderlos Laclos, cœur des Fontaines, Maison Égalité, no. 1110, Paris."(1)

Mme Laclos, in a note(2), explains that "il devait aller à la mort, celle du tribunal révolutionnaire, c'était tout ce qu'il pouvait risquer de m'écrire. La mort de Robespierre au 9 thermidor, les événements qui succédèrent, l'empêchèrent de subir sa condamnation; il resta néanmoins en prison plus de 6 mois après cette lettre qu'il croyait alors être la dernière qu'il m'écrivait." The hair which he sent her, she explains, was preserved in a locket along with some of her own hair and some of her children's(3). So once again the question must be asked of how Laclos managed to escape the guillotine. The short answer is that we do not know. Dard suggests (4) that during the early days of his imprisonment he benefited from Danton's protection, and this may well be true; but on the 5th April, just before Laclos wrote this letter to his wife, Danton was himself executed along with many of his friends. On the basis of this hypothesis, one would expect Laclos to follow Danton to the scaffold, and indeed it would seem that when he wrote to his wife Laclos himself expected to do so. This fate, however, did not befall him. One

1. Lettres inédites, p. 29.

2. ibid., pp. 29-30.

3. There is a photograph of this locket in Vailland's Laclos par lui-même, p. 159.

4. Dard, p. 398.

L. I. /

explanation of his escape is contained in a rumour of the time(1) to the effect that whilst in prison Laclos wrote some of Robespierre's speeches for him, and that in Dard's words, "ainsi le dictateur aurait sauvé l'écrivain, qui limait et polissait ses phrases inimitables." Replying to the suggestion that Laclos's character and Robespierre's vanity are in themselves sufficient to explode this theory, Rabbe says(2):

"Nous pensons au contraire que l'esprit de Laclos, dont le caractère était une extrême souplesse et une aptitude très remarquable aux choses les plus diverses, ne répugne pas plus à cette explication que la vanité de Robespierre; car si Robespierre avait beaucoup de vanité, il est tout aussi certain qu'il avait très peu de talent comme orateur, et que plusieurs de ses discours étonnèrent les hommes qui le connaissent le mieux, tant ils paraissent au-dessus de sa portée."

Arsène Houssaye echoes the same theme(3) and, although at first he appears noncommittal on this point, he concludes that "Robespierre nous paraît tout entier en La Clos. Il ne faut pas oublier que, dans ses trois ou quatre discours importants, Robespierre a surpris tout le monde, surtout ses amis, qui ne croyaient pas à son éloquence." Faced with the problem of Laclos's failure to claim the authorship of these speeches when Robespierre was dead, Houssaye states, rather weakly:

"La Clos était au-dessus de cette gloire, encore dangereuse; et puis, c'eût été avouer une lâcheté (i.e. the purchase of his life). Il faut bien croire d'ailleurs, puisqu'il s'est trouvé quelqu'un pour écrire cela, que La Clos l'ait dit, ne fût ce qu'une fois."

If this were sufficient proof, and all one required as proof of any of the allegations made against Laclos was the fact that some one had made the allegation, then indeed one would have to paint Laclos as a new Mephisto-

1. vide Dard, p. 399.
2. Rabbe, Biographie universelle et portative des contemporains, III, p. 27, col. 2.
3. A. Houssaye, Galerie du 18e s., 3e série, 6e édn., Paris, 1858, p. 237.

phases. Gérard Walter, in his work on Robespierre(1), makes no reference to this legend of Laclos's continued machinations and, moreover, it is scarcely true that Laclos's style is similar to that of Robespierre. Dard, after declaring that he can see very little akin to Laclos in "la plate rhétorique de Robespierre", makes the point that "si Laclos avait écrit les discours de Robespierre, celui-ci ne le lui aurait jamais pardonné, La vanité littéraire de cet émule de Rousseau se fût vengée comme la vanité amoureuse de Valmont. Un tel rôle n'eût été pour Laclos un arrêt de mort. Il connaissait trop bien le cœur humain pour s'y méprendre."(2) There seems little possibility of there being any truth in this story.

Conditions improved in Plopus, and by the beginning of May Laclos could correspond with his wife with comparative ease, and these letters provide us with valuable information concerning his private life and feelings. We shall consider them in a later chapter. Suffice it to say here that he kept himself occupied in prison by playing cards or draughts, by reading and by teaching calculus and book-keeping to some of his fellow-prisoners, amongst whom was Saiffert, Orléans's physician. To do this, Laclos taught in the evening what he himself had learned in the morning. He also speaks of a French grammar upon which he had started work, but says of this work that "sans le détruire, je l'ai suspendu"(3). He explains this by saying that he has not, in prison, the tranquillity of mind necessary to produce the clear style essential to such a work. This, no doubt, is a reasonable

1. G. Walter, Robespierre, 2 vols., Paris, 1936-9.

2. Dard, p. 399.

3. Lettres inédites, pp. 65-8; vide also pp. 72-3.

enough excuse, in view of his circumstances, but one cannot help feeling that here one has hit upon something which goes far deeper than Laclos seems prepared to admit, and which his wife may well have realised - for she urges him to take up his grammar once again. This cry was to be echoed in later years, and it is a fact which can scarcely be unconnected with this that, after Les Liaisons dangereuses, Laclos succeeded in producing no work of any size or importance, and indeed several of his works are unfinished. Laclos complains of an inability to bring his creative imagination to life, and hints at a kind of mental laziness which may well go some way towards explaining why he never wrote another novel, although he did later have a plan for one. On the 27 prairial (15th June 1794), he remarks that "quand il faut tirer de son propre fonds, le fonds ne se trouve pas toujours productif, soit par épuisement, soit par aridité! J'ai donc mis, pour le moment, mon esprit en jachères et je le fume avec quelques connoissances que je tâche d'acquérir, ensuite je le labourerai, et peut-être produira-t-il encore quelques récoltes dans l'arrière saison."(1)

He urges his wife to devote herself to the writings of the stoic Seneca, and although he shows himself to be deeply worried when for a few days her letters are delayed, he urges her not be alarmed when his are late in arriving, and on the 24 Prairial (12 June 1794) he tells her that "en cas de maladie, ou autre accident qui me serait survenu, ce seroit positivement alors que tu en serois informée"(2)

1. Lettres inédites, pp. 65-8; vide also pp. 72-3.

2. Ibid., pp. 39, 49, 56-8, 64. The "accident" referred to is of course the guillotine - vide Mme Laclos's note, p. 64. h. I. /

About the middle of Messidor (the beginning of July), conditions in the prison once again grew harsh. The alarm and urgency of the situation is reflected in the following three short notes which Laclos sent to his wife: The first of these bears no date.

"Je te prévien, ma chère amie, qu'il faut, dorénavant, que tu m'adresses tes lettres directement, c'est-à-dire au Citoyen Laclos, maison d'arrêt de Picpus, rue Picpus, fbg Antoine. Je te prévien-
drois aussi qu'il faut les berner aux simples nouvelles de ta santé, et de celles de nos enfants. C'est la seule manière pour espérer qu'elles me parviennent: bien entendu que tu peux y ajouter les détails des effets que tu m'enverras, mais il ne faut, dans ce nombre, ni comestibles, ni luminaire. Je ne t'écirai plus que tous les deux ou trois jours, et mes lettres ni diront autre chose, sinon que: Je me porte bien.

13 messidor an S^d de la Rép. une et indiv.

Je compte, ma chère amie, recevoir, ce soir ou demain, les effets que tu m'as envoyés hier.

J'ai reçu ta petite note du 12 de ce mois, je te conseille de les mettre, à l'avenir, non cachetées à la poste, elles m'en parviendront plus sûrement.

Je me porte bien, je t'aime et embrasse de tout mon cœur, ainsi que nos enfants.

22 messidor an S^d de la Rép. une et indiv.

J'ai reçu, ma chère amie, les effets que tu m'as envoyés le 19, je continue de me bien porter. Je t'aime et embrasse de tout mon cœur, ainsi que nos enfants." (1)

These were the last letters which Laclos was allowed to send until after Robespierre's downfall on the 9 Thermidor (27th July 1794).

As early as the 12 Thermidor permission to write was renewed, and Laclos was prepared to hope that this was "le présage d'une justice entière"(2). Indeed, on this day he was able to write two letters to his wife - unless

1. Lettres inéd., pp. 74-5.
2. ibid., p. 76.

L.I./

he made a mistake in dating one of them! - and in the second of these we find him actively thinking of means to obtain his release, and deciding to write to Alquier and Lacombe Saint-Michel(1). This latter had been a fellow-captain of Laclos's in the Régiment de Toul, and both were members of the Convention. Laclos also pinned great hopes on someone to whom he refers as "l'ami de l'ange"(2). It seems likely that the "ange" was Mme Pourrat, a banker's wife who was certainly closely connected with the Laclos family. Laclos himself was a regular correspondent of hers, and when in Italy was to write that he knew her "depuis bien longtemps"(3). She is not once mentioned by name in Laclos's letters from Piopus, but Mme Laclos wrote to her frequently, and a miniature of her has been preserved amongst the belongings of Laclos's family(4). Mme Pourrat was closely connected with Pariset, who was also a friend of Laclos's, and it may well be that he was the friend in question. Pariset certainly knew Laclos during his days in prison, and writes of him that "dans sa prison, et lorsque son existence était chaque jour un nouveau miracle, on le voyait aussi calme qu'au milieu de sa famille et de ses amis les plus chers"(5). Palewski(6) says without further ado that Mme Pourrat "intercède personnellement - et non sans courage - auprès du boucher Le Gendre pour sortir

1. Lettres inéd., pp. 77-8.

2. ibid., pp. 83-94.

3. ibid., pp. 164-, 186, etc. (cf infra, 781-2.)

4. Chauvigny, in Lettres inéd., p. 83, n.l. A photograph of this miniature is reproduced by Vailland in Laclos par lui-même, p. 186.

5. Pariset, Notice sur le Général La Clos, n.p., an XII, p. 6.

6. J. P. Palewski, Mme Pourrat, ses filles et ses amis (Benjamin Constant - Chénier - Laclos), Versailles, 1934, p. 24 (taken from Revue de l'Histoire de Versailles et de Seine-et-Oise, jan-mars 1934).

L.I./

Laclos du Petit-Luxembourg(1) où il a été incarcéré comme ancien secrétaire de Philippe-Égalité; et Laclos... vante à tout instant les rares qualités de la seule femme qui peut-être, à part la sienne, fit battre son cœur d'homme mâle." This is borne out to a considerable extent by Laclos's correspondence, for on the 27 Thermidor (14th August) Laclos speaks of an approach being made to Le Gendre to interest him in his case, and on the 5 Fructidor Laclos makes it clear that it is "l'ami de l'ange" who is acting as intermediary(2). Laclos showed some regret that Carnot did not put in a better word for him(3): "Je ne demandois pas plus à C(arnot) qu'il n'en a répondu, car en effet, il ne m'a vu qu'à l'armée des Pyrénées, et ce n'est donc que là qu'il me doit son suffrage. Quant à de l'intérêt, j'ignore s'il en prend à beaucoup de monde, mais j'y ai bien peu de droits, n'ayant jamais eu avec lui que des relations d'affaires..."(4) If those were his genuine sentiments, one wonders why he bothered to approach Carnot.

Laclos's friends had difficulty in discovering exactly what accusations were levelled against him. "L'ami de l'ange" agreed to approach Chevrier, the Convention's archivist, in an attempt to gain access to the official papers concerning the prisoner. Unfortunately, however, these papers had been mislaid, and a large-scale search for them was embarked upon(5). No

1. Gaussy, p. 279, claims that L. was transferred to the Petit-Luxembourg shortly before his release, but at this time he was definitely in Picpus. It is on the basis of such a stay in Petit-Lux. that is based the suggestion that L. met Vilate & is the real author of the latter's Des Causes secrètes de la Rév. du 9 au 10 Thermidor..., Paris an III. There is no good reason to accept this attribution (vide Gaussy, p. 280).

2. Lettres inéd., pp. 81 & 83. L. I. /

3. ibid., p. 91.

4. Their principal contact, other than that at Toulouse, had been through Laclos's attack on Carnot's views concerning Vauban.

5. Lettres inéd., pp. 83 & 85. L. I. /

motives justifying Laclos's arrest were found, but the searchers did light upon the report on him given by the Comité de Surveillance of his section of Paris, the Montagne, on the 16 ventôse (6th March 1794). This document stated that he had been under arrest "depuis quatre mois et demi, arrêté le 14 brumaire, par ordre du Comité de Sûreté générale, nous en ignorons le motif"(1). It described Laclos as an "homme de génie, très froid et très fin, auteur des Liaisons dangereuses..."(2) The fact that Laclos was the author of such a reputedly immoral work dogged him always. It is not, without interest to note that this was not the original description given by the Comité of Laclos. He was first of all described as an "homme de grand génie", but in the manuscript document the word "grand" has been crossed out and the reference to his novel added in another hand(3). Laclos's comment to his wife on this document reads as follows:

"Un des reproches que l'on me fait est d'être homme de génie, et celui-là même est aussi une calomnie; on m'y reproche aussi d'être très froid, je te fais juge si je le suis dans mes affections."(4)

There is a certain sad humour in that which is very appealing. We shall shortly have the opportunity of examining the value of these two "reproaches".

There was certainly nothing in this document to warrant Laclos's detention, and finally, on the 11 Frimaire An III (3rd December 1794), Laclos was released. The official reason was, as the "Femme Ghoderlos" was informed, that he was given his freedom "sur la considération d'une détention très longue aggravée par son état de misère et de maladie."(5)

1. in Champion, op. cit., document II, p. 118
2. ibid., p. 120.
3. Dard, p. 409, n. 1.
4. Lettres inédites, 12 fructidor An II, pp. 86-7.
5. Champion, op. cit., document XVI, p. 139.

L.I./

8. LACLOS AFTER HIS RELEASE FROM PRISON. HIS FINAL
MILITARY CAREER AND HIS DEATH (1795-1803)

For a variety of reasons, relatively little is known about Laclos's life between his release from prison and the beginning of 1800. We know from a petition preserved in the Archives Nationales that towards the end of January 1795 Laclos "demande ... que le Comité de salut public veuille bien lui allouer les indemnités réglées pour les commissaires aux expériences de Meudon, depuis le 1^{er} vendémiaire jusqu'au 14 brumaire an II", the date of his arrest(1). Dubois-Grancé approved this request and passed it on to his colleague Fourcroy. According to Jal(2), Laclos received 10,000 livres.

Amongst Laclos's manuscripts(3) there is an article entitled De la Guerre et de la Paix, manifestly written during the early months of 1795, whilst the negotiations leading up to the treaties of Bâle(4) were under way, and intended as a piece of advice for the Comité de Salut Public, which was empowered to discuss the plans for peace "plus ou moins discrètement manifestés, depuis la réaction thermidorienne, par certaines des puissances coalisées contre la France(5)". Dard suggests that the article was probably published about the same time(6), but there is no evidence whatsoever to support this idea. Of the suggestions put forward by Laclos in this article Gaussy remarks(7) that "il ne lui avoit point fallu, pour les faire, être grand politique; tant la plupart d'entre elles... faisaient alors l'objet banal des conversations."

1. Reprod. in Gaussy, p. 281, n. 3; Archives Nationales AF2/223.
2. Jal, Dictionnaire p. 720.
3. BN MS Fonds fr. 12846 fos. 16-22 (not 15-21 as Allen says). First pub. by Gaussy 328-50; O.C., 661-78.
4. With Prussia 5 April; & Spain 22 July.
5. Allen, O.C., p. 919.
6. Dard, p. 415.
7. Gaussy, p. 288.

Nevertheless, there were some original ideas in this article, and it merits brief consideration.

Laclos begins by saying that he is "tourmenté" by the idea that "les puissances coalisées, après avoir vainement tenté d'empêcher par la guerre l'établissement de la République française, tenteraient au moins de la renverser par la paix." He refers here not only to the foreign powers but also to those who are stirring up trouble in one form or another within France, be it in the form of riots in the capital or the uprising in the Vendée. These people excuse their opposition to the régime by pointing to the excesses of the Revolution. Certainly, says Laclos, it was "la philosophie" which sowed the germs of the Revolution, but philosophy is not action, and "ce sont les passions qui les ont fécondés". Only the passions could calculate "sans effroi les malheurs inévitables qui doivent précéder la félicité qu'elles envisagent". The French Revolution is justified, and is differentiated from all other revolutions, by the fact that it set out to restore political power to its rightful place, by giving it to the people. These internal enemies, however, in Laclos's view were not really important, for they were no more than "un ramas obscur d'agents subalternes soudoyés et guidés par une puissance ennemie et tout prêts à devenir capitaines de voleurs, dès qu'ils ne pourront plus être chefs de révoltés".(1)

Laclos saw an important difference between the position of the foreign allies and that of France. The former were merely suffering from "une sorte d'épuisement passager", and "3 ou 4 années de paix et d'économie remettraient ces puissances dans le même état ou peut-être dans un meilleur que celui où

1. O.C., pp. 661-3.

elles étaient au commencement de la guerre." Moreover, their soldiers were not fighting for a cause in which they believed. They were mercenaries, but whilst this meant that "rien ne les exalte", it also meant that "rien ne les refroidit". They were merely doing a job, whilst for the French, on the other hand, "chaque combat général est la querelle particulière de chacun". This meant that each French soldier was worth two or three enemy soldiers, but it had the drawback that after three or four years of peace, when the enemy would be back to strength, France would scarcely have had time to "cicatriser tant de plaies profondes faites par le Robespierreisme", and would have been given time to lose her warlike revolutionary enthusiasm(1).

This does not mean that Laclos, at the time of writing this article, was totally opposed to negotiations for peace, but merely that he considered that these facts should not be forgotten for one moment in the drawing up of any peace treaty. "On doit considérer la France comme une grande place, dans un territoire ennemi, dans une telle situation que le 1^{er} soin doit être de le bien fortifier."(2)

Laclos was more or less in agreement with the Comité de Salut Public when he wrote that France's natural defences were "les deux mers, les deux chaînes de montagnes et le Rhin". The difference was that Laclos considered that the Rhine should be "considéré comme rivière intérieure jusques et compris le Wal"(3). France would occupy both banks of the river; this would mean that she would both control commerce along the Rhine and oblige any aggressor to

1. O.C., pp. 665-7.

2. O.C., pp. 667-8.

3. O.C., p. 668; vide Allen, *ibid.*, p. 919.

give battle on the right bank before he could invade France.(1)

To Laclos's way of thinking, Russia was too far away to be a serious danger, although France's loyal allies the Turks should be supported up to the hilt against the forces of the Czar. Spain, on the other hand, could become "la plus utile des puissances pour nos relations commerciales", and should simultaneously be presented with "la foudre et l'olivier". The most important article in any treaty with Spain would be "la libre importation en France des moutons, et," says Laclos, "je ne crains pas de dire que je crois que nous gagnerions beaucoup à troquer cette importation contre l'exportation des Bourbons." Prussia would have to lose her Rhineland territories, but should be recompensed by the gift of Hanover, for such an arrangement would serve both to mollify the Prussians and to weaken England.(2)

Laclos's policy towards Holland, however, was different from that of the Convention, which wished simply to annexe that country by right of conquest, and from that of the Comité which, in view of the precarious position of the French army of occupation, preferred to wait and see(3). Laclos saw Holland as "une puissance essentiellement ennemie et ennemie très dangereuse, non pas à la vérité en temps de guerre mais en temps de paix." Holland bought French raw materials and sold them back to France in manufactured form at a high profit, deprived France of most of her trading potentialities, sold her colonial produce at a high price, and invested the profits in England. "dans tout cela," says Laclos, "je ne vois assurément rien d'amical." Holland was,

1. O.C., pp. 668-71.

2. O.C., pp. 671-4.

3. Caussy, p. 287.

as we have said, under rather insecure French domination at this time, but Laclos, in a passage which M. Roger Vailland describes as "le premier énoncé clair du droit des peuples à disposer d'eux-mêmes"(1), says, "Je ne puis quant à moi attribuer aucun sens à ces mots influencer sur le gouvernement d'un peuple libre et je me demande toujours qu'est-ce que la liberté d'un peuple dont le gouvernement est influencé par une puissance étrangère...."(2)

Laclos's solution is simple. Holland should lose only that part of her territory essential to French security, "cette partie... en deça du Wal et les îles qui en dépendent", and should be given as compensation part of "le territoire au delà du Rhin faisant partie des 3 électorats", the other part being given to Switzerland in return for permission to establish a French garrison in Bâle, which would give France complete control of traffic on the Rhine. As a result France would have not only the Rhine as a moat along the frontier, but also a "ceinture" of free friendly buffer-states, and, "pour tenter contre nous le passage du Rhine, il faudrait avoir violé l'une ou l'autre de ces républiques, qui toutes deux, sans être assez fortes pour pouvoir donner de l'ombrage à la France, le sont cependant assez pour se faire respecter de toutes les puissances."(3)

Laclos's views concerning Austria are somewhat different. "Je pense," he says, (4) "qu'il nous convient bien moins de traiter avec cette puissance que de la réduire par tous les moyens à l'impossibilité de nous nuire et qu'il serait peut-être imprudent d'indiquer déjà ceux qui nous restent encore et que

1. Vailland, ^{Laclos} par lui-même, p. 172.
2. Laclos's italics, O.C., p. 675.
3. O.C., pp. 675-7.
4. O.C., p. 677.

nous devons mettre en usage pour atteindre ce but." As for England, says Laclos, "je ne vois ni dignité, ni prospérité pour la France tant qu'elle laissera l'Angleterre, que la nature a placée pour être tout au plus une puissance de second ordre, être la dominatrice des mers et y exercer envers toutes les puissances un despotisme également avilissant et ruineux."

There is only one logical policy that France can adopt towards England: "ce n'est pas de dispositions de paix qu'il faut s'occuper à son égard, mais de dispositions de guerre vigoureuses et promptes"(1). Continuation of the war with England and Austria, he says in conclusion, is the only way to destroy for ever the coalition ranged against France. These two powers should be excluded from any peace treaty. All Orleanist dreams of an Anglo-French alliance have completely disappeared.

In 1797 appeared the Voyage de La Pérouse autour du monde, upon which Laclos wrote an essay which is preserved - without title - amongst the Laclos manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale(2). This essay, which was first published by M. Allem(3), is largely descriptive in character, but it does contain one or two general reflections by Laclos. Laclos shows that he has by no means renounced his Rousseauesque idealism, but that it has become tempered, and he certainly does not here believe that civilised man is necessarily far from the state of nature, or that society and its institutions are necessarily a corrupting influence. He rejects this naïve view when he writes of man as "tenant de la nature toutes ses facultés, et la civilisation n'étant que l'action de ses facultés intellectuelles sur ses

1. O.C., pp. 670 & 678.

2. BN MS fonds fr. 12846, fols 23-27; vide supra p. 36.

3. O.C., pp. 546-63.

facultés physiques". He concludes that "la moralité des peuples tient bien moins au degré qu'à l'espèce de la civilisation"(1). Nevertheless, civilisation has but little to boast about. "La seule différence sera que les nations que nous appelons civilisées se valent entre elles à l'aide des manifestes, des traités, des baïonnettes et des canons, tandis que les peuplades que nous appelons sauvages n'y emploient que l'adresse et la ruse. Ne nous pressons pas de juger des peuples que nous avons à peine aperçus; ne nous pressons pas surtout de déclarer que nous valons mieux qu'eux"(2). Yet he still hopes, as we see from his reflections on the people of "la baie de Castries, dans la Manche de Tartarie", that there exist somewhere "tous les éléments de l'art social dans sa perfection"(3).

Apart from these two works, we lose virtually all trace of Laclos. During this period he held the post of Secrétaire-général des hypothèques, to which he was appointed towards the end of 1795. Pariset, in his Notice(4), says that "telle était l'heureuse facilité de son esprit, que ce genre de travail, tout nouveau pour lui, parut néanmoins lui être familier". Nothing more can be said of Laclos's career as a civil servant, save that he was efficient enough to hold down his job.

When he was released from prison he moved, with his family, into 3, rue du Faubourg Poissonnière, which was to remain his Paris address until the end of his life. The ghost of Orleanism was still in existence, and despite the retired life which he was leading, Laclos found his name assec-

1. O.C., p. 553.

2. O.C., p. 554.

3. O.C., p. 558.

4. Pariset, Notice sur le Général La Clos, n.p., an XII, p. 2.

lated with it in anything but ^{flattering} ~~flattering~~ terms(1). It was, as Dard says, as if "son renom de conspirateur orléaniste lui collait à la peau, comme une tunique de Nessus"(2). He remained, however, firmly anchored in obscurity, and at a later date was even to speak of "l'espèce de proscription dans laquelle l'ancien gouvernement (the Directorate) s'obstinait à me tenir"(3). Nevertheless, these years may well have been among the most pleasant of his life: he was living in the bosom of his family, and his health, which had certainly deteriorated during his imprisonment in Picpus, was improving. Alexandre Pleyre, who had known Laclos in 1787(4), met him again in 1798, and gives us a picture of his way of life at that date:

"J'ai retrouvé M^r de la Clos, jouissant de la même considération. S'il est superflu de dire que ces maisons (in which he met Laclos: no doubt that of Mme Pourrat amongst others) étoient de celles où les opinions libérales sont en crédit, j'espère qu'il le seroit encore plus d'ajouter, que les bonnes mœurs y sont en honneur."

Pleyre says that Laclos was "parmi ceux qui avoient le plus de droit à l'estime", and tells us that the people in this society "ont apprécié ses qualités domestiques, et sociales":

"Ils ont recueilli de sa bouche une foule de ces traits, où le coeur se montre à découvert, et que l'esprit ne peut jamais parfaitement imiter. Ils ont entendu ce concert unanime de ses estimables amis, qui le vengeoit des calomnies, où son talent l'avoit mis en butte. Enfin ils ont vu s'il pratiquoit les vertus, qu'il savoit si bien louer: ils ont vu s'il étoit bon époux, bon père, bon ami, bon citoyen."(5)

Allowing for the fact that this encomium, written as an obituary notice, may

1. vide Dard, pp. 422-4; newspapers of the time; Aulard, Histoire politique de la Révolution française, pl 641; L. Pingaud, Le Cte. d'Antraigues, Paris 1893, p. 212, etc.
2. Dard, p. 424.
3. Letter to his wife from Milan, 18 brumaire, an IX, Lettres inéd., p. 181. *L.I.*
4. vide supra, p. 81.
5. BN MS fonds fr. 12845, fol. 128.

well - as is common in such writings - exaggerate Laclos's virtues, it nevertheless makes it quite clear, as Laclos himself felt, that he had been unreasonably identified with Valmont, and that he was in fact anything but a letter-day Machiavelli, either of politics or of sex. Pleyre ^{a/} goes on to regret that he cannot name "les nombreux, les sinceres (sic) amis de M^r de la Clos," and we must regret this with him. We must, on the other hand, agree with Pleyre, that it would be ridiculously wrong to judge the moral character of Laclos by "quelques pages, qui n'ont été nuisibles qu'à son repos". Pleyre found his satisfaction in laying the first stone of "le monument qu'attendent les mânes d'un homme de bien".(1)

During his imprisonment in Picpus, Laclos claimed on several occasions to have served the Republic well. This, after all, is not surprising, for not only was he at this time a supporter of the Revolution, although a middle-of-the-road supporter, but he was also perfectly well aware that his letters to his wife would be seen by official eyes before they reached their destination. Similarly, in De la Guerre et de la Paix and his article on La Pérouse, he professed republican sentiments, going so far as to write in the latter work of "la vengeance implacable que les rois tirent des plus petites injures et comment ils punissent les plus légers délits commis dans les circonstances les plus excusables"(2). This, however, is not necessarily anything more than a formal recognition of the fait accompli in France, and does not mean that Laclos was now an out-and-out

1. BN MS fonds fr. 12845, fos. 128-9. On the strength of this letter, Mme Laclos suggested that Pleyre was the man to write her husband's biography: Letter to Pleyre, 23 vendém. an XII, BN fonds fr. 12845, fol. 130.

2. O.C., p. 558.

republican. Indeed, it might well be argued that Laclos here goes no further than he had gone as a moderate revolutionary during his days at the Jacobin club, deploring the arbitrary powers of the absolute monarch, but by no means rejecting the idea of constitutional monarchy. Laclos was, in fact, psychologically prepared for the rise to power of Bonaparte as First Consul, and, as we shall see, in his letters from Italy spoke in glowing terms of France's new leader, foreseeing great things for him. It is not without significance that the journal Le Thé had linked Laclos's name with that of Napoleon by including both in a list of officials of a foreseen Orleanist monarchy(1).

It is impossibl~~y~~ to say what rôle, if any, Laclos played in the advent e/ to power of Napoleon. "Des indices certains nous permettent de croire," says Dard (2), "qu'il a pris une part secrète au coup d'État final, qui rétablit l'ordre en France". This belief is based on a letter which Mme Laclos wrote to the Emperor after her husband's death, asking for an increase in her pension. This request was rejected by Berthier, the Minister of War, who expressed "tous ses regrets de ne pouvoir lui procurer un meilleur sort"(3). In her letter Mme Laclos had begged to remind the Emperor that "après avoir employé ses talents à écrire, Votre Majesté lui a donné de l'emploi dans les armées". Caussy points out that this may well be merely "un argument de solliciteuse sans vergogne"(4). It may well be, at least, the result of Mme Laclos's desperation. There is certainly

1. Quoted by Dard, p. 423.

2. Dard, p. 430.

3. 25 ventôse an XIII, ^{L.I.}~~Lettres inéd.~~, p. 318.

4. Caussy, p. 295.

no proof that Laclos conducted a press campaign to prepare the way for Napoleon's coup d'état, although the possibility cannot be entirely excluded. On one occasion, in a letter to his wife from Milan(1), Laclos refers to "Berthier, qui ne me connoit que par les rapports qu'il m'a vu avoir avec le Général Bonaparte," and Dard remarks(2) that "Berthier, arrivé d'Égypte avec Bonaparte, et qui fut nommé ministre de la guerre après le coup d'État, prit la part la plus active et la plus immédiate à ses préparatifs et à son exécution". Furthermore, Laclos says on another occasion that if he can find the opportunity, "quand je serai en Italie", he will speak to Bonaparte on behalf of his brother(3). "Il l'avait donc connu personnellement," concludes Dard(4), "et d'assez près". This letter might mean what Dard suggests. On the other hand, it need not. Laclos was at this time, after all, a general, and if the occasion arose he would probably feel himself in a position to approach the First Consul for a favour.

There is no need to see the application for re-admission into the army which Laclos now made as a sign of excessive ambition. As we can see from his letters to his wife, Laclos loathed almost every minute of his final military career. A far more reasonable explanation than that of an unbounding desire for "la gloire" would be, in Dard's own words, that Laclos the civil servant needed a better-paid post "pour répandre chez les siens un peu

1. 14 germinal an IX, ^{L.I.}Lettres inéd., p. 236.

2. Dard, p. 430.

3. Letter to his wife, 6 messidor an VIII, ^{L.I.}Lettres inéd., pp. 128-9.

4. Dard, p. 430.

de confort, élever dignement ses enfants, pour procurer à cette femme tant aimée, si jeune encore... les plaisirs d'un âge dont il n'avait plus les ardeurs"(1). On the 5th December 1799, he requested a recall to the colours, preferably in the artillery(2). On the 24th Andréossi, the director of artillery, reminded the Minister of War of the regulations which meant that Laclos could rejoin the artillery only with the rank he had held in 1791, that of captain. Nevertheless, on the 16th January 1800, Laclos was appointed general in the artillery, this promotion to be back-dated to the 22nd September 1792(3) or, in other words, to the date of his promotion after Valmy(4). Dard sees this as a definite sign of Napoleon's personal interest in and favour towards Laclos, and it is certainly true that this promotion was a contravention of the strict letter of artillery regulations, although Laclos had been promoted general seven years earlier.(5) Viewed in this light, the breach of regulations was a triumph of common sense over red tape. On the 7th March Laclos was assigned to duties with the Army of the Rhine.

He set off from Paris on the 12th April 1800, and spent the night at Meaux, from which town he wrote to his wife to say that "premièrement, mon absence n'a qu'un seul but, notre avantage à tous, le tien, le mien, et celui de nos enfants; de plus, elle n'est pas, de la centième partie, sous tous les rapports, aussi dangereuse que tu te la figures; enfin, je ne crois

1. Dard, p. 431.

2. A.A.G. Laclos dossier: In his letter L. says that the only reason he had not applied earlier was that he had waited for the Comité d'Art^{rie} to report on an expt. at Vincennes. This seems to mean he was still working on Boulets creux.

3. ibid.

4. vide supra p. 252.

5. Dard, 430 & 438. This breach may well explain officialdom's subsequent refusal to give L. a permanent active post.

pas non plus qu'elle soit longue... et, dans le fait, nous ne serons éloignés qu'aux yeux des imbéciles, car ceux-là n'ont que les yeux du corps. les demi-sots ont bien quelquefois les yeux de l'esprit, mais nous, nous avons ceux de l'âme qui valent mieux que les longues vues de Gonichon"(1).

By the 18th, he was in Strasbourg, From that town he wrote to General Éblé, one of the strictest and most vigorous artillerymen of the time(2), under whose command he had been placed, to ask where he should report for duty, and also for permission to stay in Strasbourg for a week or so to try and buy some horses(3). Éblé ordered him to join the "corps de réserve", which was stationed in the region of Bâle, as soon as he had obtained horses, and take command of its artillery.

This "corps de réserve" was "la force principale des quatre grandes unités dont Moreau avait composé son armée", and was some 30,000 strong(4). It was under the direct command of Moreau himself, and so Laclos's appointment was not unimportant, Moreau's division of his army into four, instead of the classical division into three, left flank, centre and right flank, was unpopular with his officers, who saw it as a device whereby the commander-in-chief could easily win personal triumphs for himself, "en faisant intervenir ses troupes dans le moment propice à la victoire"(5). Laclos, however, saw no action. He realised that Bonaparte was concentrating his efforts on Italy, and, he says, "nous ne sommes icy qu'une simple amulette pour occuper quatre- s/

1. Lettres inéd., pp. 95-6.

2. P. Mahon, Les Services de Choderlos de Laclos, p. 242; Dard, p. 437.

3. Lettres inéd., p. 98.

4. Caussy, p. 298.

5. ibid., p. 299.

L.I./

L.I./

vingt mille ennemis, que, sans nous, on lui opposerait de plus"(1). We have the pathetically comic picture of the elderly, unwilling General Laclos of the great Napoleonic army sitting down to write to his wife in the following terms:

"Ce qui me convient le mieux, quant au physique, de ce séjour prolongé, c'est la facilité que cela me donne de faire chaque jour une promenade à cheval qui me rend un peu d'habitude, sans trop de fatigue. Malgré cela, je ne suis pas encore fameux. Ce n'est pas que mes hémorroides me tourmentent, je ne les sens point et ma santé est bonne sous tous les rapports, mais je perds encore facilement le fond de la selle et même les étriers, pour peu que les mouvements soient vifs".)2)

On the 5th June he was ordered to go to Grenoble, having been appointed second-in-command of the siege equipment of the "armée de réserve" under his friend La Combe Saint-Michel(3). Beth Moreau and Éblé expressed their regret at losing Laclos(4).

Laclos was not impressed by what he saw of Switzerland on his way to Grenoble. Berne, he said, could not compare with any third-rate French town, although it possessed some arcades which, although of inferior quality, recalled those of the Palais Royal(5). Some enthusiasm was aroused in him by the countryside between Geneva and Lausanne. "C'est le roman de Julie mis en paysage," he tells his wife(6). "Tout y rappelle les souvenirs de cet ouvrage délicieux. Oh! combien je t'ai désirée dans ma voiture! Est-ce donc que jamais nous ne ferons ensemble un voyage en Suisse?" He arrived in Grenoble on the 26th June, and stayed in an inn which had been one of his favourite haunts fifteen or twenty years earlier(7). We have already men-

1. Lettres inéd., p. 112.
2. ibid., pp. 113-4.
3. ibid., p. 116.
4. ibid., pp. 118-9.
5. ibid., p. 122.
6. ibid., p. 130.
7. ibid., pp. 127-8.

L.I./

tioned his reactions on returning to the town where he had spent several years of his youth as an officer on garrison duty.(1)

The same uncomfortable thought was always at the back of Laclès's mind. It was that, if he did not succeed in obtaining a position which he could be said to be "en activité réelle", financially he would be in a poor position after the war, with a retirement pension of 5,000 instead of 10,000 francs.(2) La Combe Saint-Michel was in a similar position. It was not that Laclès was thirsting for glory, as the following extract from one of the letters he wrote to his wife will show, but simply that he was thinking in terms of practical financial realities:

"Saint-Michel a pris le parti d'en écrire à Marmont, et moi à Clarke(3). Chacune de nos lettres que nous nous sommes communiquées, traite en commun l'intérêt de tous deux. Si les hostilités ne doivent pas recommencer, quoique il vaille mieux vivre en pays ennemi que chez soi, pécuniairement parlant, j'aime tout autant, pour mon compte, me reposer icy (in Grenoble) que courir les brûlantes campagnes d'Italie; mais il étoit nécessaire de se mettre en mesure pour le cas où les hostilités recommenceroient"(4).

Laclès was never to be given the appointment "au dedans du Corps" which he sought(5). This may well be due partly to animosity aroused by what was considered, in artillery circles, his irregular promotion to the rank of general. He himself said that he placed little trust in the benevolence of Carnot and Gassendi(6).

1. vide supra, pp. 19-16.
2. Lettres inéd., p. 229. L.I./
3. Clarke had come a long way since his days with Laclès at the Palais Royal, rising rapidly from cornet to general and later to Minister of War.
4. Lettres inéd., p. 134.
5. ibid., p. 136. L.I./
6. Lettres inédites, p. 138. The names are written "C....t" & "G.....i" - ibid. /
the number of points of suspension corresponds with the missing letters; vide
pp. 139-40 & 144-145, & Dard, p. 434.

Finally, on the 11th August, La Combe Saint-Michel and Laclos were ordered, with all their troops and equipment, to set off for Italy(1). As he was about to set off Laclos "dictated" to his wife a letter which she was to send to Clarke:

"Mon mari..... ne désire plus que d'être enfin placé dans son corps, où il est toujours en dehors, et, comme ce vœu est exactement conforme à la décision du 1^{er} Consul qui l'a réintégré dans son grade dans l'armée de l'artillerie, j'ose espérer que vous obtiendrez facilement cette justice, à quoi tient la solidité de son état."

Laclos realised that this letter would probably meet with no effect, but nevertheless thought the attempt worthwhile(2):

On the 29th August Laclos finally set out with his troops to cross the Alps, and a fortnight later was in Turin(3), having visited en route "le pays du Vaudois que rien n'égale peut-être dans le monde entier, pour la perfection de la culture, la bravoure des habitants, et la pureté des mœurs." There was still a good deal of the admirer of Rousseau in Laclos. Another tone is heard when, concerned as always about his family's financial position, he manages to send his wife 1,200 francs. He writes: "Quand tu auras touché les douze cents francs, je te prie de les porter sur ton petit livret: 'Reçu de mon mari', afin que nous puissions savoir un jour ce que nous aura coûté ou valu l'honneur de servir la République". He hurriedly denies that this is "un propos d'humeur", however(4).

Marmont was appointed commander-in-chief of the artillery of the Army of Italy(5), and took a liking to Laclos, whilst Laclos himself says after an

1. Lettres inéd., pp. 140-1 & 145-6.
2. ibid., p. 147.
3. ibid., p. 149.
4. ibid., pp. 152-3.
5. ibid., p. 155.

L.I./

evening in company with Mme Marmont - who was a friend of Mme Pourrat(1) - that "Madame m'a traité... beaucoup mieux qu'on ne pouvoit l'espérer d'une très jeune femme, quand on a 58 ans". The young Marmont remarked that Laclos had an enemy in Gassendi, but promised to see what he could do on his behalf(2). Laclos became one of Marmont's chiefs of staff, and finally, at the crossing of the Mincio on the 26th December, received his baptism of fire. He had his horse shot from under him, but tells his wife(3), "Jé n'ai encore rien fait pour mon compte qu'échanger quelques coups de canon qui n'ont influé en rien sur ma santé". This was the only really serious battle in which Laclos was to take part, and the campaign was to all intents and purposes over by the 20th February, on which date Laclos was able to return with Marmont to Milan. All that there remained to do was to await the ratification of the Peace of Luneville.

Laclos periodically mentions, in his letters from Italy, hopes of taking up a diplomatic career after the war(4). These hopes were no doubt based on his acquaintanceship with Talleyrand. Laclos's brother later put it higher than acquaintance, and spoke of "l'amitié" that Talleyrand had for Laclos(5). Moreover, Laclos had his experience of the mission to London with the Duc d'Orléans upon which to draw, and the reputation of his brother, an experienced diplomat in his own right(6). Here again, it is worth stressing that

1. Dard, p. 442.

2. Lettres inéd., p. 157.

3. ibid., p. 205.

4. ibid., p. 159, etc.

5. In a letter to Laclos's widow, 27 prairial an XII, Lettres inéd., p. 326.

6. vide Archives des Affaires Etrangères, Personnel dossier, Choderlos; & H. Bordeaux, Voyageurs d'Orient, Paris, 1926.

L.I./

Laclos was not indulging in pipe-dreams of future greatness, and that his project was not the result of deeply-ingrained ambition. "Je suis très purgé d'ambition", he tells his wife(1), "mais je voudrais que mon état me mit à même de te faire vivre avec quelque agrément, et de donner à mes enfants une éducation convenable. Tous mes souhaits se bornent là, quelque carrière que je doive courir. Cela me mène à celle diplomatique. Al(quier)(2) ne m'y trouvera point à côté de lui; il court les grandes ambassades et moi je préférerois d'être, au plus, ministre plénipotentiaire auprès de quelque petit prince. Une place quelconque de retraite et que personne ne vous envie, est tout ce que je désire. Sois donc bien sûre, bonne chère amie, que si j'ai désiré de servir, si je le désire encore, c'est pour le motif 1^o de faire mon devoir d'officier; 2^o de faire aussi celui de père de famille, sans quoi il ne faut, à mon avis, ni prendre du service, ni se marier et faire des enfants". On another occasion he tells her(3) that "si quelquefois je me surprends à désirer d'être à même de déployer le talent dont j'ai la conscience, plus souvent je me répète que l'obscur médiocrité a aussi ses avantages et ses plaisirs; et celui qui a su vivre si longtemps impassible au milieu des injustices, n'ira pas prendre de chagrin de ce qu'il n'a pas ou n'aura pas de faveur".

Whilst still in Milan Laclos mentioned to his wife a literary project which, like his plan for a diplomatic career, was never to come to fruition. It was nothing less than an idea for a new novel. He says he has had the idea "depuis assés long-temps", and adds that he has practically promised a

1. ^{L.I.} Lettres inéd., p. 217.
2. Alquier had been appointed French ambassador to Naples.
3. Lettres inédites, p. 227.

L.I./

certain M. Dolomieu to do something about it. This was Gratel de Dolomieu, who had been on the expedition to Egypt as a geologist, and had been captured on his way home from Egypt. He had just been released when Laclos met him in Milan. We shall have occasion to mention Dolomieu once again when we come to consider the sources of Les Liaisons dangereuses. The aim of the novel which Laclos was considering writing was to "rendre populaire cette vérité qu'il n'existe de bonheur que dans la famille". He says that he is in an admirable position to treat such a subject, in view of his own happy married life, and he is not "embarrassé de savoir où (il prendra) le sujet de (s)es tableau". Before he can settle down to write, however, he will need "plus de loisir qu'il n'en faut à (s)a paresse", and, moreover, he says,

"Les événements seront difficiles à arranger et la difficulté presque insurmontable sera d'intéresser sans rien de romanesque. Il faudroit le style des premiers vol. des Confessions de J.-J. Rousseau, et cette idée est décourageante..."(1)

It is worth noting that once again Laclos refers to his mental laziness. This theme recurs throughout his correspondence. Whether the choice of subject for this proposed new novel can be attributed to Laclos's senility is a matter of opinion(2). It is just as possible that he was thinking of trying to write a novel which would counterbalance the unfortunate - and undeserved - reputation he had acquired through Les Liaisons dangereuses, one which would be written around a maxim in which it is certain from his letters to his wife and children that Laclos sincerely believed. In any case, it is doubtful whether this suggestion was ever more than a passing fancy. His

1. Lettres Inéd., pp. 238-9.

2. Caussy, p. 294, takes this view, and rejoices that fate ruled that L. was not to produce such a sequel to L.D. Caussy says that this was left to the Abbé Gérard, with his Le Comte de Valmont. This work, however, was written before L.D.

"paresse" prevented its coming to anything but, although it is futile to try to say whether an unwritten work would or would not have been worthwhile, one may well be tempted to rejoice over this.

Laclos had to wait two long months before he could leave Italy. Finally, on the 20th April 1801, he set off for Paris with General and Mme Marmont. He left his young companions once they had crossed the Mont Cenis, and rejoined his wife about the 7th May.

Although he was now back in Paris with his family, Laclos was still liable for recall to the army. He was, however, left in peace in the capital for some time, and was attached to the Comité d'Artillerie. On the 25th June Gassendi had him sent to La Rochelle to supervise some experiments, which were carried on daily from the 10th to the 30th July on the Ile d'Aix. On the 4th August Laclos asked to be recalled to Paris, as his mission was accomplished and any junior officer could supervise the work which remained to be done. He was recalled on the 19th August, and when in Paris reported on the experiments and in particular on a new type of gun-carriage which he had evolved by adapting those designed by Gribeauval and Montalembert(1). Laclos continued to work with the Comité d'Artillerie throughout 1802(2).

On the 31st October 1801, Laclos had received an order couched in the following terms:

"Vous partirez, citoyen général, aussitôt la réception de cette lettre, pour vous rendre en poste à Brest, où vous vous embarquerez sur l'escadre de l'amiral Villaret-Joyeuse, pour prendre le commandement de l'artillerie de l'armée de St.-Domingue."

Of this order Dard says, "on envoie là-bas, sous le soleil tropical, contre les

1. vide P. Mahon, Les Services de Choderlos de Laclos.
2. A.A.G. Comité d'Artillerie

nègres insurgés, toutes les mauvaises têtes de l'armée, les soldats républicains de Moreau, les officiers frondeurs, les politiciens suspects, qui déjà portent ombrage à César"(1) Dard suggests that Laclos was marked down as suitable prey by "les bureaux de l'artillerie", but whoever was responsible for it, and whether or not there was any particular malevolence behind it, the order was rescinded by Gaspard two days later, and so it seems that Laclos still had powerful friends. Dard suggests that this was the work of Marmont.(2) But Laclos, who, throughout the Italian campaign, had longed for peace so that he could be permanently reunited with his wife and family, was not to see his wish fulfilled. He wished to remain in the army, for this was the only way open to him of maintaining a steady income, and as a result he was sent on a mission scarcely more pleasant than the one he had just escaped, for he was sent to join the Army of Naples, which had its headquarters at Taranto. Laclos was placed in command of the artillery of this newly-founded army, the function of which was to occupy the kingdom of Naples and keep an eye of the Ionian islands, which had been occupied by the Russians.

Before going on to consider the last few months of Laclos's life, there remains one last literary work to be examined. There appears, in the Bossange edition of the works of Pierre-Louis Lacretelle(3), a work which seems to have escaped the notice of all commentators on Laclos⁽⁴⁾ and which does not appear in M. Allen's edition of the Oeuvres complètes, even in appendix. It bears the title Observations du Général Laclos sur le Fils Naturel. For the

1. Dard, p. 461.

2. A.A.G. Laclos dossier.

3. Oeuvres complètes de Lacretelle aîné, Paris, 1823-4, 6 vols., vol. 4, pt. I, pp. 1-60.

4. With the exception of C. Pichois - cf. Bibliography and my article Laclos' Other Novel in Nottingham French Studies, vol. III, no. 2, pp. 63-72.

authenticity of the attribution of this work to Laclos we have to rely principally upon the comments of Lacretelle himself in his Note préliminaire (1)

Here he remarks that

"Les circonstances de mes liaisons de société, dans notre ancien régime, avec l'autour des liaisons dangereuses, et celles qui m'ont rapproché de lui, au commencement du consulat, me fourniraient peut-être quelques anecdotes caractéristiques de ces temps bien divers; je les réserve pour un écrit intitulé, Revue de ma vie..." (2)

Unfortunately we do not possess this elaboration upon Lacretelle's relationship with Laclos. Laclos on no occasion mentions his name.

Lacretelle goes on to say that Laclos was working on this study of his "dramatic novel" when he was appointed by the First Consul to "une mission militaire et diplomatique en Italie" (3), and so left the work unfinished and uncorrected. Lacretelles states that some years prior to the time at which he is writing he decided to reconsider Le Fils Naturel, and so was led to take another look at Laclos's comments. He found Laclos's rough draft was full of crossings-out and interpolations which rendered various passages of it virtually illegible. "J'ai donc été obligé", he says, "d'en refaire beaucoup de phrases, d'après la pensée de chaque alinéa." This means, of course, that we cannot with any degree of safety apply stylistic tests to the Observations to determine their authenticity. As the self-effacing Lacretelle says of his endeavours to reconstitute the original text, "j'en

1. Oeuvres complètes de Lacretelle aîné, pp. 3-7.
2. ibid., p. 3.
3. ibid., p. 5.

préviens les critiques, ou plutôt je les avertis de savoir distinguer certaines fautes de style, que je dois prendre à ma charge."(1) One appreciates the irony, and yet all that one can say is that the style of the fragment is neither more nor less distinguished than that of Laclos's study of Fanny Burney's Cecilia, although it certainly has none of the sparkle of Les Liaisons dangereuses, which is scarcely to be wondered at in a work of this nature.

Lacretelle, however, makes an interesting point when he gives reasons for Laclos's favourable attitude towards Le Fils Naturel. He gives three reasons in all. Firstly, he says, the general always had a great liking for him personally, and "même une grande estime pour mes premiers travaux." Secondly, Laclos "était fortement enclin aux idées singulières; et particulièrement aux vues nouvelles en morale et aux innovations en littérature". But it is the third reason given by Lacretelle which is by far the most interesting, and it is one which turns our attention not to the style of the Observations but to their content.

"Troisièmement", says Lacretelle, "j'avais rencontré dans l'un de mes personnages un caractère, qu'il avait toute sa vie médité comme le sujet d'un second roman, où il croyait s'élever bien au-dessus du premier. Ne pouvant plus, par une nouvelle direction de sa vie, se livrer à ce plan, il vit, avec une sorte de bienveillance paternelle, son idée au moins ébauchée par un autre."(2)

This remark certainly rings true, for we have already seen that Laclos at least tentatively considered writing a second novel in his later years, meant to show that true happiness can be found only within the bounds of married life.

The character of Le Fils Naturel referred to by Lacretelle is Gourville,

1. *ibid.*, p. 6.
2. *ibid.*, p. 4.

and no less than ten pages of the Observations are lavished upon him.

Indeed, as Lacretelle points out, Laclos's labours were interrupted "dans ce morceau même, où je conçois que son imagination, jouant sur son propre fonds, eût encore trouvé de riches développements"(1). One is therefore naturally prompted to turn to Gourville to see whether he could possibly have become the central character of such a novel as Laclos is known to have contemplated. This is by no means self-evident. It is true that the play opens upon the preparations for Gourville's marriage, and that this marriage does in fact take place. Nevertheless, his married life with the bourgeoise Hélène Artaut is far from being the crux of the plot. It is also true that one of Gourville's main aims is to bring about the wedding of Malherbe and the Comtesse de Lussan, but it would be quite false to maintain that conjugal life is the principal theme of the play. It is quite clear that Lacretelle's main interest lies in the legal problem of Malherbe's claim to be recognised, although illegitimate, as the heir to the Comtesse de Lusigny, and in the historical events, the fall of Turgot and the inevitability of the Revolution. In both these themes Gourville is deeply involved.

One is obliged to conclude, then, that Gourville, although he is a virtuous character, can scarcely be seen as the principal rôle in a novel depicting marital bliss of the type which Laclos seems to have known. However, in another way, Gourville is clearly a Laclos character in embryo, for although he is essentially a virtuous man, he is also one of rather an unusual kind. He is, like Valmont, very much the man of intrigue, although

1. *ibid.*, p. 4.

his tactical moves have a very different end in view. Here, the Observations tend to move away from the particular character to the general, and show signs of the "riches développements" of which Lacretelle speaks.

What was Lacretelle's purpose in portraying such a character as Gourville?

"Il a voulu montrer en lui", says the author of the Observations, "un homme de bien, un grand caractère, armé, pour les intérêts de la vertu et du bien public, de tous les talents d'un intrigant supérieur."(1)

The author of the Observations sees Gourville as a victim of the society of the Ancien Régime, a man of talents who is in such a position that only by a great show of energy can he hope to be able to make use of his gifts:

"Quant à moi, je gagerais presque que M. de Gourville est né avec ce qu'on appelait une naissance; mais de parents pauvres. Il n'a voulu rester au-dessus de personne dans le monde; et il a songé de bonne heure à tirer parti de lui-même. Ses études et son instruction lui auraient permis d'obtenir de la distinction dans quelque état qu'il eût choisi, et même dans la profession des lettres. Mais le don d'observer les hommes et de manier les affaires, qu'il a reconnu en lui, lui a paru son génie particulier, et il a cédé à son génie."(2)

It is very tempting to say, on the strength of this passage, that Gourville is very much what Laclos may have considered himself to be. There is scarcely need to say, however, that any such suggestion would be extremely tenuous. That Laclos was interested in Gourville as a piece of character-drawing there can be no doubt, if we accept his authorship of this essay, but the evidence we have brought shows that in all probability Laclos was far from being the man of intrigue he has been thought to be.

The writer continues his study of Gourville by asking, "Cependant comment s'élever dans les cours sans une basse souplesse; et vivre avec les grands,

1. *ibid.*, p. 51. The italics are in the text.
2. *ibid.*, p. 50.

en conservant des principes qu'ils feignent de mépriser, en les redoutant?"(1)

The reflections upon the character of Gourville, as they become more general, betray an attitude towards society which, if it is not cynical, shows resignation to the idea that intrigue is an essential, unavoidable part of human relationships in public life. Much as General Booth is reputed to have asked why the devil should have all the good tunes, so the author of the Observations asks why vice should have all the good tactics:

"Ajoutez à la fermeté de la vertu l'activité de l'intrigue; à sa générosité, le don de ne rien négliger, de tout soumettre, de tout ramener à ses plans, à son but: tout ce qu'il y a de bon dans l'une, viendra perfectionner l'autre..... Retranchez de l'intrigue ses mauvaises fins, qu'elle est obligée de dissimuler; ses vils moyens, qui la forcent de rougir d'elle-même; et elle ne sera plus qu'une qualité honorable, qu'un talent précieux. Voyez, dans les affaires privées, dans les affaires publiques, tout ce que font, tout ce qu'obtiennent les intrigants! Voyez tout ce que perdent les honnêtes gens, souvent par une fausse roideur, par une dédaigneuse incurie des voies nécessaires du succès. Otez à ceux-ci ce qui ne sera bon que dans les autres; et tout sera au mieux."(2)

There are other passages in the Observations which are similarly fascinating coming from the pen of the author of Les Liaisons dangereuses. Laelos's novel is primarily a novel of intellectual domination, and there is a striking parallel in this summing-up of Gourville's character:

"Le vrai secret de sa supériorité est dans le genre de son esprit, de son caractère, et même de son âme; surtout dans un sang-froid imperturbable, et dans une présence d'esprit parfaite... C'est qu'il sait toujours dominer les autres, en se dominant lui-même."(3)

That, in a very different context, is precisely the secret of Mme de Merteuil and, to a lesser degree, of Valmont. Gourville, like Merteuil in the Liaisons, holds and controls all the strings of the action. It is he who, at the beginning, prevents Malherbe from destroying the evidence which entitles him to be considered

1. *ibid.*, p. 50.
2. *ibid.*, p. 52.
3. *ibid.*, p. 58.

as the eldest son of the Comtesse de Lusigny, and it is he who brings about the dénouement. Here, he skilfully uses the agent of the Cardinal de Granville, Mme de Lusigny's brother and Malherbe's arch-enemy, to bring false information that the Comtesse de Lussan, whom Malherbe wishes to marry, has fled. By so doing, he puts the Maréchal d'Harocour, who is Prime Minister and also the Comtesse de Lussan's uncle, into a state of fearful anxiety, and simultaneously encourages in the Cardinal an attitude of overweening triumph. Then Gourville produces the Comtesse de Lussan, so that d'Harocour is brought from agitation to joy and a mood in which he is prepared to listen to Malherbe and agree to his marrying his niece, while the Cardinal is utterly confounded. Thus, Gourville at one and the same time contrives to bring about a conventional happy ending for his friend and, by disgracing the Cardinal, to restore himself to a position of political favour. Like those of Merteuil, many of the moves in Gourville's intrigues are hidden beneath the surface, and come to light only at the dénouement, but throughout he is well and truly "la source et l'instrument de (l'action)".(1)

However, as has been said, unlike Merteuil, Gourville, though a creature of intrigue, is virtuous, and so we cannot expect him to have all the icy objectiveness of the Marquise. Thus it is that despite all his planning and intrigue Gourville "humilie franchement toute sa tactique devant (1)'espièglerie d'un jeune poète(2)", Pontigny, who nobly gives himself up as Malherbe when the latter is in danger of the Bastille as a result of the Cardinal's machinations. "Cette pièce de la machine," says Gourville (and the author of the Observations

1. *ibid.*, p. 53.

2. *ibid.*, p. 56.

points it out), "que je n'avais pas arrangée, est celle qui a le mieux joué"(1).

Gourville shows this other side of his nature once again, when Malherbe impulsively decides to seek refuge in his mother's house instead of fleeing abroad, although so far as he knows she is a party to the Cardinal's persecution of him. Gourville's reaction to this is that

"Je crois que les beaux mouvements de l'âme valent mieux que toutes les combinaisons de l'esprit, pour sortir des troubles de familles. - J'adopte aussi ce parti. - Mais il faudra le soutenir de quelques batteries contre la machination du cardinal; et c'est mon affaire"(2).

Gourville, then, is clearly a man of intrigue above all else, but a virtuous one. He gives battle to the intriguers of vice, and wins. He has all the talents of Merteuil, and yet he has also that which she lacks, human feeling. It is as though Valmont's skills were turned in another direction, with human feeling not as a defect in his talents for intrigue, but a complement to them. Above all, the major difference between Gourville and both Merteuil and Valmont is that his skill is employed in a useful direction. It is not, although he certainly looks after his own interests, entirely egocentric.

If we can accept Lacretelle's assurance that Laclos was thinking of some such character for his projected novel, then it is clear that his idea of writing a work of fiction to show that true happiness can only be found in matrimony had, by the last few months of Laclos's life, undergone some change. Gourville is essentially a man of action, a man used to the highest positions in public life, who knows how to handle other people in such a manner as to get his own way. Despite his liking for "les beaux mouvements de l'âme",

1. vol. 4, pt. I, Le Fils Naturel; Action, Act III, p. 145.

2. ibid., p. 149.

one can hardly think that the style of Rousseau's Confessions would be fitted to the portrayal of such a character. Nevertheless, Gourville is no seducer like Valmont, but a happily married man, albeit a newly-married one; he is, moreover, married to the bourgeoisie Hélène Artaut, who is an example of emancipated womanhood according to the lights of her time, having, like the Comtesse de Lussan, been educated by Malherbe. The fact that they are educated women is a point which is emphasised throughout the play. One remark made by the author of the Observations which is very significant in this connection, even allowing for any element of political or social propaganda - or conformism - runs as follows. He is discussing Gourville.

"On voit que ce grand coeur, comme tous les autres, se complait dans les moeurs franches et pures d'une maison bourgeoise; et qu'il se délasse là des vices brillants du grand monde, où il jouit pourtant de sa supériorité."(1)

May this not well be a relic of what, from his correspondence, we know was in Lacllos's mind, but which, if allied with the analytical method of Les Liaisons, might well have succeeded in producing a novel which would present a more constructive view of French society than that to be found in Les Liaisons? Moreover, may it not be an expression of the happiness which Lacllos found with his wife away from the "grand monde" of politics and the army?

The actual criticism of Le Fils Naturel contained in the Observations is of little or no value, and one cannot help but feel that Lacreteille was more accurate than he can have wished in suggesting that Lacllos's admiration for his "roman théâtral" "pourra être taxée d'un bizarre engouement"(2). To a large extent the comments are restricted to a recapitulation of the plot, and when they digress into praise of the value of Lacreteille's experiment and

1. Observations..., p. 54.

2. Note préliminaire, p. 3.

of its novelty they can only be considered fulsome and nonsensical.

The interest lies in the appeal which the character of Gourville clearly had for him, and in the fact that Laclos remains true to himself in this interest in yet another cerebral character, a man who can shape the destinies of those with whom he comes into contact, and who is considered fit to shape the destiny of his country. Cerebral though he is Gourville is also a character of sensibility. In his interest in this side of Gourville, the author of the Observations is not far from the Laclos of the correspondence. Laclos was not a young man when he wrote Les Liaisons, but here - if he is indeed the author of the article, and Lacretelle's account of its origin is reasonably convincing - he has mellowed, to take what is, on balance, a more optimistic view of human nature. Gourville is, by accepted standards, fundamentally good. There is no such character in Les Liaisons, as we shall see, not even Mme de Tourvel - and certainly not the "gentle, sensible, and generous Madame de Rosemonde", with her "moving" and "unaffected" virtue⁽¹⁾. It cannot be stressed too much that it would be dangerous to claim that Gourville was such a character as Laclos liked to imagine himself to be. We have seen that Laclos was by no means the Machiavelli he has been thought, and that he was almost certainly not the ringleader of an Orleanist plot. Indeed, the Observations show more of a similarity with the Laclos of the correspondence than with the legend of Laclos the conspirator. Perhaps if Laclos had written another novel along these lines it would have become impossible to talk of a dichotomy in his character, and the "Laclos enigma" would have been buried once and for all time; he wrote no such novel, how-

1. Dangerous Connections..., London, 1784, 4 vols. vol 1, ... The Utility of Novels... p. xii.

ever, and all this is but idle speculation#.

Laclos set off from Paris for Taranto on the 2nd May 1803, with the intention of having his wife and daughter Soulange join him if peace continued. The reluctance of the elderly general is shown in the letters he sent his wife from the various stopping places along his route to Taranto. In his first letter, written on the 5th May from Briare, on the road from Paris to Lyon, he writes, "Si tu savois de combien de façons je t'ai déjà fait arriver en Italie, tu serais étonnée de n'y être pas rendue avant moi. Baste, le temps présent est gros de l'avenir". At Milan he was attacked by fever. He recovered somewhat, and wrote, "Je te demande du courage... sur cette grande et longue séparation", but soon depression set in again and he had to admit that "(Je ne vois plus) ce que j'écris et tu en devines bien la raison". In his lodgings at Lanciani he found a street-plan of Paris: "Je me⁶ suis fait apporter", he tells his wife, "et j'y ai cherché bien vite la rue du Faubourg-Poissonnière, là je suis resté près d'un demi quart d'heure à consid- é/ érer le petit espace compris entre le Boulevard et la rue Bergère". Finally, on the 14th July, he arrived in Taranto, "une assés vilaine ville dans un assés vilain pays"(1)

The Army of Naples was in a difficult position. It was situated amongst hostile inhabitants, and in unpleasant and unhealthy country, and moreover it was short of manpower and ammunition(2). Furthermore, in Laclos's own words, "le Roi de Naples refuse toute espèce de subsides et il faut savoir si la France fera les frais de notre armée ou si nous recevrons l'ordre d'aller chercher

1. Lettres inéd., pp. 253; 261-2; 268; 273.
2. Dard, p. 466; Caussy, pp. 324-5.

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notre solde à Naples. Le Roi a déjà déclaré que, dans ce cas, il quitteroit son royaume, et une frégate angloise croise toujours à la vue de Naples pour cette fuite éventuelle. En attendant nous sommes icy sans traitement et même sans solde"(1).

This was indeed not an agreeable situation, and, so far as Laclos himself was concerned, things were to take a turn for the worse. On the 2nd August he contracted dysentery. After three days of very serious illness he thought that he was recovering. His aide-de-camp, captain Lespagnol, became his nurse and shared his sick-room. Laclos's health, however, was not so improved as he thought, and it was Lespagnol who, on the 10th, tactfully informed Mme Laclos of the gravity of the situation. A week later, Laclos was once again able to pen a few lines, but had to allow Lespagnol to write most of the letter at his dictation:

"Bonjour, bonne chère amie," Laclos wrote, "je t'aime et embrasse de tout mon coeur, ainsi que nos enfants. J'ai bien peu de forces, mais c'est quelque chose d'en avoir assés pour vous aimer tous et pouvoir vous en assurer.

Lespagnol te dira le reste."

Lespagnol could not tell Mme Laclos that her husband's health was improving. His few hesitant lines were sufficient proof to the contrary. What he could say, however, was that General Saint Cyr and the doctors had decided that Laclos should return to Paris as soon as he was well enough to travel. Another week went by, and Laclos was for the last time able to write a few lines in his own hand. The last sentence he himself wrote reads, poignantly enough, "O le beau jour où je vous reverrai tous". Lespagnol still hoped that the return to Paris would take place, but there had been a change of plan, and the journey was to be by land instead of sea, with a halt at Naples and Rome(2)1

1. Lettres inéd., p. 271.

2. Ibid., pp. 274; 275; 276; 277; 278.

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Laclos's friend Alquier was French ambassador in Naples, and we possess a copy, made by Laclos's daughter, of a letter from Laclos to the ambassador(1), which shows yet another change of plan. It is a reply to a letter from Alquier, and Laclos, dictating to Lespagnol, tells his friend,

"Je n'ai à ma disposition qu'un seul moyen de vous prouver ma reconnaissance de toutes vos offres obligées, c'est de les accepter toutes, depuis l'azile jusqu'aux offres pécuniaires, mais avec les modifications que les circonstances devront y apporter."

This letter shows that all hope of Laclos's going further than Naples in the foreseeable future had been abandoned. Laclos himself mentions the possibility, or rather the probability, of his having to stay in Naples for several months. He also asks Alquier to find lodgings in the town for his wife.

"Je souhaite bien vivement," he explains, "qu'elle et ma fille viennent me retrouver à Naples. Être réuni aux objets de ses affections n'est assurément pas un moyen pour ne pas mourir, mais au moins, c'est celui, et c'est le principal, de vivre jusqu'à la fin de sa vie."

Still haunted by the thought of not being able adequately to provide for his wife and family, he wrote to Marmont(2). He points out that all the appointment which the latter obtained for him has amounted to is "à tenir garnison à 550 lieues de ma famille et de mes amis, dans le climat le plus malsain de l'Italie, pour être considéré ensuite comme n'ayant pas servi activement dans la guerre présente." He tells Marmont that this expedition has already cost him 6,000 livres of his own money, and that this, together with medical fees and the cost of a journey back to the healthier climate of France, means that "il faut que je meure à Tarente, si je n'y reçois pas un

1. *ibid.*, pp. 282-4.

2. *ibid.*, pp. 284-5.

secours de 12000 l. au moins." Only the First Consul, says Laclos, could render him such a service, and Marmont is the only person who could intercede for him with Bonaparte. In conclusion, he says,

"J'ai laissé à Paris ma femme chargée de ses 3 enfants et sans ressources pécuniaires; elle vendrait tout son mobilier qu'elle n'en retirerait pas de quoi me tirer d'icy..... je ne croyais pas en partant de Paris que l'issue de ce voyage seroit de venir à Tarente y demander l'aumône.

Je suis bien malheureux; les larmes me gagnent: Adieu, général, je me recommande à votre amitié pour moi."

To strengthen his case - and it would be unfair to criticise these letters adversely - Laclos wrote to Bonaparte himself, his letter being forwarded after his death by Lespagnol. It read as follows:

"Général Premier Consul,

Je profite de quelques instants qui me restent encore à vivre pour dicter les derniers vœux de mon cœur. Je désire, Général, qu'ils vous soient connus.

Le bonheur de ma patrie, le succès de vos armes, le sort de ma malheureuse famille, voilà ce qui m'occupe dans ce moment où tout va finir pour moi.

La triste position de mon épouse et de mes trois enfants que je laisse absolument sans ressource, m'afflige, mais l'espoir, dans lequel je vis, que vous les secourrez me fait mourir plus tranquille. Cette consolante idée, qui me ranime un instant en ce moment, me donne encore la force de vous assurer de toute la sincérité, du dévouement et de l'admiration que j'ai eue et que je conserverai pour vous jusqu'à mon dernier soupir.

J'ai l'honneur de vous saluer très respectueusement.

LACLOS."(1)

Laclos died on the 5th September 1803, without ever setting off even upon the journey to Naples, and was buried in a fort on an island off Taranto. He died poor, and the sale of his belongings brought, "en monnaie de France, exactement seize cent treize francs"(2). His fellow-officers, however, led by one d'Anglemont, decided to erect a monument to him, and in November 1803 d'Anglemont wrote to Mme Laclos, asking her to send him a copy of Laclos's Épître à la Mort, in the hope that it contained some apt quotation to be

1. Lettres inédites, p. 286.

2. Louis de Chauvigny, Lettres in., p. 315.

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inscribed upon the monument. This, however, proved impossible(1). The following Spring, Laclos's widow put forward the following Latin epitaph, which Chauvigny suggests was probably written by Pariset(2):

"Hic Laclos, ingenio vixit qui clarus et armis,
A sponsa, sociis flendus et hoste jacet.
Pictor acer vitii, virtutem cultor amoenus,
Scriptor, homo, patriae, censor, honosque fuit."(3)

This was not, however, considered suitable by the officers. "Elle conviendrait peut-être," d'Anglemont told Mme Laclos, "sur un marbre qui couvrirait une tombe dans une église, ou contre une muraille, mais, il s'agit d'un monument et il faut rappeler le Consulat, l'Armée, le général Saint-Cyr."(4)

It seems that this fuss over a tomb was not well-received in high places. Berthier, the Minister of War, says d'Anglemont in another letter to Mme Laclos in November 1804, "a écrit au chef du génie à Tarente pour lui demander d'après quel ordre le fort qu'on construit à l'île Saint-Paul portait le nom de Laclos..."(5) Oral tradition in Tarante has it that the entire population of Tarante turned out for Laclos's funeral, and that the body was escorted by "la fleur de l'aristocratie Tarentine".

"En 1815," we are told, "au retour du roi Ferdinand de Sicile, la tombe fut violée, profanée par des vandales demeurés inconnus et qu'on soupçonne avoir été des royalistes.

En 1844, on pouvait distinguer encore un fossé long de deux mètres, profond d'autant, sur un mètre de largeur.

C'était là tout ce qui restait de la tombe du Général de Laclos!

Puis dans un coin du fort, un fragment de pierre, qui permettait de constater que le monument funéraire avait été construit en Carparo (sorte de granit rouge du pays)."(6)

1. *ibid.*, p. 316.

2. *ibid.*, p. 317.

3. "Here lies Laclos, made famous by his feats of arms and his mind. Worthy of the tears of his wife, his comrades and the enemy, he painted vice with vivacity, cultivated virtue with amenity, and both as writer and man was the glory and curse of his country."

4. 1 germinal an XII, quoted by Chauvigny, p. 317.

5. 20 brumaire an XIII, pp. 317-8.

6. Letter from the Town Clerk of Tarante to L. de Chauvigny, 10 June, 1904, *ibid.*, pp. 327-8.

In November 1803, as we have already mentioned, Mme Laclos was awarded a pension of 1000 francs and, despite a direct approach to Bonaparte, was unable to obtain more. Gradually, however, the shares which Laclos had bought, on the advice of Mme Pourrat, in the Anzin coal-mines(1), increased in value, and the financial circumstances of his family became more and more comfortable.

1. Lettres inédites, pp. 115 & 225.

9. LACLOS IN PRIVATE LIFE

We have, unavoidably, already touched upon certain aspects of Laclos's intimate life. The purpose of this chapter is to emphasise that there was nothing remotely Machiavellian about it, and that, so far as we know, there was nothing whatsoever of the roué in him. It is necessary to stress this fact to the utmost, in view of the confusion which has sprung up between Laclos and Valmont. We shall also attempt in this chapter to give a brief survey of the comments made by Laclos in his correspondence upon such matters as politics and religion, for it is in a man's private letters that we can hope to find him at his most sincere.

According to Tilly(1), Laclos told him that, "J'avais bien par-devers moi quelques petites historiottes de ma jeunesse, qui étaient assez piquantes." Again according to Tilly, Laclos claimed to have used these stories of his own youth in Les Liaisons dangereuses. We have already mentioned that it is quite possible that Laclos had one or two affairs in his young days, either in Grenoble or elsewhere. This would not be remarkable in any young army officer. There has been no lack of critics, however, to suggest that Mlle Duperré, who was later to become Mme Laclos, was one of the heroines of his novel, "probablement à cause de la similitude qu'il y a entre le nom de Volanges et le prénom de Soulanges"(2). Although all the evidence points to Laclos's having written Les Liaisons before he even met Mlle Duperré, the circumstances of his marriage merit examination,

1. Tilly, Mémoires, I, 323; O.C., pp. 732-3.
2. Gaussy, p. 80.

since they alone can, by any stretch of the imagination, be said to be a blot upon his private life.

Laclos's marriage is shrouded with legends. According to Arsène Houssaye(1), Duret de Tavel, Laclos's son-in-law, told him about 1846 that upon the arrival of the notorious novelist in La Rochelle, Mlle Duperré cried out, "Jamais M. de Laclos ne sera admis dans notre salon". This remark is supposed to have been repeated to Laclos, who saw it as a challenge and declared with all the coldness of a Valmont, "Je songe à me marier; je veux épouser avant six mois Mlle Duperré." He is supposed to have kept his word. Whatever the merit of this story - and, apart from anything else, it is difficult to fit it chronologically into Laclos's biography - it effectively disposes of the idea that Mlle Duperré is reflected in Cécile de Volanges, since their son Étienne was born in May 1784, and they married in May 1785.

Louis de Chauvigny accepts the family tradition of the wager made by Laclos concerning Mlle Duperré, and says,

"L'officier habile dans l'art des sièges qu'était Laclos, avait entrepris, par suite d'une gageure, celui de la belle Soulange Duperré. La place s'était rendue un peu trop tôt, mais, il en advint du vainqueur comme des Romains subjugués par l'art de la Grèce; il n'y eut guère que lui de vaincu et ce fut la revanche définitive du coeur et de l'amour sur ce Don Juan par trop cérébral qu'avait prétendu être Valmont." (2)

Let us examine the circumstances of this seduction in rather greater detail.

The story is based upon something as weak as a "tradition locale"(3), according to which Laclos, when in La Rochelle, lived in the house next door

1. A. Houssaye, op. cit., p. 224, n.

2. Chauvigny, Pref. to Le Fils de Laclos. Carnets de Marche du Commandant Choderlos de Laclos (An XIV-1814). Suivie de lettres inédites de Mme Pourrat., Lausanne & Paris, 1912, p. 8.

3. Dard, p. 106.

to that of the Duperré family. André Hallays lays the scene with the following description of the Duperrés's house(1):

"Au troisième et dernier étage de la maison se trouve un merveilleux boudoir de forme ovale, tout garni de boiseries représentant des allégories des saisons. La sculpture de ces panneaux est d'une charmante élégance, un peu facile (elles furent, dit-on, exécutées par des sculpteurs italiens). L'ensemble est d'une grâce exquise. Il est du reste impossible de se tromper sur la destination de cette petite pièce. Un des panneaux tourne, c'est une porte secrète donnant sur un petit escalier pratiqué dans l'épaisseur du mur. L'escalier aboutit à un souterrain qui passe sous le jardin de l'hôtel: le souterrain communique à un autre escalier pratiqué dans la muraille d'une maison voisine et qui conduit à un autre boudoir ovale tout semblable à celui de l'hôtel Duperré, décoré de la même façon. On n'a pas de peine à s'imaginer le roman: c'est un décor à souhait pour un 'conte moral'... Le boudoir de l'hôtel Duperré, les deux escaliers secrets, tout cela en dit long."

The house next door mentioned by Hallays is, of course, the one which Laclos is supposed to have inhabited.

"Comme c'est vraisemblable!" says Caussy(2), "Dans la maison Duperré, la seule personne à qui l'on doit avoir la prudence de ne pas confier la clef du boudoir, est justement celle qui l'a. À cet égard, pour avoir la jouissance du boudoir secret, de l'escalier dérobé, le capitaine Laclos a sans doute dû louer la maison entière pour un loyer annuel d'au moins 1800 livres, avec pour toutes ressources sa solde de 225 livres par mois..."

Caussy is surely right. This is merely legend, fascinating legend perhaps, but it can scarcely be accepted at its face value. All we know for sure is that Laclos "had to get married", a not uncommon phenomenon, and experienced some difficulty in obtaining agreement to the wedding(3). This is quite insufficient to make a Valmont of Laclos.

All we have, then, to sustain the argument that Laclos was ever anything like a roué, is the story reported by Tilly to the effect that Laclos had one

1. Journal des Débats, 23 nov. 1900.

2. Caussy, p. 79, n.l.

3. vide Mme Laclos's letter to the Maréchal de Ségur, 25th May 1786, quoted supra p. 79, n. 3.

or two love affairs in his youth, and the unauthenticated and romanesque story of the seduction of Soulange Duperré. There is, let it be noted in passing, not the slightest evidence that he was ever unfaithful to her in thought or deed after she became his wife. Unfortunately we know next to nothing about Laclos's private life up to his imprisonment, but his correspondence with his wife and children after that date presents him in a very different light from that of legend. Evidence that Laclos was a devoted husband and father abounds in his correspondence, and is all the more convincing because there is very rarely an attempt in these letters to write in a polished style such as that to be found in the letters of Les Liaisons dangereuses. One feels that one is, as it were, eavesdropping, and this feeling is so strong as to be, at times, almost one of embarrassment. The evidence is so prolific that the only difficulty is that of selection.

Let us first of all consider his letters to his wife from prison. They are full of small, insignificant details concerning his health, his food and his clothing, which are points such as not to deserve emphasis, were it not that they show a simplicity of character which helps give the lie to the idea that Laclos was a cold, calculating individual, forever spinning a web of intrigue, whether political or amorous. His attitude towards his wife and family is more significant. Consistently he shows himself as, above all, a man of sensibility. It is her "expansive sensibilité" which he praises in his wife, adding,

"C'est par l'esprit qu'on brille, mais c'est par le sentiment qu'on aime et qu'on est aimée(1); l'un ne procure qu'un peu de vaine gloire, l'autre nous rend susceptibles du seul véritable bonheur dont nous puissions jouir dans ce court trajet qu'on nomme la vie. quelle que

1. He is writing principally about their young daughter who, he hopes, will have her mother's sensibility.

s soit sa durée, on n'a vécu que par les affections qu'on a inspirées ou ressenties; et tel homme croit avoir vécu 100 ans, qui est mort au berceau. Quant à moi, quel que soit l'avenir, j'aurai toujours fourni une carrière complète, puisque j'aurai su t'aimer et me faire aimer de toi,"(1)

The thing which hurts him most is that he must be separated from his "bonne et chère amie". "Je suis au levant comme toi," he tells her on one occasion; "ainsi quand je verrai le soleil sur mon lit, je me dirai qu'au même moment, nous partageons ses rayons, et je les en trouverai plus doux." On the following day he tells her, "Je me surprends à chaque moment du jour, à me demander, que fait-elle à présent? Je voudrais ne pas te quitter un instant, en idée, pour me dédommager un peu, par là, de notre trop réelle séparation"(2).

The only thing about her which comes anywhere near to irritating him is her tendency to underestimate herself. It is not surprising that we find something paternal in his attitude towards her; after all, there was a difference of more than twenty-five years between their ages. "Tu as beau faire et beau dire," he says, "ton bon esprit s'échappe par tous tes pores et comme il est toujours dirigé par un coeur meilleur encore, il ne manque jamais le but, quoique tu te plains si souvent de ne pouvoir l'atteindre." "Tu as la fureur de te croire, ou au moins de te dire bête." Finally he tells her, "Tu as bien raison d'avouer enfin que tu as des qualités qui justifient mon amour pour toi. Si j'en faisais icy l'énumération, cette lettre seroit longue. Maîtresse adorable, excellente femme et tendre mère, en voilà le résumé en peu de mots...." On one occasion he confronted her with concrete evidence that she undervalued herself:

1. Lettres inéd., p. 32.
2. ibid., p. 40.

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"Je ne pardonnerois pas à toute autre personne que toi, d'avoir fait sur la sensibilité, une phrase plus jolie et plus juste que tout ce que j'ai pu écrire sur ce sujet: 'ce trésor de tous, - me dis-tu - et qui n'est jamais celui de qui le possède'; je ne crois pas qu'on puisse rien trouver de mieux senti, ni de mieux exprimé. Je voudrois avoir embelli de cette phrase, le style de Mme de Tourvel, et elle est échappé à ta plume, sans soin comme sans prétention."(1)

All sorts of small details show Laclous's love for his wife and family. He says that he will think of them when he eats the butter the children have sent him, "en sorte que ce sera un(e) espèce de repas de famille"(2), and he always imagines that his lunch each décadi is a family meal. He almost always used much the same formula to bring his letters to an end, as though it were a ritual: "Je t'aime et embrasse de tout mon coeur, ainsi que nos enfants." When, much later, he was on his death-bed and could barely hold a pen, he still managed to scrawl down those few words(3).

His attitude towards his wife during his period of imprisonment is summed up in a letter which he wrote to her towards the end, when he was eagerly looking forward to his release. He refers to her as "toi qui es un autre moi-même", and says, "Il y a près de douze ans que je te dois mon bonheur; et... en ce genre, le passé est la caution de l'avenir."(4).

His sole reference, anywhere in his correspondence, to the morals of the Ancien Régime, is in a similar tone. Still writing from Picpus, he says,

"Je te remercie, ma chère amie, de la place que tu as donnée à mon portrait. Il falloit bien une révolution pour que, dans un logement de cour, le portrait du mari se trouvât dans le boudoir de la femme; mais nous avons devancé de beaucoup d'années le plus beau décret de l'Assemblée qui consacre l'amour conjugal"(5).

One can, perhaps, scarcely quarrel with Dard when he says that "dans cet

1. *ibid.*, pp. 45; 64; 69-70; 35.
2. *Lettres in.*, p. 33.
3. *ibid.*, pp. 277 & 278.
4. *ibid.*, p. 92.
5. *ibid.*, pp. 38-9.

ibid. /

étalage de sensibilité, sans doute il faut faire la part de la mode, et même de l'hypocrisie du temps. Il faut faire aussi celle de l'adversité..."(1). Nevertheless, one cannot deny the genuine tone of almost every word of these letters. The feeling is too sustained to be an act. Here, surely, we have the true, intimate character of the author of Les Liaisons dangereuses revealing itself.

This feeling, this sensibility, are still there in the letters from the Army of the Rhine and the Army of Italy, and in those from the final expedition to Taranto. We have already mentioned the letter from Meaux in which Laclos tells his wife that they possess the eyes of the soul "qui valent mieux que les longues vues de Gomichon". Laclos adds to this remark, "On aura beau dire, ce n'est pas là un sophisme, et je persiste dans ce sentiment(2)". In another place he tells her, "... le plaisir de causer avec toi est celui que je tiens en réserve pour me rendre du courage quand l'ennui me suffoque"(3). From Turin he writes,

"Tu as bien raison de dire que malgré les dix-sept ans de mariage l'amour subsiste encore sous quelque nom qu'on le désigne. Il ne s'est même pas partagé avec nos enfants, il s'est seulement répandu sur eux",

and in his next letter he says, "Le courrier passé, le courrier futur, voicy ma vie: le reste n'est que la végétation"(4). Perhaps the most delightful of his letters from Italy, but also one in which Laclos pays considerable attention to style, is the one with which he enclosed a cameo bearing his own head. Part of this letter reads as follows:

"Quoique tu sois peu versée dans les connoissances numismatiques, je présume qu'entre toi et tes enfants, vous possédez assés votre histoire pour reconnoître quel est l'empereur que ce camée représente.

1. Dard, p. 405.
2. Lettres inéd., p. 96.
3. ibid., p. 122.
4. ibid., pp. 154 & 155.

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Pour vous mettre tous sur la voie, voicy, pour mon compte, ce que j'en sais. Il sut, par des moyens doux, l'emporter sur ses concurrents, quoique peut-être il eut moins de droit que quelqu'un d'eux à l'empire que tous désiroient. Il l'a possédé près de 18 ans, s'occupant du bonheur de ses sujets, et trouvant le sien dans leur tendre affection pour lui, et quoique les événements extérieurs lui aient fait éprouver quelques traverses, il répétoit souvent que, grâce aux sentiments qu'il éprouvoit et qu'il inspiroit, il se trouvoit plus heureux que bien d'autres, qu'il reconnoissoit comme plus puissants que lui. Je t'en dirois bien davantage, mais ce seroit faire tort à ta mémoire. Tu sais cette histoire là par cœur; et tu l'as apprise à tes enfants. Charles même la balbutie déjà."(1)

The immense pleasure caused by this letter and the cameo is evidenced to by a letter which Mme Laclos wrote to her husband(2). Still later, from Chiari, he writes to tell his wife how glad is to hear of the pleasure the children derived from going to Versailles, but adds.

"Mais on aura beau leur faire de petites fêtes, leur plus grand bonheur sera toujours de t'avoir pour mère, comme le mien de t'avoir pour femme, pour maîtresse, pour amie, pour tout"(3),

and ends his letter with a touching "Bonsoir toute la famille".

Laclos continued the practice he had taken up in Picpus of pretending his wife and family were with him. From Épernay, on his way to join the Army of Rhine, he jocularly describes to his wife how he first of all imagined that she, his daughter Soulangue and his son Charles were all with him: However, he says, "J'ai ... mis de côté Soulangue et Charles, parce que, quoique j'aie mangé comme 4, il n'y avoit pas à dîner pour 4. Je t'ai donc appelée seule, et nous avons dîné en tête à tête" - and then he goes on to give the menu!(4) From Italy he describes how he drinks the health of his family in cherry brandy: "Quoique le verre soit petit, tu te doutes bien qu'il s'y trouve une grande pour toi. Je t'y campe au beau milieu et nos trois enfants autour de toi, et puis j'avale"(5)

1. *ibid.*, p. 162.
2. *ibid.*, pp. 172-4.
3. *ibid.*, p. 203.
4. *ibid.*, p. 97.
5. *ibid.*, p. 149.

Mme Laclos still received mild reproaches from her husband for her self-effacement. The general wrote to her from Grenoble begging her,

"Expliques moi donc pourquoi, puisque tu es si maussade..., par quel aveuglement tous ceux qui te connoissent aiment tant à te voir, ou t'entendre lorsque tu consens à causer. Ma bonne amie, quitte cette méfiance de toi-même qui ne te dépare pas, mais qui te tourmente..."(1)

From Milan he urged her to mingle more in society during his absence. He fears that she is moping unduly, and giving way to what he describes as "cette déprisation de toi-même, si l'on peut parler ainsi, qui est vraiment une sorte de maladie de ton esprit"(2).

Laclos continued to adopt a quasi-paternal attitude towards his wife, as is illustrated by the letter in which he corrects her choice of words and refers her to her "distionnaire (sic) de l'Académie", adding affectionately, "Cela est bien égal de toi à moi, mais tu serois peut-être fâchée de l'avoir écrit à un autre; voilà pourquoi je t'en parle"(3). It would be wrong, however, to think that Laclos inevitably treated his wife as a child. There is never anything oppressive or unbearable in his attitude, and he normally treats her as an equal partner, as for instance when he discusses with her what to do with their investments. He advises her to hold on to them: they are intended for her. He hastens to assure her, however, "d'une part, que tout ce que tu aurois fait ou tout ce que tu feras, sera toujours bien fait, et de l'autre, que je compte vivre encore 100 ans"(4).

There continues to be a host of small traits which proclaim Laclos's genuine love for his wife and family. In the main he sticks to his usual

1. Lettres inéd., p. 141.
2. ibid., p. 182.
3. ibid., pp. 202-3.
4. ibid., pp. 224-5.

tht/

formula for ending his letters, but on one occasion varies it in the following way:

"Adieu, bonne chère amie; je n'ai point reçu la lettre d'Étienne, ainsi je ne peux pas y répondre. Grondes le, pour ton compte, puisqu'il se néglige, embrasses le pour le mien ainsi que la menue Soulange et le gros Charles, et garde pour toi les plus tendres baisers de l'amour et de l'identité"(1).

The "Bonsoir toute la famille" already mentioned is a similar trait. When addressing his wife Laclos is capable of affectionate - and bourgeois - language which would have repelled any roué. On two occasions he refers to her as "gros-bet"(2), and on another, when she complains of growing rather plump, he fondly tells her, "De toi, bonne chère amie, plus il y en a et mieux c'est"(3). Decidedly, Laclos was no Valmont!

Similar affection is shown in his letters about and to his children. He says of Soulange, after he has heard of her kindness to her mother during his imprisonment, "J'avoue que jusqu'à ce moment, j'avois craint qu'elle qu'elle ne fût plus spirituelle que sensible. Je dis que j'en avois peur, car, en convenant qu'on peut avoir à se plaindre de la sensibilité, je plains bien davantage encore ceux qui n'en ont pas"(4). In another letter from prison Laclos asks his wife to thank Soulange for the "petit mot" she has sent him, "en lui faisant observer toutes fois qu'il est bien court. Il me semble que si nous étions ensemble, elle auroit plus de choses à me dire que cela; et je voudrais qu'elle comprit déjà qu'écrire à quelqu'un n'est autre chose que causer avec lui"(5).

He worries at the slightest sign of ill-health in his children(6), and

1. Lettres inéd., p. 132. Laclos's italics.
2. ibid., pp. 142 & 147.
3. ibid., p. 243.
4. ibid., p. 35.
5. ibid., p. 54.
6. ibid., pp. 36-7 & 142.

ibid. /

watches their educational progress with great attention. He asks his wife to tell Charles "qu'il aura une lettre de moi dès qu'il saura en entier son Ba Be Bi Bo Bu, jusqu'à la fin de l'alphabet", and congratulates Étienne on paying attention to his handwriting and spelling(1). However, later on, in a letter to Étienne, he administers a rebuke: "Tes lettres sont très bien quant à ce que tu dis, mais la manière dont tu le dis, ne laisse pas de les déparer et quelquefois même il faut deviner ce que tu veux dire".(2) Writing from Turin he tells Étienne that he must study hard, and cultivate discipline. Nevertheless, he tempers this criticism by telling his son, "Tu vas peut-être prendre cette lettre, un peu sérieuse, pour un sermon paternel, tu te tromperois en jugeant ainsi, c'est la simple conversation d'un ami à son ami"(3).

Laclos had further cause, some time later, when Étienne was in diplomatic service in Germany, to reprove him(4). He settled the debts which his son had incurred, and then called upon him to be his own judge, asking him what he would think of a man who contracted debts which he knew he was unable to meet. This letter is firm, and yet affectionate. Laclos appeals to Étienne's finer feelings, pointing out that Soulangue and Charles have to be educated too, and that as a result thoughtless spending hurts the entire family. He tells him, "C'est rester toujours enfant que de ne pas savoir régler sa conduite sur ce qu'on juge honnête et utile; ce seroit ne pas mériter le nom d'homme, que de n'en avoir pas le courage... Je suppose que les chagrins intérieurs dont tu me parles, sont ceux que te causent tes dettes; si tu en as d'autres, n'hésites pas de me les confier."

1. Lettres inéd., pp. 154 & 153.
2. ibid., p. 288.
3. ibid., p. 289.
4. ibid., pp. 300-303.

ibid. /

Étienne simply was not cut out for a career in diplomacy - he later succeeded as an army officer - and when Laclos went to see Talleyrand, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, on his son's behalf, Talleyrand showed him a despatch copied by Étienne, and enquired, "Comment est-il possible qu'un fils de M. de Laclos mette l'orthographe comme une cuisinière?" Laclos excused his son as best he could, saying that perhaps there had been too much emphasis upon mathematics in his education. Talleyrand told him very seriously to warn his son to improve matters, particularly as it was possible that some of these despatches might be seen by the First Consul himself. Laclos was thus reduced to telling his son to find a French master in Dresden and study "les premiers élémens de ta langue, et particulièrement de la conjugaison des verbes". He sugared the pill by telling Étienne that, apart from this, he was pleased with his conduct. "Enfin que veux-tu que je te dise?" he asked. "Ton sort est dans tes mains"(1).

We have a letter from Laclos to Soulange and Charles about their mother's birthday, which clearly shows his sensibility. "C'est vous deux", he tells them, "que je charge de lui offrir, pour ce jour, l'hommage de mes sentiments et de mes vœux.... Vous ne lui présenterez en mon nom qu'une simple fleur; mais pour orner le bouquet, vous y joindrez vos tendres caresses"(2). The following example will give some idea of his affection for his youngest child, Charles, who was born on the 4th June 1795. The letter from which the following extracts are taken was written in Prairial, an XI (May-June 1803):

"Figures-toi que quand tu resterois en voiture d'un dimanche à l'autre, en allant toujours tout droit, tu n'arriverois pas encore où je suis;

1. Lettres inéd., pp. 306-7.
2. ibid., p. 308.

ibid./

et cependant d'icy à quelques jours, j'irai encore plus loin: mais quelque loin que je puisse être, j'aimerai toujours Charles, et je penserai souvent à lui; et comme nous savons tous deux lire et écrire, nous pourrons, de temps en temps, nous donner de nos nouvelles et nous répéter réciproquement que nous nous aimons toujours autant que quand nous nous voyions tous les 15 jours ou toutes les semaines. C'est vraiment bien consolant de savoir écrire, car, vois-tu, sans cela, nous ne pourrions aucun de nous deux faire savoir à l'autre que nous l'aimons toujours.....

.

Songes combien je serai content quand ta maman me mandera: On est content de Charles, il travaille bien, il a été le second ou le troisième en lecture, en écriture ou orthographe; et si jamais tu étois le premier! Ce seroit bien le cas de l'écrire de suite, et moi je le dirois à toute l'armée et chacun diroit: Il faudra que ce petit Charles vienne bientôt avec nous, c'est un bon garçon qui travaille bien, et sera un bon militaire.

Ne seras-tu bien aise qu'on dise cela?....."(1)

We have already said that, at any rate during the period for which we have direct documentary evidence concerning his private thoughts, Laclos shows himself to be the reverse of a man eaten up by ambition. One or two further examples will serve to underline this point. From Picpus he writes:

"Le cœur pur et sensible d'une bonne épouse et d'une bonne mère, est un panthéon qui en vaut bien un autre. Il est moins brillant, sans doute, mais aussi n'a-t-il pas besoin, pour y parvenir, de circonstances étrangères. Au surplus, je n'ai point à me reprocher de n'avoir pas concouru pour l'autre. J'ai fait ce que mon talent et les circonstances m'ont permis de faire"(2).

All his ambition amounted to in Picpus - when, admittedly, he was living under abnormal conditions and the fear of the guillotine - is described by Laclos, when commenting on the fact that he is reading the Abbé Rozier on rural economy, as the hope of being allowed one day to "aller labourer quelque petit coin de terre pour y chercher la subsistance de ma famille et la mienne"(3). This desire is paralleled by that which he subsequently expressed in Italy for a minor diplomatic post somewhere with some petty princeling.

1. Lettres inéd., pp. 309-10.

2. ibid., p. 38. It must be stressed, as we have already pointed out, that it would be foolish to claim that Laclos was devoid of normal ambition. It is, however, still more foolish to attempt to explain his entire life and work by this one word, ambition.

3. ibid., p. 63.

ibid.

Shortly before he returned from the Army of Italy Laclos declared himself resigned to the fact that he would not be on the List of Notables, and therefore be able to be "ni ministre, ni conseiller d'État, ni sénateur conservateur, ni tribun, ni membre du Corps Législatif, ni commissaire de la Comptabilité Nationale". He added, "mais, bonne chère amie, on vit fort bien sans être rien de tout cela." Nevertheless, he wrote to the authorities of his arrondissement, pointing out that two years earlier (when he was conservateur des hypothèques), they had given him a "carte de citoyen", and that he was "aujourd'hui absent pour le service public, en qualité de général de brigade dans l'arme de l'artillerie"(1). He denied, however, that this was anything to do with ambition. "La liste de notabilité", he told his wife, "ne m'a occupé que pour y prendre ma place de citoyen, et tel a été l'unique motif de la note que j'avois remise à mon frère"(2). He thought that it might be a good thing to be on the Communal List, and suggested that Mme Pourrat might be of some help in this connection, but his heart was not set upon it. As he said, "Qu'y aura-t-il donc de si étrange que je reste comme les 9/10 de la Nation, ou pour mieux dire, des citoyens qui s'y trouvent? Car enfin il n'y aura qu'un dixième d'entre eux porté sur la Liste Communale. Il n'y en aura de même qu'un centième sur la Liste Départementale, et enfin un millième sur celle dite Nationale..."(3) What matters for Laclos is always happiness: "Le bonheur est le but, la gloire n'est qu'un moyen"(4).

The rôle played by sensibility in Laclos's life is clear from the literary allusions to be found in his correspondence, although these, admittedly, are

1. Lettres inédites, p. 231. Laclos's italics.
2. ibid., p. 238.
3. ibid., pp. 244-5.
4. ibid., p. 195.

ibid. /

not very numerous. He describes Marivaux as a man "qui avoit beaucoup d'esprit et qui étoit un grand disséqueur de mots, connoissoit fort bien la première peau du coeur humain, et en avoit examiné tous les replis avec soin et avec succès; mais il n'avoit pas pénétré plus avant..... Marivaux a voulu dire que Madame de Mirande, en obligeant, se livroit plus au plaisir qu'elle y trouvoit, qu'au mérite que cela lui donnoit. Après cela il a nommé noblesse d'âme cette bienfaisance sèche par laquelle, dans le bienfait, le bienfaiteur ne considère que lui-même, et, si sa définition est juste, ce que je ne crois pas, je déclare, que je ne veux jamais être l'obligé d'un bienfaiteur à âme noble." In Laclos's view, "il est certain qu'il y a quelque chose de plus simple, du plus touchant, dans celui qui vous oblige uniquement, parce que vous avez besoin d'être obligé, que dans celui qui vous oblige parce qu'il est beau d'obliger"(1).

Rousseau, the author of "cet ouvrage délicieux", La Nouvelle Héloïse(2), comes in for far gentler treatment from Laclos. It is from Rousseau that Laclos finds it easiest to quote(3), and the extent of his love for the Genevan's work is expressed in a letter which, like the one in which he attacks Marivaux, was written to his wife from prison.

"Tu trouves", he writes, "que Rousseau et moi écrivons de même! Tu me fais assurément beaucoup d'honneur, et toi beaucoup d'allusions; mais il a écrit presque tout ce que tu m'as inspiré et tu m'inspires encore, et tu prends la ressemblance du sentiment pour celui de l'expression. Au surplus, talent à part, j'assure que je ne connois que lui digne être, auprès de toi, l'interprète de mes sentiments et peut-être, lui et moi, étions-nous les seuls êtres capables de parler à ton coeur le langage qui lui convient et que tu sais si bien entendre et apprécier."(4)

Laclos was no blind worshipper of Rousseau however - at least in his later years -

1. Lettres inéd., pp. 46-7.
2. ibid., p. 130.
3. ibid., pp. 61; 86; 142.
4. ibid., p. 60.

ibid./

as is shown by a comment in a letter to his wife from Brescia, in which he links the names of the two giants of French thought and literature of the eighteenth century:

"J'apprends avec plaisir que Charles est devenu un garçon instruit qui sait son Ba be bi bo bu. Hélas, il fut un temps où Voltaire et Rousseau furent moins savants que lui et tous deux aussi sont morts sans savoir leur Ba be bi bo bu sur beaucoup de choses dont peut-être ils s'étoient fort occupés. Charles peut donc prendre courage, le voilà presque comme tout le monde."(1)

If this is disenchantment, it is disenchantment of a singularly good-humoured kind. It should be remembered that, later, when Laclos was contemplating another novel, he felt himself still in harmony with Rousseau.(2)

We have already mentioned that whilst in Picpus Laclos claimed to have served the Revolution well. We have also given, as one possible reason for this, the censorship to which he knew his letters were subject. In these circumstances it was natural for him to express opinions which would not clash with his hopes of release. At the same time it should be pointed out that, whilst Laclos was temperamentally unsuited to whole-hearted enthusiasm for democratic republican government, he was nevertheless no died-in-the-wool conspirator for the establishment of an Orleanist monarchy. There is no evidence whatsoever that he was even remotely connected with the Dancouriez conspiracy. It is worthwhile, however, to devote some space to consideration of his political declarations, both during his period of imprisonment and after his release.

We have seen that one of Laclos's principal and ever-present worries was his concern for the material and financial well-being of his family. In his

1. Lettres inéd., p. 195.
2. ibid., p. 239.

ibid. /

third letter to his wife from Picpus, he writes(1):

"Quand la patrie avoit accepté mes services, elle absorboit une grande partie de mes occupations, et la conscience que j'avois de lui être utile, me faisoit négliger, peut-être trop, ces intérêts de"

The end of this letter has disappeared, but if, as seems likely, Laclos is saying that he did not fill his pockets when he might have done, then this merits consideration before one condemns him as a mere political adventurer.

"Actions, vœux et pensées," he says(2), "tout a été pour la République, pour toi, pour nos enfans."

He declares that he does not wish to leave prison until he is fully cleared:

"Non seulement je veux sortir, mais je veux qu'on reconnaisse que j'ai été victime des calomnies répandues contre moi par les véritables ennemis de la patrie, tandis que je la servois de tous mes moyens et de tous mes vœux; et cela, depuis l'origine de la Révolution jusqu'au moment de mon arrestation; je pourrois même dire et prouver, encore depuis mon arrestation."(3)

This last remark is a clear reference to his experiments with the boulet creux.

Laclos's declaration here is not entirely disinterested, since this letter was written after the fall of Robespierre, when his hopes of release were high during the post-thermidorian reaction. Nevertheless, one cannot but agree, in view of the scurrilous pamphlets which had been written against Laclos, that there is more than a grain of truth in what he says.

Although Laclos cannot be said ever to have been an upholder of republicanism, he certainly was an ardent supporter of the revolution, and he saw the Napoleonic régime as the finest possible outcome. One regrets that he did not live to see the establishment of the Empire, to which he would surely have given his whole-hearted support.

1. Lettres inéd., p. 32.
2. ibid., p. 38.
3. ibid., p. 81.

ibid/

"Sois bien assurée," he tells his wife in a letter of 1st July 1800 from Grenoble(1), "que les esprits bornés qui sont entrés dans l'ornière de la haine de la Révolution ne redoutent rien tant que l'époque où ils en ressentiront les bienfaits; ou tout autour d'eux déposera du bonheur public, et même du leur en particulier. La prospérité de la France est la plus grande punition qu'ils puissent subir, et c'est aussi la seule qu'il convienne de leur faire supporter. Je suis dans le ravissement de voir toute la conduite de Bonaparte prendre cette heureuse direction. Qu'il vive seulement, et les premiers fondateurs de la liberté seront à jamais, je ne m'abaisserai pas à dire justifiés, mais honorés et bénis."

He reproaches his wife for not going to see the arrival in Paris of "l'Immortel Général ... notre héros, qui est aussi celui de la France, de l'Europe, et du monde entier"(2). The reason that he wishes to see this war under Napoleon through to its conclusion is "parce que je la regarde comme partie intégrante de la Révolution, et que ses orages, que je ne prétends pas justifier, ne m'ont ni dégoûté de sa théorie, ni ébranlé sur les heureux résultats que j'en prévois pour la France, et, à la longue, pour l'humanité entière"(3). He evaluates the very presence with the army of Bonaparte, the man who has accustomed France to miracles, at 30,000 extra men, and declares,

"Je vois avec une grande satisfaction que Bonaparte rappelle à Paris l'élégance et l'urbanité française, c'est aussi là une carrière de gloire et il les parcourra toutes"(3).

He looks forward to the greatness which France was later to know under the Empire:

"Les malveillants auront beau faire, la prospérité de la France et la gloire de Bonaparte iront toujours croissant, et feront, j'ose le prédire, la plus brillante époque de l'histoire de tous les siècles"(4).

Despite one or two slight misgivings, such as his prayer that Bonaparte, this great leader of men, would always prove a good judge of them(5), there was no

1. Lettres inéd., pp. 130-1.
2. ibid., p. 135.
3. ibid., pp. 169-70.
4. ibid., pp. 183; 197; 184.
5. ibid., p. 222.

ibid./

real doubt in Laclos's mind that the French Revolution had at last found the leader it had needed all along.

There is no evidence that Laclos was what would commonly be called a religious man, although it seems that, as was not unnatural in his period, he was to some extent imbued with deism. From prison he writes,

"C'est véritablement un bienfait de la Providence que la manière dont ma santé se soutient depuis ma détention..... Cela me ramène assés souvent à cette idée, que la Providence n'envoie de peines à chacun que ce qu'il en peut supporter..."(1)

He returns to this impersonal Providence of his shortly afterwards, when he tells his wife that

"La Providence, à laquelle tu reviens toujours dans nos infortunes communes, ne se montre jamais avec plus d'avantages, pour l'idée d'une vie à venir, que lorsque l'homme vertueux est en butte au malheur; car alors, il est naturel de croire que sa vertu sera récompensée et même vengée en quelque temps et de quelque manière que ce soit: mais, ce qu'on n'observe pas assés, c'est qu'elle agit dès ce monde, d'une manière déjà bien sensible pour celui qui observe profondément, et ne s'arrête pas aux surfaces si souvent trompeuses. En effet, l'homme de bien conserve tout sa sérénité dans le malheur, tandis que le méchant y est sans aucune consolation; tandis même que le méchant qui prospère est déchiré par ses remords, en sorte que, bien souvent, celui qui y regarde de près, s'aperçoit aisément que la victime est plus heureuse que l'appresseur; c'est là, particulièrement, le bienfait qui mérite notre éternelle reconnaissance"(2).

According to Pariset, Laclos followed his own precept and retained his serenity in adversity, and "dans sa prison, et lorsque son existence était chaque jour un nouveau miracle, on le voyait aussi calme qu'au milieu de sa famille et de ses amis les plus chers"(3).

Robespierre's celebration of the Supreme Being inspired him to say that "une fête à l'Éternel est pour tout le monde,... on est tout aussi bien en sa

1. Lettres inéd., pp. 37-8.
2. ibid., pp. 47-8.
3. Pariset, Notice sur le Général de la Clos, p. 6.

ibid./

présence, sous les verroux qu'en raze campagne... J'ai placé sous les yeux de l'Éternel notre déjeuner de famille, intentionnel et décadien". In Laclos's view, Marmontel was right when he said that "le ciel, l'enfer, sont dans le coeur de l'homme"(1). The nearest he ever comes to "personalising" the eternal being is when he jocularly writes, in a parody of Biblical language, "En vérité, en vérité, je vous le dis, depuis le 18 brumaire, Dieu est redevenu patriote"(2).

We have seen that Laclos's dying thoughts were for his family. "Être réuni aux objets de ses affections n'est assurément pas un moyen pour ne pas mourir, mais au moins c'est celui, et c'est le principal, de vivre jusqu'à la fin de sa vie"(3). Nowhere in his last letters does Laclos so much as refer to God, and there is no sign in Lespagnol's letters that a priest attended him to administer the last sacrament of the Church, although according to the tradition of Taranto, however, at Laclos's funeral the body was "accompagné par le chapitre des chanoines au complet"(4).

In writing this biography, we have attempted to concentrate upon the facts as we know them and to ignore the mere legends which have grown up over the years about Laclos the conspirator, Laclos the seducer of women, or in short, Laclos the incarnation of Valmont. Laclos himself said,

"Il faudra bien finir par juger les hommes d'après leurs actions et non d'après leurs calomniateurs; alors je leur dirai de voir ma vie politique et privée, et de prononcer"(5).

1. Lettres inéd., p. 62.

2. ibid., p. 212.

3. ibid., p. 283. Letter to Alouier.

4. ibid., p. 327. Letter from Town Clerk of Taranto to Louis de Chauvigny.

5. ibid., p. 84.

This is what we have attempted to do, and the conclusion which we have to draw is that Laclès was no Valmont and no Machiavelli. Apart from one flash of inspiration, represented by Les Liaisons dangereuses, he was, although versatile and active, not even an outstanding man. In his private life he was a man of sensibility; in his political life he was a moderate revolutionary; as a man of letters he was rooted in the elegance and urbanity of the Ancien Régime which he was so pleased to see coming back into favour under Napoleon. It is now time for us to study Les Liaisons dangereuses, which is at one and the same time the expression of this elegance and urbanity and the cause of the legends which besmirched Laclès's reputation as a man.

II. LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES.

1. THE PUBLICATION OF 'LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES'

We do not know precisely on what date the first edition of Les Liaisons dangereuses was published, although we can narrow it down considerably. The book's appearance was announced in the Mercur de France on the 23rd March 1782, and the contract(1) between Laclos and his publisher Durand neveu is dated the 16th March. This contract was for a first edition of 2000 copies. That the work was an immediate success is indicated by the fact that on the 21st April Laclos, acknowledging the receipt of 1200 livres due to him from the first edition(2), agreed to a second to be published under the same conditions as the first. Allem lists nine editions of Les Liaisons in 1782, and twenty-one before the end of the century. To these should be added a French edition published in London in 1797, which Allem seems to have missed (3). According to Laclos himself(4), the two editions for which we have the contract with Durand are the only two in which the author himself had a hand; the rest he personally had nothing to do with. This seems peculiar and, as Mistler says, "s'il faut prendre au pied de la lettre l'affirmation de Laclos, on se demande pour quelle raison, devant l'énorme succès des Liaisons, l'auteur et l'éditeur Durand les auraient laissées réimprimer par des pirates et se seraient personnellement désintéressés d'une excellente affaire"(5). This is an enigma which seems insoluble(6). If we are to accept the evidence of Tilly, Laclos on another occasion stated that since the publication of his novel, "je n'ai presque pas su depuis

1. B.N. MS., Fonds fr. 12845, fol. 36; O.C., pp. 751-2; photograph in Laclos par lui-même, pp. 34-5.

2. He received the balance of 400 l. on 7th May - *ibid.*

3. 2 vols., Londres, G.G. & J. Robinson, 1797. Allem also misses an edn. P.T.O.

sa fortune, mais on me dit qu'il vit encore"(1). Why this should be it is difficult to say, especially as Laclos was not averse to mentioning Les Liaisons, as his letters show. We may well be justified in being suspicious of Tilly's evidence on this point, for it is quite clear that, if Laclos did tell his son that the first two were the only editions with which he had been concerned, he also makes it quite plain that he is familiar with the various editions which have appeared since 1782, for he says that the edition of which his son speaks is the worst of the many which have appeared. Laclos's letter to Étienne dates from 1802. Tilly was writing at the turn of the century about a conversation which he alleges took place ten years previously. Further evidence that the author of Les Liaisons was more interested in the fate of his work than Tilly implies is once again presented by Laclos himself. In 1800 he wrote to his wife that "autant que j'ai pu m'en assurer chez les libraires de Turin et de Milan, les Liaisons dangereuses ne sont pas traduites en italien. Elles y ont été beaucoup lues en français; voilà tout ce que j'en sais"(2). Indeed, he took an interest in a plan to translate the work into Italian, although he thought this would be a difficult task(3). We shall presumably never know why this man who was to go to the trouble of sending complimentary copies of his novel to Italian bishops when they showed an interest in it, who visited Italian bookshops in search of possible translations of his work, who was well aware that pirated editions were frequently appearing, and who, moreover, was never perfectly happy about his family's financial circumstances, was content not to publish more than two editions himself, and those within a month of each other.

1. in O.C., p. 733.

2. ~~Lettres inéd.~~, 28 brumaire, an IX, p. 191.

3. *ibid.*, 7 germinal an IX (to his wife) p. 235.

There has been some controversy as to where Les Liaisons dangereuses was written. Dard implies(1) that Laclos wrote it either in Paris or in La Rochelle, whilst both Bourget(2) and Houssaye(3) mistakenly say that it was composed in Grenoble. Why there should be this disagreement it is difficult to see. None of these writers brings a shred of evidence to support his claim, and on this point the evidence of Tilly, slightly corrected by that of Laclos's friend Pariset, seems irrefutable. According to Tilly, Laclos told him that he wrote the novel whilst "en garnison à l'île de Ré." As we have said(4), this island is close to the île d'Aix, off La Rochelle, where we know that Laclos did a tour of duty under Montalembert, and it is on the latter island that Pariset says the book was written(5). It therefore seems unlikely that, as Dard would have us believe, it was composed during the six months' leave which Laclos began in September 1781. It is reasonably certain that by this time the first draft was either complete, or very near to completion, and that Laclos had set to work on it to fill his leisure time whilst on duty on the island.

Mistler suggests(6) that the manuscript of Les Liaisons preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale indicates that Laclos "a composé son roman d'un seul jet." He offers as proof of this thesis the fact that there are numerous abbreviations in the manuscript. For instance, we find "1^{re} fois"; "Blle" for "bataille"; "com." for "comédie". Then there are occasional errors

1. Dard, p. 30.
2. Sensations d'Italie, Paris, 1891, pp. 293-4.
3. Galerie du 18e s., 3e sér., Paris, 1858, p. 223.
4. *supra* p. 5.
5. Notice..., An XII, p. 3.
6. *op. cit.*, p. xix.

such as "Sophie Volanges" for "Cécile Volanges"(1), or "espérer la même espérance" for "espérer la même indulgence"(2). Mistler also points out that in the manuscript on very many occasions a phrase which is initially crossed out finds its way in again a little further on. Examples of this are indeed very frequent, and Mistler concludes that they show Laclos correcting "non pas après coup, en relisant, mais au fil de l'écriture"(3). He also claims that the suppressed letter from the Présidente de Tourvel to Valmont(4), full, as it is, of crossings-out and variants, "montre...l'aspect de la plupart des pages du manuscrit." Finally, he points out that Laclos indicates several changes in the order of the letters of which the novel is composed.

Despite the evidence brought forward by Mistler we must, along with Yves Le Hir,(5), take the opposite view, and say that the manuscript "nous donne un état excellent des Liaisons dangereuses, prêt pour l'impression." Despite its crossings-out and corrections, the manuscript which we possess seems to be a copy made by Laclos of an earlier draft. The presence of obvious and clearly understandable abbreviations does not militate against this view, and slips of the pen of the type we have mentioned could just as well occur in a copy as in an original draft. The same applies to the reappearance of phrases which a few lines earlier had been crossed out. Indeed in many cases the idea that Laclos was copying from a first draft makes this phenomenon more readily understandable. It can often be explained in one of the following two ways: as a simple mistake, caused by the eye travelling too fast and too far along the original draft, or as the sign of a last minute insertion. That this is so will be seen from the following examples:

1. Heading of Letter XII.
2. Letter CXXII, O.C., p. 314.
3. Mistler, op. cit., p. xix.
4. O.C., pp. 841-2.
5. Y. Le Hir, Introduction to the Garnier edn. of Les Liaisons, (1958), p. xvii.

Suite de la Lettre XLMS folio 72"... intrigues? mais nos parents ne songent à rien."O.C., p. 114."... intrigues? ne serait-il pas plaisant de dérober la Lettre ou le portrait d'un rival, ou de tirer des poches d'une Prude de quoi la démasquer? Mais nos parents ne songent à rien."Lettre CXIVMS folio 113"... est d'avis que, naturell."O.C., p. 297."est d'avis que, dans les personnes naturellement actives..."Lettre LVIMS folio 80"En est-il de plus doux que d'être en paix avec soi-même, de s'endormir."O.C., p. 141."En est-il de plus doux que d'être en paix avec soi-même, de n'avoir que des jours sereins, de s'endormir sans trouble....."

There are numerous similar examples.

An extension of this phenomenon is pointed out by Le Hir when he says(1), "des ratures que M. Allem ou J. Mistler n'ont pu lire, j'ai réussi à les déchiffrer. Or elles recouvrent un texte précédemment écrit." Le Hir gives one example. It occurs in Letter XXVII(2), at the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth paragraphs(3). The first two lines of folio 61 of the manuscript read as follows:

- 1.1. "mal qu'il demande. Cependant si vous trouvez que ça ne se doit pas, je vous promets de m'en empêcher; mais je crois
- 1.2. que vous penserez comme moi, que ce n'est pas là du mal. Pendant que j'y suis, Madame, permettez moi de..."(4)

The third line is quite heavily crossed out, but the magnifying-glass enables one to see quite clearly that it is a repetition of line one. It should be

1. op. cit., p. xviii.
2. O.C., p. 85.
3. Not para. 3, as Le Hir says.
4. We have modernised the spelling.

pointed out, however, that such examples are not as numerous as Le Hir implies. Indeed, this is the only one we were able to discover, despite a reasonably thorough examination of the manuscript. Nevertheless, this is not the type of thing which one would do if one were writing direct from one's imagination, and this is perhaps the clearest indication that Laclos was copying from another draft.

Despite Mistler, it is not true that the omitted letter from Mme de Tourvel to Valmont is an accurate reflection of the general state of the manuscript. There are in fact letters which contain hardly any crossings-out, and the photograph of folio 51, which we have used as a frontispiece, although it contains a certain number of corrections, is far more typical than folio 127, upon which appears the suppressed letter(1). The fact that the letter was not used, is, after all, significant, and it may well be that here at least we do possess a page of the original rough draft(2). This letter is not numbered, and only the initials of the writer and recipient are given, "la p^{dte} T. au V^{te} de V." This would seem to indicate that this particular sheet, at any rate, was not intended for either a copyist or the printer.

Mistler's claim that the modification of the order of some of the letters indicates that the manuscript is an original draft is unconvincing(3). It

1. Folio 127 is photographically reproduced by Vailland in Laclos par lui-même, pp. 136-7.
2. cf. also folio 123: an omitted letter from Valmont to Mme de Volanges. This does not appear to fall into the same category. Originally it was numbered 145, but it was then entirely crossed out and replaced by a footnote (cf. O.C., pp. 854-5 & footnote p. 387. It contains only a few corrections, and those of the type already described.
3. The original order of letters 16-23 was 21, 22, 23, 20, 16, 17, 18, 19; of 45-8, 46, 47, 48, 45; of 64-7, 67, 74, 64, 66; of 88-91, 90, 91, 88, 89; of 103-6, 104, 105, 106, 103; of 145-7, 147, 146, 145; of 160-1, 161, 160. The way in which L. indicated these changes is seen in the frontispiece.

should be stressed that in the main Laclos shows no hesitation concerning the sequence of the letters. These changes, affecting twenty-nine letters out of one hundred and seventy-five, are not of tremendous importance in this context, and certainly cannot be used as evidence that the Bibliothèque Nationale manuscript is the original. The order of these letters was clearly changed by the author upon mature reflection, for dramatic purposes or, in the words of Mistler himself, so as to "donner au progrès de l'intrigue un caractère plus simultanéiste ou plus polyphonique"(1). It seems reasonably obvious that the changes were made when the manuscript had been written out in its entirety, and they therefore throw no light upon the way in which it was written.

Both Mistler(2) and Le Hir(3) attempt to deduce from the manuscript when the novel was written. The evidence here is sketchy. The letters, in the manuscript are usually dated as they are in the published book, with the day, the month, and the first two digits of the year. Thus letter XXI is dated "18 août 17--"(4). It is, however, true that letters LXXXIII-LXXXVI inclusive bear the date 1780, whilst letter XI is dated 1778. Moreover, letter CXXV(5) refers to the 28th October as being a Thursday. Le Hir points out that this was so in 1779(6). On the basis of this evidence, Mistler has argued, concerning the letters dated 1780, that "Laclos écrivant les épîtres imaginaires

1. Mistler, p. xx.
2. Mistler, p. xix.
3. Le Hir, op. cit., pp. xviii-xix.
4. of frontispiece & O.C., p. 73. This is a special case in some respects, as this letter was involved in a change of sequence. Also for dramatic purposes, the date was changed to the 20th in the published work, to add verisimilitude to the maturation of Valmont's plan to perform a "good work".
5. O.C., p. 322.
6. Le Hir, op. cit., p. xix.

de ses personnages, a mis la date mécaniquement, comme il l'eût fait pour des lettres qu'il eût réellement adressées à ses correspondants"(1). It does not follow, of course, that this is so, although it is certainly a possibility, just as it is possible, if one adopted the same line of reasoning about it, that Letter XI would indicate that Laclos had started writing Les Liaisons by letter CXXV, with its reference to Thursday October 28th, are concerned, that here we are dealing with accidents. It is possible, for instance, that the date 1778 was idly chosen so as to situate the action some little way into the past, whilst the date Thursday the 28th may well have been chosen at random. It is difficult to believe that letter CXXV was written before letters LXXXIII-LXXXVI. These four consecutive letters dated 1780 are a little more convincing. It may well be that the very fact there is a letter dated 1778, whilst others are dated 1780, militates to some degree against Mistler's argument that the manuscript proves that Laclos wrote his novel in one sustained effort. This evidence is very tenuous, and it would be very rash to be more positive than Le Hir when he says that "on peut donc supposer que Laclos a travaillé des 1779 à son roman; et en 1780 certainement"(2)

However, although it seems likely that the manuscript which we possess is a fair copy, possibly made from the original draft during Laclos's six months' leave from the army, it seems highly improbable that this copy was ever handed to a printer. In the first place, it is far too difficult to read. The handwriting is very small(3), and matters are made even worse by the complete absence of paragraph indentation. Secondly, the manuscript bears none of the marks

1. Mistler, op. cit., p. xix.

2. Le Hir, op. cit., p. xix.

3. It is smaller than that of the MS of Des Femmes et de leur Éducation. Perhaps this in itself is a sign that the MS of Les Liaisons, is a copy although other and far more prosaic explanations could be offered.

which one might expect to find had it been in the hands of a printer(1). In the last resort, then, we cannot rely on the manuscript to give us an indication of how Laclos initially brought his novel into existence. We can look to it, on the other hand, for the final touches which Laclos thought fit to put to it. The chief of these are the changes in letter sequence, surely a sign in themselves that Laclos was here licking his work more or less into its final shape. These final touches have an interest of their own.

Les Liaisons dangereuses, then, was a success. Like many a novel, down to Mr. Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita in our own times, the fact that it sold like hot cakes was not entirely due to its literary qualities. Its success was to a considerable extent a "succes de scandale." We shall go into this at a later stage. Let it suffice to say for the moment that the extent of Laclos's success was attested to by Mme Ricceboni, not the least intelligent of his critics, in a letter which she wrote to him on the 14th April 1782, protesting, in the name of French womanhood, about the picture he had drawn of Mme de Merteuil. "Tout Paris s'empresse à vous lire," she told him, "tout Paris s'entretient de vous. Si c'est un bonheur d'occuper les habitants de cette immense capitale, jouissez de ce plaisir. Personne n'a pu la goûter e/ autant que vous"(2). Before he published Les Liaisons, Laclos was virtually an unknown. Critics did not even know the correct spelling of his name. The Mémoires secrets refer to him as "un M. de la Glo, officier d'artillerie, auteur de quelques opuscules en prose et en vers" (29th April 1782), "fils

1. One would, for example, expect the change of date of letter XXI to be indicated on the MS. - of supra p. 356, n. 4. p. 334, n. 4.
2. O.C., p. 713.

d'un M. Chauderlot, premier commis d'un intendant des finances"(14th May)(1).

The Bibliothèque Nationale possesses a copy of Laclos's novel bound in blue leather and bearing the arms of Marie-Antoinette. The spine of this book does not bear the title. This is a gauge of the type of reception which it received. According to Tilly(2), the Marquise de Coigny told her porter, "Vous connaissez bien ce grand monsieur maigre et jaune en habit noir, qui vient souvent chez moi? Je n'y suis plus pour lui... Si j'étais seule avec lui, j'aurais peur." Indeed, the confusion of Laclos with Valmont sprang up immediately. "Parce qu'il a peint des monstres on veut qu'il en soit un", said the Mémoires secrets on the 14th May(3). The Correspondance littéraire, pointing out that it was the ladies who were most violently up in arms against the author of Les Liaisons dangereuses, said, "Comment un homme, qui les connaît si bien, et qui garde si mal leur secret, ne passerait-il pas pour un monstre? Mais, en le détestant, on le craint, on l'admire, on le fête; l'homme du jour et son historien, le modèle et le peintre, sont traités à peu près de la même manière"(4). Apparently, then, not all ladies were so rigorous in their treatment of Laclos as was Mme de Coigny. Perhaps inevitably, it was not the most moral of the ladies who were his most rigorous opponents. The Marquise de Coigny, as Dard says, "n'avait d'une Tourvel que la faiblesse"(5), and Mme de Genlis, who was later to condemn Les Liaisons in no uncertain terms, partly through literary jealousy(6), was by no means a model of virtue.

1. Bachaumont, etc., Mém. secr., XX, 211 & 250.
2. Tilly, Mémoires 3 vols., Paris, 1828, I, 290. Quoted by Dard, pp. 45-6.
3. Bachaumont, etc., Mém. secr., XX, 250.
4. Grimm, etc., Corr. litt., XIII, 108 (April 1782)
5. Dard, p. 45.
6. cf supra, p. 95.

On the 14th May the Mémoires secrets, saying that a key to the characters of the novel was circulating in Paris, added that "la police en a arrêté le débit et a fait défendre aux endroits publics où l'on le lisait, de le mettre désormais sur leur catalogue", and that Laclos "a déjà éprouvé beaucoup de chagrin de la publicité de son ouvrage"(1). The first part, at least, of this statement was incorrect. The ban was never imposed(2). Métra, in his Correspondance secrète, wrote, "On a parlé d'interdire la vente de cet ouvrage; il est honteux qu'on s'en soit tenu au projet"(3). Even Tilly was to say of Les Liaisons that it was "un livre que toutes les femmes ont confessé d'avoir lu quand tous les hommes auraient dû le réprouver, et qui méritait d'être livré aux flammes par la main de l'exécuteur public"(4). Condemned Les Liaisons dangereuses may have been, but it was avidly read. Tilly himself admits to having been its "admirateur passionné"(5). According to Dard(6), when Lafayette was imprisoned by the Austrians in 1792 there was only one book in his luggage, and it was Laclos's novel: "Pendant ses dix années de captivité, à Olmütz, il n'eut d'autre distraction que de relire l'ouvrage dont il avait fait choix en quittant Paris."

We have so far described the reception afforded to Laclos's novel by contemporary critics and by the general reading public. We shall deal with the

1. Bachaumont, etc., Mémoires secrets, XX, 250.
2. No action of this nature was taken against Les Liaisons until the days of the Restoration. It was ordered to be destroyed as an outrage upon morality by the Tribunal Correctionnel de la Seine on the 8th November 1823 (cf Fernand Drujon, Catalogue des ouvrages, écrits & dessins de toute nature poursuivis, supprimés ou condamnés depuis le 21 octobre 1814 jusqu'au 31 juillet 1877, Paris, 1879, p. 230. It also figured in a trial on the 12th May 1865 when ten people were convicted of being involved in the sale of 87 obscene and immoral works (ibid., p. 299).
3. Métra, Corr. secr., Londres, 1788, XIII, 23.
4. Tilly, Mémoires I, 318-9
5. ibid., I, 319.
6. Dard, p. 51 & n.1: "tradition orale dans la famille de La Fayette"

causes behind this reception in some detail when we come to examine the question of the morality of Les Liaisons, and to consider its validity as a picture of eighteenth-century manners.

2. "LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES" AS A MANUAL OF CORRUPTION

Laclos's novel has scandalised the public, or at least certain sections of the public, ever since it first appeared, although it did not suffer official condemnation until the nineteenth century, as we pointed out towards the end of the preceding chapter. Some of the adverse criticisms concerning the morality of Les Liaisons dangereuses arise from attitudes which are themselves far from disinterested. These are often the result of political prejudice, and we have already mentioned in our biographical section the frequent attempts made by pamphleteers to confuse Laclos the politician with the Valmont of Les Liaisons. Into this category falls the remark of Montjoie that,

"Monstre d'immoralité, il s'est peint lui-même trait pour trait dans le scélérat dont il a fait le héros de son impur roman des liaisons dangereuses. Quiconque a lu ce détestable ouvrage, connoît les mœurs, les principes, le génie de Laclos..... La fange dont son âme est pétrie, jette au-devant de ses yeux un brouillard empesté qui enlaidit tous les objets qu'il voit."(1)

Mme de Kéralio referred to "le roman pernicieux de la Cl..s, qui n'a pas rougi d'épancher toute la noirceur de son âme dans les liaisons dangereuses; où il ose insulter à notre sexe, en mettant dans le coeur d'une femme tous les vices qui composent le sien"(2). This reaction, however, is the protest of femininity outraged by the portrait of Mme de Merteuil, and is nearer to that of Mme Riccoboni, which we shall to consider in some detail, than to that of Montjoie.

The question of the morality of Les Liaisons is one of some importance,

1. Montjoie, Histoire de la Conjuration de L.-P.-J. d'Orléans, Paris, 1796, 3 vols., I, 213.
2. Mme de Kéralio, Les Visites, Paris, 1792, pp. 7-8.

historically if not aesthetically, for the writers of the time almost all protested that one of the prime aims of a work of fiction must be to give moral instruction(1). The notion that morality and literature need not necessarily go hand in hand was not current, and indeed was not easily to gain acceptance - for example, years later, Baudelaire was to experience great difficulties in putting over the idea that aesthetic beauty could be found in subjects which, conventionally, came under a moral ban. This is not to say that Laclos, in writing his novel, was proclaiming any such theory as "art for art's sake". His own pronouncements will show us that he was doing anything but this. Nevertheless, even today, it is still worth stressing that the moral aim, or lack of it, behind the creation of a work of art, by no means necessarily bears a direct relationship to the aesthetic worth of that work of art.

We shall consider the public reaction in France at the time of the first appearance of Laclos's novel later, in connection with Laclos's own claims in this respect and the novel's value as a reflection of contemporary manners. For the question of whether Les Liaisons served a useful moral purpose was not the only one behind the furore caused by its publication. The novels of Crébillon films could not seriously be held to serve any high moral cause, and yet they were accepted without fuss, and avidly read. There was, as we shall see, a far more fundamental difference between Crébillon and Laclos than any question of a profession of moral purpose.

It is in no way our intention to "whitewash" Laclos, but merely to examine the evidence dispassionately. Laclos, however, did make a moral claim.

1. cf. G. May, especially ch. IV and Conclusion.

Precisely what was the nature of this claim we shall see shortly. Many critics, from the eighteenth century up to the present day, have rejected this claim. In this chapter we shall examine these arguments in the light of the novel itself.

Meister(1) wrote in April 1782 that

"Quelque mauvaise opinion qu'on puisse avoir de la société en général et de celle de Paris en particulier, on y rencontrerait, je pense, peu de liaisons aussi dangereuses, pour une jeune personne, que la lecture des Liaisons dangereuses de M. de La Clos..... en peintre habile, il a cédé à l'attrait d'embellir ses modèles pour les rendre plus piquants, et c'est par là même que la peinture qu'il en fait est devenue bien plus propre à séduire ses lecteurs qu'à les corriger."

La Harpe protested that "le vice ne trouve... pas ici sa punition en lui-même"(2), whilst the Mémoires secrets was alone amongst contemporary writings in maintaining the moral worth of Les Liaisons(3).

This early adverse criticism of Laclos's moral claims for his novel was not confined to the other side of the Channel. The first English translation of Les Liaisons appeared, under the title of Dangerous Connections(4), in 1784. It was prefaced by an essay on The Utility of Novels(5), signed "By the Abbé Kentzinger"(6), which attacked all novels:

"A novel, the morality of which is equivocal, is a very dangerous poison; a novel that only possesses mediocrity, is at best useless. Even a good novel is but aliment for a child or some weak being, to whom morality unadorned is a disgusting object. Hence we may conclude, that every thinking man will take care to banish this kind of works from his library.

1. Grimm, etc., Corr. litt., XIII, 109.
2. La Harpe, Corr. litt., XI, 476; in O.C., 728.
3. Bachaumont, etc., Mém. secr., XX, 299, 13 June 1782.
4. Dangerous Connections: or, Letters Collected in a Society, and published for the Instruction of Other Societies, London, Printed for T. Hookham, 1784, 4 vols. 120
5. Extract from the Correspondence on what concerns the Happiness of Man & Society (No. III), The Utility of Novels. The Novel of Dangerous Connections ibid., I, i-xix
6. Kentzinger: (cf. Bro. Boris Telepneff, Johann August Starek & his Rite of Spiritual Masonry, Trans. Quatuor Coronati Lodge, vol. XLI, 1928). The prefatory essay is composed initially of strictures upon fiction in general & subsequently of a reply to these strictures & a defence of the morality of Les Liaisons. It is not made clear which part is attributed to Kentzinger. It is the first part which concerns us here.

He will then likewise proscribe that novel, now so much prized, called Dangerous Connections."(1)

The author of the essay goes on to say that he is "far from a wish to calumniate" Laclos, who, he is assured, is "a military man of the highest character for wit and good conduct; but his work, which seems to have a moral end in view, is in reality very dangerous". Of the picture of society which it presents, he adds,

"If it is true, it ought to have been concealed; there are shocking nudities which our minds revolt at rather than receive any instruction from".

"Vice is to be drawn," he says, "but shall it be drawn in such seducing colours?"(2)

The Monthly Review for August 1784 published a notice of Dangerous Connections. This notice(3) is comparatively lengthy for a work of fiction by an "unknown" author. The reviewer declares that "the pretence of 'instruction' is an insult on the understanding of the Public, as the work is a daring outrage on every law of virtue and decorum." He presents us with a splendid example of English cant when he goes on, "For aught we know, such characters may exist as are here described, not only in France, where the scene of the action is laid, but in other countries, whose religions and customs may be more favourable to virtue and decorum." The writer's passion for decorum leads him to take the same line as the author of the essay on The Utility of Novels, and declare that such people, if they exist, "should be consigned to that outer darkness to which they belong." Nevertheless, like Meister in Correspondance littéraire, the English reviewer is objective enough to recognise Laclos's talents as a writer. At first he does so grudgingly:

1. Dangerous Connections, I, ii.
2. ibid., iii-v.
3. Monthly Review, vol. LXXI, August 1784, p. 149. This review is the work of Samuel Badcock, a prolific reviewer of the period, and a contributor to The London Review, The Gentleman's Magazine, the Westminster Magazine, The General Evening Post and the St. James's Chronicle, as well as the Monthly Review. He was for a long time a dissenting minister, but was ordained into the Church of England in 1787 (cf. B.C. Nangle, The Monthly Review: First Series, 1749-89, Indexes and Articles, Oxford, 1934, pp. 2 and 217).

"He who could trace the current of human actions through all their intricate channels to their hidden source in the heart, and unfold its most secret springs, could not be ignorant of the tendency of the present publication. In paying this compliment to his penetration, we at the same time pass the severest censure on his principles."

He concludes his review, however, more generously, by declaring, "We shall be glad to see this unknown Author's abilities more happily employed."

The Quarterly Review provides evidence that it was for the immorality of his book that Laclos continued chiefly to be known in England. In the April edition of 1817 there appears a review of a work by Lady Morgan entitled France.

The reviewer raises his hands in pious horror as he writes:

"Some of our readers may have heard the title of a most profligate French novel called 'Les Liaisons Dangereuses'. We had hoped that no British female had ever seen this detestable book; it seems we were mistaken."(1)

The reason for this remark was that Lady Morgan had referred with scorn to the court of Louis XVIII, of which she had said,

"All 'liasons dangereuses'(sic) are banished from a court, where piety and politics have usurped the place of gallantry and the graces; as les petits ramoneurs once showed their sooty faces on the fans of French belles, instead of "the loves", whom they had dethroned."(2)

As the writer in the Quarterly Review points out, Lady Morgan does not seem to know whether to attribute Les Liaisons to Laclos or to "the respectable historian Duclos"(3), a not uncommon confusion of names. She may not, however, have been so degenerate as the reviewer seemed to think, for elsewhere in her book she compliments Mme de Genlis for avoiding both "the grave formalities" of the early French novel" and "the licentious liberties of the new, a witty but an immoral school founded by the Marivaux, the Louvets and the Leclos (sic)(4), and declares

1. Quarterly Review, April 1817, Art. XI.
2. Lady Morgan, France, London, 1817, II, 132.
3. Quarterly Review, loc. cit.
4. Lady Morgan, op. cit., VIII, 230.

that from the "ingenious fictions of the Marivaux, Crébillons, Louvets and the Duclos, a code of corruption might be drawn, so perfect in vice, so matchless in crime, that not the hardiest champion of the "bon vieux tems" would dare to defend it." (1) Thus, even Lady Morgan, herself attacked by the reviewer as of doubtful moral standards, felt obliged to attack such novels as Les Liaisons on the moral plane.

Many writers have seen in Laclos's novel such a "code of corruption" as that mentioned by Lady Morgan. Augustin-Thierry describes Les Liaisons as "le manuel de la débauche et de la corruption" (2). Gide said that he would include only two French novels in a list of the ten greatest novels of the world. They were La Chartreuse de Parme and Les Liaisons dangereuses (3). Gide wondered whether Laclos had set out to compose "le vrai manuel de la débauche", but hoped that he had sincerely hoped to perform a moral service, so that "de cette vérité: que c'est desservir l'art que de servir les mœurs, ce livre servît de preuve par l'absurde..." (4) Van Bever saw Les Liaisons as "un pernicieux traité de 'stratégie' amoureuse" (5). The refrain has been taken up on this side of the Channel too. H. M. Stephens described Laclos's work as "one of the most licentious novels ever written" (6). Saintsbury relegated Laclos to "the Condemned Corps", holding that he had "a disgusting subject and no real compensation of treatment" - nor was this the worst that Saintsbury had to say about the author of Les Liaisons (7). F. C. Green had a far higher

1. *ibid.*, II, 89.
2. A. Augustin-Thierry: "Les Liaisons dangereuses" de Laclos, Paris, 1930, p. 13.
3. A. Gide, Les dix romans français que..., in Morceaux choisis, Paris, 4e éd., 1921, p. 143.
4. *ibid.*, p. 144.
5. A. Van Bever, Introduction to L.D., Paris, Chevrel, 1908, p. vi.
6. H. M. Stephens, Hist. of the Fr. Rev., I, 84.
7. G. Saintsbury, A History of the French Novel, London, 1919, 2 vols., II, 359 & 487. cf. vol. I,

opinion of the novel's merit, although he too considers it "a regular manual of seduction"(1). Martin Turnell, in describing Les Liaisons as "the smoke-room story... raised to the level of art"(2), gives a more favourable twist to Nodier's enraged description of it as a "Satyricon de garnison"(3).

There is, in short, a considerable body of opinion to the effect that Les Liaisons dangereuses is a work capable of corrupting the reader. The body of opinion can be divided into two halves. First of all, there is a general, even vague view that it is an undesirable book, with no more precision about it than the argument that the subject is taboo. Then there is the view that the novel sets forth a clearly defined plan of campaign, or in other words sets as a primer, for the would-be rake. In this argument the allegation is far more precise. Both will be examined in this chapter. It should be stressed that there are nuances within the mass of opinion. By no means all those who object to the novel on moral grounds therefore condemn it out of hand. Almost all the serious critics, from Laclos's time down to our own, acknowledge the literary power of Les Liaisons, whilst Turnell goes so far as to consider this "smoke-room story" the best French novel of the eighteenth century.

Nevertheless, it remains true that even today moral prejudice is sometimes allowed to intervene in purely aesthetic matters. This moral prejudice is often a very woolly thing, and one manifestation, or result, of it is a certain haphazardness in the use of words. "Pornographical", "obscene", and

1. F. C. Green, Mimuet, p. 421.

2. M. Turnell, The Novel in France, London, 1950, p. 59.

3. Written in 1833. Quoted by Vailland, Preface to L.D., Bib. Mondiale, Paris, 1956, 2 vols., I, 6.

"erotic", are often carelessly used as synonymous adjectives to signify something which is unmentionable, something which, in the words of the Monthly Review's literary critic of almost two hundred years ago, "instead of being exposed to the eye of the Public, ... should be consigned to ... outer darkness..."(1) Some distinction, however, must be drawn between these words.

The root meaning of "pornography", the description of the life and manners of prostitutes and their patrons, has no strict relevance to Les Liaisons, since the Marquise de Merteuil, whatever else she may be, is no prostitute. By extension, however, pornography has come to signify, in the words of the Oxford dictionary, "the expression or suggestion of obscene or unchaste thoughts." Here the problem is complicated by the use of the word "obscene", which is another of the words so frequently used carelessly. One of the most usual uses of the word "obscene" is in terms of language, to signify in English certain four-letter words which are not in polite usage. It is worth stating at the outset that no such language is to be found in Les Liaisons. Indeed, as we shall see, Laclos's use of language is as far removed from this as it is possible to be. If we hold that what is obscene is what is offensive to modesty or decency, then we are not greatly advanced, for what is meant by these last two terms is not constant, and we are dealing with subjective rather than objective or universally accepted values. Moreover, "obscene" does not necessarily refer to things sexual, whereas pornography does.

Most of us, however much we like to pretend that the contrary is the case,

1. Monthly Review, August, 1784, p. 149.

like a moderate rousing of our sexual appetite and, this being once admitted, we can, as D. H. Lawrence put it at a time when the problem was perhaps rather more acute than it is today, "dismiss the idea that sex appeal in art is pornography. It may be so to the grey Puritan, but the grey Puritan is a sick man, soul and body sick." (1) For Lawrence, "the whole question of pornography seems... a question of secrecy"; sex is made to be "the dirty little secret." (2) Lawrence will not have it that a mild degree of "sex appeal" is not pornographical, whereas a high degree is. "Boccaccio at his hottest," he says, "seems to me less pornographical than Pamela or Clarissa Harlowe or even Jane Eyre." (3) This ties up with his view that sentimentality, the sentimental lie of purity which makes sex a "dirty little secret", is a sure sign of pornography, and no doubt Lawrence would have agreed with F. C. Green that "Richardson... could make the binomial theorem sound indecent." (4) Pornographical writing is fairly defined by Lawrence as "the attempt to insult sex, to do dirt on sex." It can be recognised "by the insult it offers, invariably, to sex, and to the human spirit." (5) Sex with a snigger is pornography. There are two points to be made here. The first is that pornography, like beauty, can be in the eye of the beholder (6), and the second is that it is possible for a work to depict people whose attitude is an "attempt to insult sex, to do dirt on sex," without that work of art itself being pornographical.

Finally, some consideration must be given to the question of what is meant by the word "erotic". An erotic novel is often thought to be a porno-

1. D. H. Lawrence, Pornography & Obscenity, London, 1930, p. 11.

2. *ibid.*, pp. 16 & 22.

3. *ibid.*, p. 11.

4. F. C. Green, Mimesis, p. 382.

5. Lawrence, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

6. Thus Elio Vittorini can quite rightly say of Lolita that "Only illiterate bigots or dimwits could find anything offensive or scandalous in this novel", & Taylor Caldwell that, "Of course, I do not recommend it as required reading for any children from 8 to 80." Quoted in V. Nabokov, Lolita, London, 1959, pp. 318 & 315.

graphical novel. This is not so. An erotic novel is one which treats of the sexual passion, as opposed to the one which treats of sentiment. The sentimental vision of love doled out in much popular fiction can be more sickening and harmful than that given of the sexual passion in the erotic novel. Eroticism, which is a normal, healthy state, should be differentiated from erotomania, which is an exaggeration of that state, and which is a phenomenon of the same plane as sadism or masochism. Every individual has some element of sadism within him, and similarly he incorporates elements of eroticism. This is not a matter for guilt, but a statement of fact, and only Lawrence's "grey Puritan" is ashamed of it.(1) That there are various possible degrees of eroticism in the human mind, and that the erotic instinct, excessively indulged, can become erotomania, is another thing altogether. This occurs when the individual loses all conscious control of himself, and then "eroticism" becomes to love what alcoholism is to thirst. It is, however, possible to develop one's erotic tendencies at the expense of the other sides of the human personality, and yet without reaching this ultimate stage. In this case, as Claude Elsen puts it, "les relations entre les sexes, entre les personnes, cessent souvent d'être des relations de personnes. L'autre devient dans une certaine mesure interchangeable, perd, en tout cas, sa qualité d'être unique, irremplaçable."(2). There is, in the excessively erotic person, a desire for domination, and so, in the words of André Malraux, "il y a érotisme dans un livre dès qu'aux amours physiques qu'il met en scène, se mêle l'idée d'une contrainte."(3) Eroticism, pornography and obscenity,

1. "L'érotisme ne paraît vraiment dans toute sa force que dans les pays où existe la notion du péché." - André Malraux, quoted by Julien Green, Oeuvres complètes, Journal I, Paris, 1954, p. 52, and J.-L. Seylaz, Les Liaisons dangereuses et la création romanesque chez Laclos, Geneva, 1958, p. 55.

2. C. Elsen, Home Eroticism, Esquisse d'une Psychologie de l'Érotisme, Paris, 1953 p. 57.

3. A. Malraux, Préf. to L.D., Paris, Gallimard, 1952, p. 14.

they have very little in common. Pornography and obscenity aim at base effects, and their appeal is on a low, animal plane. "The books they sell in the underworld," said D. H. Lawrence, "... are either so ugly they make you ill, or so fatuous you can't imagine anyone but a cretin or a moron reading them, or writing them." (1) The fellow whose delight it is to pore over dirty pictures is not going to waste his time struggling through the elegant prose of Lolita or La Nuit et le Moment in search of a cheap thrill. Félicia - page Apollinaire (2) - might be more in his line. Eroticism is a far more subtle, intellectual phenomenon, "un appel du corps au corps à travers l'avilissement de l'esprit," as Thierry Maulnier called it (3). "un tête-à-tête pour ces hommes (that is, the erotics)", say the brothers Goncourt, "est une lutte, une lutte sans brutalité, mais sans merci, d'où la femme doit sortir humiliée par leur intelligence, domptée et soumise par la supériorité de leur rouerie, non point aimante, mais vaincue." "La victoire par l'esprit" is the most esteemed of all, and in the eighteenth-century literature this battle "finit par avoir des principes, une manière de philosophie, des moyens d'apologie." (4) The erotic mind at work is perhaps not a particularly pleasant spectacle, but nor is alcoholism a pleasant subject. This does not prevent l'Assommoir being an excellent novel. The phenomenon of eroticism is an expression of one aspect of the human condition, and is therefore a perfectly legitimate subject. The apology of which the brothers Goncourt speak and which, by definition, is an attempt to put the reader on the side of the erotic characters rather than an objective study of eroticism in action, is what we are now

1. D. H. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 13.

2. Apollinaire describes Merciat as an "écrivain délicieux" the "charmant auteur de Félicia (qui) finissait en même temps que le XVIII^e siècle dont il est l'expression la plus délicate et la plus voluptueuse." - Intro. to l'Oeuvre du Chevalier Andrea de Merciat, Paris, 1910-11, 2 vols., I, 35.

3. Quoted by Elsen, op. cit., epigraph.

4. E & J de Goncourt, L'Amour au 18^e siècle, Paris, 1875, pp. 97-9.

to seek in Les Liaisons dangereuses.

First of all, let us consider how far the overall plot, or rather plots, can be considered as corrupting. In Les Liaisons, as André Malraux rightly says, "pas un couple, une seule fois, n'entre dans un lit sans une idée de derrière la tête(1)," and this idea is usually the constraint of which we have already noted as characteristic of eroticism. What at first strikes the reader as the main plot (but which in fact is not the main plot, as we shall see) is the Vicomte de Valmont's desire to possess the Présidente de Tourvel, who does not want him. Similarly, he possesses Cécile de Volanges, who wants not him but the Chevalier de Danceny. Furthermore, Valmont wishes to possess the Marquise de Merteuil, who no longer wants him, in the physical sense at any rate. In each of these cases there is a barrier, a battle to be fought and won - and these are not the only examples, as we shall see. We have already several times used the word "possess", and this word must be taken to signify possession in the widest sense as well the narrow sense of physical possession. We have already said that the desire to dominate is the characteristic of the erotic mind.

Valmont and Mme de Merteuil do not act on the spur of the moment. On the contrary, they are both very conscious of a code which they must follow. Mme de Volanges sees this quite clearly, so far as Valmont is concerned, and early on in the book tells the Présidente that there would be hope of a return to accepted moral standards if he were merely a man "entraîné par des passions f^ugeuses; si, comme mille autres, il était séduit par les erreurs de son âge." But, she warns her friend, this is not the case: "Mais Valmont

1. A. Malraux, Préf to L.D., Gallimard, 1952, p. 14.

n'est pas cela: sa conduite est le résultat de ses principes."(1) Valmont and Mme de Merteuil themselves frequently refer to this ideology of theirs, this "art de séduire"(2). Valmont chides the Marquise for supposing that he is not conversant with its "plus simples éléments"(3), and when describing what he considers to be his masterpiece, the seduction of Mme de Tourvel, calls upon Merteuil to admire his "pureté de méthode"(4). Mme de Merteuil herself is sure that "l'amour qu'on nous vante comme la cause de nos plaisirs, n'en est au plus que le prétexte," and in the brilliant Letter LXXXI, in which she gives an account of her life and the way in which she evolved her code of behaviour, she asks Valmont, "Quand m'avez-vous vue m'écarter des règles que je me suis prescrites, et manquer à mes principes,... le fruit de mes profondes réflexions?"(5) She appreciates skill in the observance of these rules in other people, and declares, "Pour moi, je l'avoue, une des choses qui me flattent le plus, c'est une attaque vive et bien faite, où tout se succède avec ordre quoique avec rapidité..."(6)

Some writers, for instance Roger Vailland(7) and Jacques Faurie(8), have endeavoured to analyse this code of principles and break it down into its separate rules. The value of this is perhaps questionable, and it might be argued that if anyone is publishing a manual of corruption it is they, and not Laclos. For Faurie,

"Les Liaisons dangereuses sont un roman et un traité de géométrie. Elles racontent une histoire et démontrent par quels chemins nécessaires une femme vertueuse tombe dans les bras d'un séducteur. Ses personnages ont donc un double caractère. (Ils)... sont des êtres de chair et de sang. Mais ils ont par ailleurs la rigueur des définitions ou des symboles."(9)

1. Letter IX, p. 50. (All references to L.D. are to the Pléiade Oeuvres complètes & henceforth the letter will be denoted by Roman, the page by Arabic numerals).
2. XXXIV, 95.
3. *ibid.*
4. CXXIV, 326.
5. LXXXI, 202 & 200.
6. X, 52.
7. R. Vailland, Laclos par lui-même, Paris, 1958.
8. J. Faurie, Essai sur la Séduction, Paris, 1948.
9. Faurie, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

Our endeavour in this and subsequent chapters must be to discover to what extent it is true that the principles of Valmont and Mme de Merteuil along are responsible for the downfall of the seduced characters in the novel, or in other words, to what extent the two accomplices do in fact construct, only by their own efforts such "chemins nécessaires." If the ultimate cause of this downfall is not solely the principles of Valmont and Mme de Merteuil, then the accusation that Les Liaisons is a manual of corruption will not stand.

The best example of the erotic technique in action is Valmont's seduction of Mme de Tourval. This is a fair choice, for Valmont himself considered it his masterpiece. In our examination of this plot, Roger Vailland's rules will act as an adequate guide. "Le libertinage, tel que nous le dépeint Laclos," says Vailland, "ressemble... à la corrida... C'est un jeu dramatique avec des figures bien déterminées aboutissant au 'moment de vérité' et à la 'mise à mort'(1)". There are four of these "figures":

- " - la première figure est le choix, qui doit être méritoire;
- la deuxième figure est la séduction, qui, comme au gibier dans la chasse à courre, doit laisser toutes ses chances à la femme poursuivie;
- la troisième figure est la chute, qui doit être exécutée bien nettement et sans aucune fioriture;
- la quatrième figure est la rupture, dont le principal mérite est d'être éclatante: c'est le défi au Commandeur. C'est également, et en tant que vérification de la vertu du libertin (vertu in the sense that the libertine must always be active: the seducer must never be seduced), la mise à mort (réelle ou symbolique) de la victime désignée au cours de la première figure." (2)

It should be pointed out at this stage that here we are not considering the mere womanizer, the "coureur de femmes" who, like Mozart's Don Juan, aims merely at adding another conquest to his list, and is attracted to almost any woman who

1. Vailland, op. cit., p. 51.

happens along. He needs no manual. Such a man is more often than not the seduced rather than the seducer, for he makes no conscious choice of a particular prey.

Valmont, on the face of it, certainly seems to follow all the principles mentioned by Vailland. He definitely considers his choice of Mme de Tourvel meritorious. In a series of letters at the beginning of Les Liaisons, he and Mme de Merteuil discuss this question. To Mme de Merteuil, Valmont says of Cécile, whom she wishes him to seduce as an act of vengeance for them both on the Comte de Gercourt, Cécile's husband-to-be:

"Vingt autres peuvent y réussir comme toi. Il n'est pas ainsi de l'entreprise qui m'occupe; son succès m'assure autant de gloire que de plaisir." (1)

The apparent inaccessibility of Mme de Tourvel makes him exclaim, "Voilà l'ennemi digne de moi..." She has a reputation for great piety and virtue, and this makes the challenge all the more exciting. The true libertine desires obstacles(2), for they add spice to the conquest; and so Valmont's cry goes out, "J'oserai la ravir au Dieu même qu'elle adore." (3)

The seduction, we have said, must leave the pursued woman all her chances of escape. It is a trial of wits. The seducer must not rush things, or force the issue at the first opportunity, but must exercise restraint, and take his victim only when she is ready to acknowledge the superiority of his method, and give herself to him in full awareness of the consequences. It must be a complete, unconditional capitulation. Rather than make too easy a conquest of it the seducer will push his amoral intellectual refinement so far as to

1. IV, 41.
2. IV, 41-2.
3. VI, 46.

create his own difficulties. Thus, when Mme de Tourvel is sentimentally moved by the report of Valmont's charity to the villagers, he seizes the opportunity to make his declaration to her. She is so carried away by her emotion that, in the heat of the moment, she is on the verge of giving in to him. Despairingly, she puts her hands over her eyes, and murmurs the two words, "Ah! malheureuse." Valmont admits, "Ma tête s'échauffait, et j'étais si peu maître de moi, que je fus tenté de profiter de ce moment." (1) But even if he had forced her into submission on this occasion, this would not have been the total intellectual surrender which he requires. In Valmont's own words, "Pour que je sois vraiment heureux, il faut qu'elle se donne; et ce n'est pas une petite affaire." (2) To have taken her now would have made her defeat a thing of relatively little moment; she would have been guilty only of a passing weakness and not of a complete voluntary submission. Valmont himself expresses this very clearly:

"Quelle est donc notre faiblesse? quel est l'empire des circonstances, si moi-même, oubliant mes projets, j'ai risqué de perdre par un triomphe prématuré, le charme des longs combats et les détails d'une pénible défaite; si séduit par un désir de jeune homme, j'ai pensé exposer le vainqueur de Madame de Tourvel à ne recueillir, pour fruit de ses travaux, que l'insipide avantage d'avoir eu une femme de plus! Ah! qu'elle se rende, mais qu'elle combatte; que sans avoir la force de vaincre, elle ait celle de résister; qu'elle savoure à loisir le sentiment de sa faiblesse, et soit contrainte d'avouer sa défaite. Laissons le Braconnier obscur tuer à l'affût le cerf qu'il a surpris; le vrai Chasseur doit le forcer." (3)

Here we clearly see the difference between Valmont and the "coureur de jupes". A Casanova or a Don Juan would not go to all this trouble, just as he

1. XXIII, 77.
2. VI, 46.
3. XXIII, 77-8.

would not have neglected to take physical advantage of Mme de Tourvel's serving-woman, caught in "une toilette que la saison comportait, mais qu'elle n'exousait pas"(1). It would have been one more to add to the list, But Valmont refuses to allow such petty considerations to distract him from the execution of his masterpiece. The number of victories is far less important to him than the purity of method. He describes himself as a man "qui aime les méthodes nouvelles et difficiles"(2), and swears that he has no intention of allowing Mme de Tourvel to escape with an ordinary seduction, after all the trouble he has taken.

We have already mentioned one example of his turning down the opportunity of this kind of victory. Another opportunity comes some time later, when Valmont succeeds in entering the Présidente's room, and with less opposition than he had expected, although she is trembling all the time. She need have had no fear, however, for, as Valmont says in his subsequent letter to Mme de Merteuil, "Vous sentez bien qu'ici il faut un triomphe complet, et que je ne veux rien devoir à l'occasion." (3) It is chiefly for this reason that he refuses to have recourse to the methods of Lovelace, and make of Mme de Tourvel "une nouvelle Clarisse"(4), although professional pride and the refusal to employ someone else's methods simply because they belong to someone else, also enter into it. Lovelace's methods are in any case far too crude for Valmont and the very opposite of his ultimate aim concerning the Présidente, which is "de faire expirer sa vertu dans une lente agonie; de la fixer sans cesse sur ce désolant spectacle; et de ne lui accorder le bonheur de m'avoir dans ses bras qu'après l'avoir forcée à n'en plus dissimuler le désir." (5) This aim

1. XLIV, 118.
2. LXX, 167.
3. XCIX, 253.
4. CX, 286.
5. LXX, 167.

Valmont constantly reiterates. He is, then, no poacher, but a hunter who pursues his prey with determination and subtle skill until it realises that the moment of truth has come, and try as it may it cannot escape, and that the only thing left to it is to beg to be put out of its misery. "Au fait", says Valmont, "je vaud bien peu, si je ne vaud pas la peine d'être demandé." (1)

The third figure noted by Vailland is the fall of the woman, which must be achieved without fuss, and with all the precision of a surgical operation. The scene in the bedroom mentioned above shows Mme de Tourvel almost ripe for the fall. It is too easy, however, for Valmont to force the issue, and it would defeat his purpose. The Présidente is not yet in a state of complete submission. She begins the crucial admission that she loves him, but has just sufficient strength left to gasp out a prayer to God to save her. In this passage (2), Laclos shows brilliant mastery of pace and language. First of all, we have a slow, clinical description of Tourvel's attitude, her hand in Valmont's, her body leaning on his arm, the turning away of her head and the lowering of her eyes, the gradual slowing down of speech until only monosyllables are uttered, the half-strangled confession, "Eh bien! oui, je....", the swoon into Valmont's arms. Then suddenly the tempo quickens in a comic way as the action is reflected in Valmont's ironically observant eyes: Tourvel gasps out her prayer, "et sur-le-champ, plus prompt que l'éclair, elle était à genoux à dix pas de moi"! This, one might think, would be a singularly inept refuge in the face of a determined ravisher, but - quite apart from other elements of Valmont's character which we shall consider in due course - his principles prevent him from being any such thing, and so, for the moment, she is safe, although now at her wits' end and frantically trying to save herself from the

1. LXX, 167.

2. XCIX, 253-254.

kill.

She resorts to desperate measures, and flees. Here we have one of the few miscalculations committed by Valmont. He is sure at this stage that "ma farouche D v te courrait apr s moi, si je cessais de courir apr s elle", and recalls with cynical pleasure that a certain Mlle de B... resisted slightly longer than Mme de Tourvel. "Je suis bien aise," he remarks, "que la franche coquetterie a plus de d fense que l'aust re vertu." (1) Yet it appears that Valmont is premature in congratulating himself. He is astounded by her flight, and is temporarily thrown out of his calm stride. This, however, is not a permanent setback, and we soon find Valmont developing his tactics to meet the changed situation (2). Tourvel has done no more than delay the inevitable.

The actual seduction is a master-stroke of Machiavellian genius. Soon Valmont is speaking of certain "grand/ projets" which he has concerning the s/ fugitive, but the precise nature of which he refuses to reveal (3). Eventually we see his plan in action, and a brilliant piece of tartuferie it is! - nothing less than enlisting the aid of P re Anselme, Mme de Tourvel's confessor, for an action which, he assures the priest, is "vraiment digne de votre saint minist re" (4). Thus, by promising a genuine conversion, he utilises the agent of the God from whom he has sworn to ravish the Pr sidente. We cannot therefore agree with Seylaz when he says in his excellent book on Laclos and Les Liaisons that, unlike Moli re's Don Juan, who "veut 'marquer des points' contre Dieu", "l'horizon de Valmont est libre de pr occupations religieuses..... Il ne s'agit pas pour Valmont d'arracher   Dieu une cr ature...." (5) This is, as we have

1. XCIX, 255.
2. C, 258; CI, 259-261.
3. CXV, ~~260~~. 300.
4. CXX, 309.
5. J.-L. Seylaz, op. cit., p. 111.

already seen, his avowed intent.

Valmont's plan now proceeds apace, and his next letter to Mme de Merteuil opens with a cry of triumph: "La voilà donc vaincue, cette femme superbe qui avait osé croire qu'elle pourrait me résister!"(1) - and if he cautiously confesses to a certain degree of uneasiness, he nevertheless holds up this seduction as the prime example of purity of method. The method he uses is not unlike that used by Célimène with Alceste, in very different circumstances, namely that of reversing rôles so that he, the pursuer, announces that he must fly, whilst Mme de Tourvel, the pursued, demands to be heard. So Molière's coquette reversed the rôles with her jealous lover, who found himself inexplicably transformed from righteous indignation to apologetic pleading for an explanation. The fact that Mme de Tourvel swoons is irrelevant from Valmont's point of view, despite Turnell, who pours scorn on the Visconte because he only succeeds in seducing her when she has fainted from fright(2). The Présidente has in fact this time made the all-important confession of her desire for him. She has refused to accede to his request to send him away for ever(3), and she has pronounced the fatal "non" which forbade him to leave her(4). Once again, "qui commande, s'engage." Her swoon is not so much the result of fright as the last expression of her modesty, and is on a par with her covering her eyes as she murmurs "Ah! malheureuse", after his first declaration. We have already seen that she swooned on an earlier occasion, in her room, and that Valmont did not, on that occasion, take advantage of the situation - but that time she had been able to stop herself before she completed her confession. Her swoon

1. CXXV, 320.

2. M. Turnell, The Novel in France, p. 71.

3. CXXV, 325.

4. CXXV, 326.

is not of great consequence, and she is soon consecrating herself - the term is important - to Valmont, her new God, and readily gives herself to him again. This time, "l'ivresse fut complète et réciproque." (1) Valmont's victory is complete, and he is quite right to point out, as he does in a proliferation of military terms, the way in which he has strictly adhered to the libertine's code of behaviour:

"... vous verrez que je ne me suis écarté en rien des vrais principes de cette guerre, que nous avons remarqué souvent être si semblable à l'autre. Jugez-moi donc comme Turenne ou Frédéric. J'ai forcé à combattre l'ennemi qui ne voulait que temporiser; je me suis donné, par de savantes manœuvres, le choix du terrain et celui des dispositions; j'ai su inspirer la sécurité à l'ennemi, pour le joindre plus facilement dans sa retraite; j'ai su y faire succéder la terreur, avant d'en venir au combat; je n'ai rien mis au hasard, que par la considération d'un grand avantage en cas de succès, et la certitude des ressources en cas de défaite; enfin; je n'ai engagé l'action qu'avec une retraite assurée, par où je pusse couvrir et conserver tout ce que j'avais conquis précédemment. C'est, je crois, tout ce qu'on peut faire..." (2)

We said that Valmont's victory was now complete. This is not strictly true, for the seducer must not allow himself to become the seduced, and Valmont, to avoid turning his victory into defeat, must bring about a rupture. One tradition of eighteenth-century libertinage was that the rake must publicise his victory. This, of course, for a woman who, like Mme de Tourvel, has prided herself upon her piety and virtue, means ruin and humiliation. In Les Liaisons, however, we are offered something far more savage than this. The broadcasting of the affair certainly enters into it and, indeed, this is resolved upon very early by Valmont and Merteuil. Merteuil demands written proof in the form of a letter in Tourvel's hand (3), whilst Valmont continually refers to the heightening of his reputation which will ensue from his victory over the Présidente becoming

1. CXXV, 328.
2. CXXV, 326.
3. XX, 69.

known.(1) Ultimately, however, and for reasons which we shall go into in another place, the rupture comes in a far more cruel way than by the mere publication of the story of Mme de Tourvel's fall (publication, in point of fact, never happens). Valmont sends the Présidente the savage "Ce n'est pas ma faute" letter.(2) Whatever may have been the real cause of Valmont's doing this, there can be no doubt that the meticulous observer of the principles which Valmont preaches would consider the act itself a highly laudable example of purity of method, and proof that the seducer had established his superiority over the victim, a superiority which Valmont is always at pains to demonstrate. This detachment, this refusal of the seducer to become the seduced, is illustrated by the letter full of double-meanings which Valmont writes to Mme de Tourvel from the bed of the opera girl Emilie(3), which comes very soon after he has succeeded in laying his hands on the evidence that the Présidente loves him, his letters to her, carefully preserved in chronological order and tear-stained, the one which she had torn up carefully reassembled, and the one which she had returned to him copied out word for word in a trembling hand(4). It is again illustrated by the night which Valmont spends with Emilie immediately after seducing Mme de Tourvel(5), and before he sends the letter which drives the Présidente into a convent and deranges her mind. And so the prey is metaphorically - and physically - put to death.

1. e.g. IV, 41; XCIX, 250.

2. CXLII, 363 & CXLI, 362.

3. XLVIII, 126-8.

4. XLIV, 116 & 119-120.

5. CXXXVIII, 355.

We have, in this account, made no attempt to motivate all of Valmont's actions in his pursuit of Mme de Tourvel. We have confined ourselves to giving, as it were, the bare bones of what Valmont considers to be the perfect seduction, for if it is true that Valmont's motives are from always being far/ what he would like them to be, and perhaps from what he thinks they are, it is also true that he does go through the motions of what his principles teach as the perfect act of libertinage.

The seduction of Cécile de Volanges does not fall into the same category as that of Mme de Tourvel. In the first place, it is an easy exercise for Valmont. We have already mentioned that he does not consider Cécile a worthy choice. In the second place it is done for reasons other than those of purity of method - Merteuil urges it upon Valmont as an act of vengeance over Gercourt, and he only finally undertakes it as an act of vengeance over Cécile's mother, whom he has discovered to be his enemy in Mme de Tourvel's camp.

There are, however, two other examples in Les Liaisons of this code of corruption being followed through to a conclusion, and one of these is, in a way, a better example of virtuosity than Valmont's seduction of the Présidente, for it is an act of seduction carried out by a woman, and by a woman whose motives, in this instance, are not, like those of Valmont, open to question in the slightest degree. These examples are the episode of the "three s/ d/ inseparables", and Mme de Merteuil's defeat of Prévan. Prévan's seduction s/ of the three inseparables is designed to establish Prévan's reputation in the reader's mind as a redoubtable rival for Valmont. It is not proposed to examine this episode in detail. Suffice it to say that this threefold affair

fulfills all the conditions as to choice, seduction, fall and rupture which are to be found in the code of Valmont and Merteuil. We shall, on the other hand, briefly examine Mme de Merteuil's victory over Prévau to show how these conditions are fulfilled there. Before we do so, however, the point should be made that although we have in this connection used the word "episode", Les Liaisons is in no way an episodic novel. Both the story of the three inseparables and that of Merteuil and Prévau are integral parts of the overall structure of the novel. We have already mentioned the reason for the first of these stories. The reason for the account of Prévau's fate at the hands of the Marquise is that she must be established as a character not only equal but superior to Valmont. This Laclos achieves, despite the fact that in the entire novel Mme de Merteuil writes only twenty-seven letters to Valmont's fifty-two(1).

That Mme de Merteuil's choice of Prévau as an adversary is meritorious cannot but be acknowledged. If the story of the three inseparables(2) is not sufficient evidence of this, Valmont's attitude towards Prévau is more than adequate corroboration.

"Il me reste à vous dire," Valmont tells Merteuil, "que ce Prévau, que vous ne connaissez pas, est infiniment aimable, et encore plus adroit. Que si quelquefois vous m'avez entendu dire le contraire, c'est seulement que je ne l'aime pas, que je me plais à contrarier ses succès.... C'est enfin aujourd'hui le seul homme, peut-être, que je craindrais de rencontrer sur mon chemin..."(3)

As for the seduction of Prévau, this is a masterpiece of technique, and is, of course, complicated by the fact that he thinks that it is he who is the seducer, and therefore that it is he who is dictating the terms. Mme de

1. Valmont's 52 include the suite to XL as a separate letter. It does not include the omitted letter to Mme de Volanges, MS fol. 123, O.C., 854-5.

2. LXXIX, 188-194.

3. LXX, 167.

§ Merteuil is in a special position, for she has to preserve her reputation ^{δ/} for virtue, whilst at the same time showing her superiority over Prévan as a rake by possessing him - or letting him possess her, a phrase which in this context loses all meaning. It is with her reputation in mind that she contrives to have the battle fought on her own terms: rejecting the tones of sentiment and gaiety, she allows him to use those of "délicate amitié" (this sounds reminiscent of the Carte du Tendre, and the ritual is basically in the same tradition) and, as she puts it, "ce fut sous ce drapeau banal, que nous commençames notre attaque réciproque." (1) She finds it easier to deal with Prévan than one might have thought. Writing to Valmont, she includes them both in her scornful condemnation:

"Qu'il est commode d'avoir affaire à vous autres gens à principes! quelquefois un brouillon d'Amoureux vous déconcerte par sa timidité, ou vous embarrasse par ses fougueux transports..... Mais votre marche réglée se devine si facilement! L'arrivée, le maintien, le ton, les discours, je savais tout dès la veille." (2)

For she is a master-tactician determined to demonstrate her superiority, and she is always in command of the situation:

"Observez seulement que, dans ma feinte défense, je l'aidais de tout mon pouvoir: embarras, pour lui donner le temps de parler; mauvaises raisons, pour être combattues; crainte et méfiance, pour ramener les protestations; et ce refrain perpétuel de sa part, je ne vous demande qu'un mot; et ce silence de la mienne, qui semble ne le laisser attendre que pour le faire désirer davantage; au travers de tout cela, une main cent fois prise, qui se retire toujours et ne se refuse jamais..." (3)

Finally she leads Prévan to his fall, and boasts of her purity of method in just the same way as Valmont:

"Remarquez que voilà une affaire arrangée, et que personne n'a encore vu Prévan dans ma société." (4)

1. §XXXV, 215.
2. §XXXV, 217. Italics in the original.
3. §XXXV, 217-218. Same observation.
4. §XXXV, 220.

She allows him to take her, so that she can enjoy what she describes elsewhere as the two favourite passions of women, "la gloire de la défense et le plaisir de la défaite"(1). The rupture follows immediately upon the fall. Just when Prévan can begin to congratulate himself on his victory, and look forward to recounting it to the two Comtesses de P..., Merteuil rings her bell to summon her servants and cry attempted rape. He is thus defeated and the rupture takes place in decisive fashion. This last stage has a special character because the victor is a woman and because the loser is who he is. It is the rake's reputation which is ruined by failure - although in actual fact he has achieved his aim of possessing Merteuil! He too had attempted to follow the principles of the code of corruption in all its details, down to the publication of the projected defeat of the Marquise, who, it must be remembered, has a reputation as a model of propriety. Unfortunately for him, he was outclassed and soundly beaten.

This, then, is the type of manual of corruption offered by Les Liaisons dangereuses. It is certainly true that the novel depicts characters with a well-defined rule of life which is anything but moral by accepted standards. The question of whether this is likely corrupt the reader, or whether it is the sole purpose of the novel is, however, not so straightforward.

There can be no denying the fact that the successful seducers, Valmont and Merteuil, are very exceptional characters. Robert Kemp said of Merteuil that "l'exemple du libertinage" which she offers is enough to discourage any imitator by its perfection(2). There is something to be said for this argument, which, if it is true of Mme de Merteuil, is also true to a lesser extent

1. X, 52.

2. R. Kemp. La Vie des Livres, Paris, 1955, p. 32.

of Valmont. One cannot seriously imagine anyone, having read Les Liaisons, being tempted to try and emulate either of them. It may be that a certain type of mentality will be attracted by the idea, but the near-omniscience required must be more than enough discouragement.

There remains, however, the general climate of the novel into which this manual fits. Here it should be stated at the outset that Laclos shows considerable restraint in description. There are no "sexy" details such as Nerciat and Sade offer, and Laclos shows himself positively modest in the periphrastic way in which he alludes to the sexual act. No physical details whatsoever are given of Valmont's seduction of Mme de Tourvel or of Mme de Merteuil's encounter with Prévau. The same is true of Valmont's night with the Vicomtesse de M..., of which he tells Merteuil, not without ^{some complacency,} ~~fatuity,~~ "Comme je n'ai pas de vanité, je ne m'arrête pas aux détails de la nuit: mais vous me connaissez, et j'ai été content de moi." (1)

There is a little more detail in his account of his seduction of Cécile, but even here Laclos contents himself with periphrasis (2). Valmont later tells us that he composes "une espèce de catéchisme de débauche, à l'usage de mon écolière. Je m'amuse à n'y rien nommer que par le mot technique." (3) Not all the novelists of the period would have shown sufficient restraint not to go into details. Similarly, no details are given of the scandalous stories - "drôles de choses" (4), as Cécile calls them - which, in his desire to deprave her, Valmont attributes to her mother.

1. LXXI, 171.
2. XCVI, 243.
3. CX, 288.
4. CIX, 283.

Perhaps the most "exciting" passage in Les Liaisons is the "seraglio scene" between Merteuil and Belleruche at the Marquise's petite maison(1). Here we see the subtlety of the erotic technique at its clearest. We have first of all the preparation of Merteuil through intellectual self-excitement: "Je lis un chapitre du Sopha, une Lettre d'Héloïse et deux Contes de La Fontaine, pour recorder les différents tons que je voulais prendre." There is no physical description as such. All Merteuil tells Valmont is that, "Je choisis le déshabillé le plus galant. Celui-ci est délicieux; il est de mon invention: il ne laisse rien voir, et pourtant fait tout deviner," and that, on her own with Belleruche, "Tour à tour enfant et raisonnable, folâtre et sensible, quelquefois même libertine, je me plaisais à le considérer comme un Sultan au milieu de son Sérail, dont j'étais tour à tour les Favorites différentes. En effet, ses hommages réitérés, quoique toujours reçus par la même femme, le furent toujours par une Maîtresse nouvelle." Merteuil and Valmont have none of the straightforward love of sex for sex's sake which characterises a Casanova. We have already noted André Malraux's observation that they have always "une idée de derrière la tête". The effect of this is heightened by Laclos's use of the epistolary form, and the most important thing about this particular scene, which is by no means gratuitous, is its effect on Valmont. "Une scène d'amour simplement vue, décrite ou racontée 'objectivement'", says Seylaz(2), "n'est pas érotique. Elle ne le devient que si elle est réduite à son reflet dans une conscience." This is precisely what happens here. Apart from the light which this passage throws upon the mental state of Mme de Merteuil, it is important as an attempt to exercise constraint over Valmont,

1. X, 54-5.

2. Seylaz, op. cit., p. 54.

to force him to admit, even if only to himself, her superiority. This attempt to arouse his jealousy (and hence demonstrate dependent position with regard to her) is fully successful.

Suggestion is, to the educated mind, more exciting than description, and the honest reader will admit that there are certain passages in Les Liaisons from which he derives a certain titillation of a type to which he does not always like to own. We are told of two nights which Valmont spends with ^{a beautiful} Emilie, the opera girl. Of the second of these, which occurs immediately after the fall of the Présidente, we are told practically nothing. The other results in the brilliant letter full of innuendoes to Mme de Tourvel, for the composition of which Emilie serves as desk(1), "En effet," he writes, "la situation où je suis en vous écrivant, me fait connaître plus que jamais, la puissance irrésistible de l'amour.... Quoi! ne puis-je donc espérer que vous partagerez quelque jour le trouble que j'éprouve en ce moment?" It is needless to multiply examples from this letter. Suffice it to say that Valmont actually interrupts his letter to perform another act of infidelity to the Présidente: "Il faut vous quitter un moment pour dissiper une ivresse qui s'augmente à chaque instant, et qui devient plus forte que moi."

Were this all there is to it, one might be justified in saying that here at least Laclos is guilty of really bad taste, and that here he comes remarkably close to a desire to do dirt on sex in the actual presentation of a situation. But this is not all there is to it. The effect of this letter is heightened by its effect on Mme de Tourvel, who takes it as a

1. XLVIII, 126-128.

straightforward declaration of passion, and proceeds to preach Valmont a sermon. "Vous-même," she tells him, "... n'êtes-vous pas... obligé de convenir qu'il (love) devient plus fort que vous, et n'êtes-vous pas le premier à vous plaindre du trouble involontaire qu'il vous cause?"(1) In other words, the letter has an aesthetic justification. We must remember that we are dealing with an epistolary novel, and that this particular letter is by Valmont. Therefore any deduction we may make about it reflects on the character of the Vicomte, but not necessarily upon the intentions of the author.

Elsewhere, Valmont confesses that, "Je ne sais pourquoi, il n'y a plus que les choses bizarres qui me plaisent."(2) Even so, it is not primarily the sensuality which matters here. Valmont is indulging in a pastime, that of innuendoes, for which both he and Mme de Merteuil several times confess a predilection. This game is essentially a test of mental alertness. In sending his letter to Mme de Tourvel Valmont is demonstrating to himself and to Merteuil (as well, of course, as to the reader), by means of mystification, his superiority over the Présidente. She, as we have said, takes it as a straightforward declaration of passion. She has no reason to do otherwise, once she has decided, in the face of his reputation, that he is not the rake he is supposed to be.

There is, however, another side to this. The reader is in on the secret, and is in some way the accomplice of Valmont. The letter expresses the philosophy of the libertines by its very abuse of the language of passion. It should be seen in the light of Mme de Merteuil's remark that "l'amour qu'on

1. L, 129.
2. CX, 288.

nous vante comme la cause de nos plaisirs, n'en est au plus que le prétexte."(1) Valmont succeeds, through the direct contact which he makes through the epistolary form, in tempting the reader, whose privileged position permits him to see both the parody of passionate language and the effectiveness of this parody, in the words of Seylaz, "à mettre en doute la sincérité de tout langage amoureux, à se demander si toute expression de la passion ne comporte pas une part de comédie et si l'hypocrisie consommée de Valmont n'est pas au fond la forme évidente d'une fausseté inséparable de toute correspondance de ce genre."(2) Even if, as is possible, there is some truth in the argument that all love letters are inevitably artificial to a greater or a lesser extent, the conclusion to be drawn need not necessarily be immoral. It does not necessarily follow therefore that all protestations of passion are absolutely false. Among those readers who insist on drawing a lesson of some sort or other from the novel, the success of Valmont's device is quite as likely to be taken as a warning to the recipient of love letters to be on his or her guard - whereby a positive moral good may be done! - as to act as an inducement to attempt to emulate the skill in deception of this virtuoso.

Valmont found that he could derive pleasure only from "les choses bizarres". There is ample evidence in Les Liaisons that Mme de Merteuil, tired of the pleasures of normal rouerie, is tempted to turn for new experiences to homosexuality. Many of her allusions to Cécile indicate this tendency towards homosexuality. Writing of Belleruche, she

1. LXXXI, 202.
2. Seylaz, op. cit., pp. 94-5.

declares that for the present she will remain faithful to him:

"Cependant si j'avais moins de moeurs, je crois qu'il aurait dans ce moment, un rival dangereux; c'est la petite Volanges. Je raffole de cet enfant: c'est une vraie passion."(1)

Again, discussing Cécile's charms, she says,

"Elle est naturellement caressante, et je m'en amuse quelquefois: sa petite tête se monte avec une facilité incroyable... En vérité, je suis presque jalouse de celui à qui ce plaisir est réservé."(2)

There are several similar remarks(3), and Cécile herself on one occasion, writing to her friend Sophie Carnay, confesses of Merteuil that

"... il me semble que je l'aime plus comme Danceny que comme toi, et quelquefois je voudrais qu'elle fût lui."(4)

Despite all these allusions, Laclos once again shows restraint, and even modesty.

There are no physical descriptions whatsoever. At first sight the introduction of this theme may seem gratuitous, but in fact this is not the case. It both throws more light on Merteuil's principles, her dissociation of pleasure from love, and highlights the readiness, eagerness even, of the young Cécile to be corrupted. More of this later.

Valmont's and Merteuil's liking for double-meanings has already been mentioned. They even acknowledge Prévan's proficiency in this form of wit(5).

A few examples of this device will serve to bring to a conclusion this examination of the "corrupting" climate of Les Liaisons. Thus, Merteuil says of Cécile:

"Le jeune Danceny en raffole. Il a chanté avec elle; et en effet elle chante mieux qu'à une Pensionnaire n'appartient. Ils doivent répéter beaucoup de Duos, et je crois qu'elle se mettrait volontiers à l'unisson".(6)

1. XX, 69.
2. XXXVIII, 105.
3. e.g. LIV, 138; LXIII, 153.
4. LV, 140.
5. LXXXV, 215.
6. V, 44.

Valmont helps Mme de Tourvel to cross a ditch, and writes to Merteuil, "Vous jugez bien qu'une prude craint de sauter le fossé." (1) Similarly, he appreciates the wit of the Comtesse de B..., who writes to tell him that her husband "a le plus beau bois du monde, qu'il conserve soigneusement pour les plaisirs de ses amis." (2) Laclos never descends from this elegance to the mot cru. Those who seek a cheap thrill of this nature in Les Liaisons will be disappointed. Even when, on the rare occasions when he refers to subjects even today normally considered taboo, the propriety of language remains. Thus Valmont can write, all within the space of two pages (3),

"Par des raisons que vous devinerez, ou que vous ne devinerez pas, Madame de Tourvel ne m'occupait plus depuis quelques jours, et comme ces raisons-là ne peuvent exister chez la petite Volanges, j'en étais devenu plus assidu auprès d'elle,"

- and then go on to describe Cécile's miscarriage; and all this in such a way that it is no exaggeration to say that the genuinely "innocent" reader might miss half the meaning. This elegance of Laclos's language, and the use of innuendoes, has nothing to do with the mystery which D. H. Lawrence associates with what he calls the sentimental lie of purity, or with the sentimentality which he states to be a sure sign of pornography. There is no sentimentality here; quite the reverse. Nor is there, despite the trappings of innuendo, any mystery around sex in this book. To the contrary, the two seducers are singularly frank about their aims.

It is the presence of these innuendoes, however, and of countless other turns of wit, which gives us a clue to another dimension of Les Liaisons dangereuses. The immodesty in Laclos's novel is invariably characterised by wit and irony, and in this respect differs in tone from the rest of the novel in no way.

1. VI, 45-46.
2. LIX, 146.
3. CXL, 358-359.

This constant resort to wit and the intellect by the principal characters implies a detachment from mere sensual pleasure which is not to be found in either Merciat or Sade, or, for that matter, in any of the disciples of Rousseau. It must above all be remembered that neither Mme de Merteuil nor Valmont consider the physical act of seduction to be the ultimate aim. "Seul un roué," says Jean-Paul Sartre(1), "se représente son désir, le met en veilleuse, en diffère l'assouvissement." Sensual pleasure is for Valmont and Merteuil a means rather than an end. If we feel sympathy, or complicity, *e/* with these two characters, it is not because we are made the slaving observers of licentious scenes, but for a reason that is purely intellectual. The letters which form this novel have a curious, direct influence upon the reader, it is true. He is in on the secret, and such is the power of the letters of Valmont and Merteuil that he is certainly made, in some fashion, to wish that they will win. This is not to say that he is made to like them, but rather that he is to some degree hypnotised by them. They are snakes and he is their victim as much as Mme de Tourvel is Valmont's victim in the book. This accounts for the unease which the reader feels as he reads Les Liaisons. Marcel Arland expresses it as follows:

"Je défie bien un lecteur de Laclos, s'il n'est pas trop blasé, de ne se point sentir parfois, jusqu'au malaise, un peu de la mauvaise conscience du 'voyeur'."(2)

Many critics have had a similar uneasy feeling. Jacques Guignard speaks of "cette froide lucidité qui n'a rien de commun avec la passion et qui fait courir dans Les Liaisons dangereuses comme un frisson glacé."(3) René de Planhol declares that Les Liaisons, although not an immoral work, "laissent

1. J.-P. Sartre, L'Être et le Néant, Paris, 1943, p. 454.
2. M. Arland, Les Échanges, Paris, 1946, p. 164.
3. J. Guignard, Notice, L.D., Paris, Horizons de France, 1946, 2 vols., I, viii.

une impression troublante, qui excuse dans une certaine mesure l'erreur de ceux qui ont traité ce roman de pervers et qui ont identifié l'auteur à Valmont."(1) This uneasiness, however, has precious little to do with sex. For a novel with such a plot Les Liaisons dangereuses is surprisingly lacking in sensuality. We certainly cannot agree with Baudelaire that it is characterised by "beaucoup de sensualité."(2) The reader is in on the secret, we have said. That the conspiracy is to do with sex may well prove to be a matter of surprisingly little importance. In the words of Seylaz, "ce sont des idées et non des sensations que ces lettres communiquent."(3)

Even if we accept the thesis that Laclos deliberately set out to write a handbook of debauchery, "un des traités de perversion les plus frémissants qui aient été écrits," as Henri Mazel put it(4), and if we consider Les Liaisons in this light, as The Prince in the domain of love(5), it is still arguable that the risk of any literary production or, in our own times, any film, having any significant corrupting influence on the reader or spectator, is negligible. Quite apart from the question, in the particular instance of Les Liaisons, of whether any reader who might feel tempted would not feel daunted by the highly exceptional talents of the Vicomte and the Marquise, it is possible that the type of person who is attracted to certain books because they are reputed "dirty", or to "X" certificate films, is so attracted because of an element already within himself which uses these books and films (uncritically so far as their technique is concerned) as a safety valve. In other words, it is

1. R. de Flanhol, Préf., L.D., Paris, Bossard, 1925, 2 vols, I, xiv.
2. Baudelaire, Notes sur L.D., O.C. (de Laclos), 740.
3. J.-L. Seylaz, op. cit., p. 52.
4. H. Mazel, Ce qu'il faut lire dans sa vie, Paris, 1906, p. 58.
5. E. & J. de Goncourt, L'Amour au 18e siècle, Paris, 1875, p. 112.

possible that we tend to look at this problem of corruption from the wrong angle, and that the accused literary or, in the widest sense, artistic productions, instead of having a corrupting effect, have a positively salutary one, by acting as a safety-release for instincts which are in all of us, but which are exaggerated in a certain type of person, and which might otherwise find more violent or more socially harmful expression. If this is so, then the "corruption", the complicity which we have noticed in the case of Les Liaisons, ends once the book is closed or once the person in question has left the cinema. The expressions on the faces of people who are, apparently, perfectly normal, at a boxing or a wrestling match is an admirable illustration of this.

Moreover, it must be remembered that so far we have largely confined ourselves to the Valmont-Tourvel theme(1), because this is where the so-called art of seduction is to be found most clearly expressed. This, however, is not the main plot of Les Liaisons, which is concerned with the conflict between Valmont and Merteuil. We have already said that basically Laclos's novel deals not with emotions or with the senses but with ideas. This is singularly clear in the Valmont-Merteuil clash which, although it has sexual elements, also has other and more profound motivations. It is equally true, surprisingly enough, that the seduction of Cécile de Volanges ultimately has little to do with sex. We shall endeavour to discover what these ideas and motivations are in a later section.

Meanwhile, it remains true that Laclos himself was apparently not satis-

1. And to only one side of it at that. As we shall show when we come to examine the psychology of Mme de Tourvel, her contribution to the events leading up to her fall is a good deal less passive than may appear to be the case.

fied with the view that his novel was morally harmless. He went further, and claimed that Les Liaisons dangereuses was intended to serve a positive moral and didactic purpose. It is this claim that we shall examine in the next chapter.

3. LACLOS AND THE MORAL UTILITY OF "LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES"

Laclos, as we have said, was not satisfied to leave the question of the morality of his novel to the individual reader. He emphasises his claim of positive moral utility from the very outset, by entitling his work Les Liaisons dangereuses, ou Lettres recueillies dans une Société, et publiées pour l'Instruction de quelques autres. He follows up this claim in his Préface du Rédacteur, declaring that

"Le mérite d'un Ouvrage se compose de son utilité ou de son agrément, et même de tous deux, quand il en est susceptible."(1)

He goes on to say that the utility of his work - which, incidentally, he states that he expects to be contested - is in his view easier to establish than its literary merit. He considers that

"C'est rendre un service aux mœurs, que de dévoiler les moyens qu'emploient ceux qui en ont de mauvaises pour corrompre ceux qui en ont de bonnes."

He asserts his confidence that his novel will fulfil this function, and then becomes more specific:

"On y trouvera aussi la preuve et l'exemple de deux vérités importantes qu'on pourrait croire méconnues, en voyant combien peu elles sont pratiquées: l'une, que toute femme qui consent à recevoir dans sa société un homme sans mœurs, finit par en devenir la victime; l'autre, que toute mère est au moins imprudente, qui souffre qu'un autre qu'elle ait la confiance de sa fille. Les jeunes gens de l'un et l'autre sexe pourraient encore y apprendre que l'amitié que les personnes de mauvaises mœurs paraissent leur accorder si facilement, n'est jamais qu'un piège dangereux, et aussi fatal à leur bonheur qu'à leur vertu."(2)

Having outlined his moral programme, Laclos proceeds to issue a word of caution.

"L'abus," he says, "toujours si près du bien, me paraît ici trop à crain-

1. O.C., p. 31.

2. O.C., p. 32.

dre; et, loin de conseiller cette lecture à la jeunesse, il me paraît très important d'éloigner d'elle toutes celles de ce genre."

He then, however, cites the judgement of "une bonne mère" who, having read the manuscript, is supposed to have declared that she would feel that she had done her daughter a real service if she gave her a copy on her wedding day. "Si toutes les mères de famille en pensent ainsi," Laclos smugly concludes, "je me féliciterai éternellement de l'avoir publié." (1)

Before going on to examine these claims of Laclos's, it is worth stressing that moral claims of a similar nature were extremely common throughout the eighteenth century, some sincere, others manifestly less so. We shall have more to say on this point later on (2). Le Sage prefaced Gil Blas with the following remark to the reader:

"Si tu suis mes aventures sans prendre garde aux inscriptions morales qu'elles renferment, tu ne tireras aucun fruit de cet ouvrage; mais si tu le lis avec attention, tu y trouveras, suivant le précepte d'Horace (3), l'utile mêlé avec l'agréable." (4)

Similarly, Marivaux's Jacob, in Le Paysan Parvenu, announces that "le récit de mes aventures ne sera pas inutile à ceux qui aiment à s'instruire." (5)

Prévost followed the same tradition when he wrote of Manon Lescaut,

"Outre le plaisir d'une lecture agréable, on y trouvera peu d'événements qui ne puissent servir à l'instruction des mœurs; et c'est rendre, à mon avis, un service considérable au Public, que de l'instruire en l'amusant." (6)

1. O.C., 32-3.
2. Cf. the introduction to our Section III, infra.
3. Horace, Ars poetica, 343.
4. Le Sage, Histoire de Gil Blas de Santillane, Paris, Garnier, n.d., 2 vols., Gil Blas au Lecteur, I, 2.
5. Marivaux, Le Paysan Parvenu, Paris, Garnier, n.d., p. 2.
6. Prévost, Avis de l'Auteur des Mémoires d'un Homme de Qualité, in Le Pour et le Contre, Paris, 1734, III, no. 36, p. 137; quoted in Cluny edn. of Manon, 1949, p. 34.

In his preface to Dolbreuse, Loaisel de Tréogate declares that "dans quelque genre que l'on écrive, on doit se proposer d'être utile"(1), and then proceeds to indulge in sensual passages galore. La Morlière had the honesty to make no such claims for Angola(2), however, and Nerciat went so far as brazenly to place the following verses as a preface to Félicia:

"Voici mon très cher ouvrage,
Tout ce qui t'arrivera:
Tu ne vaux rien, c'est dommage;

N'importe, on t'achètera.
Plus d'une femme t'aura,
Jusqu'au bout avec courage,
Lira.

La plus catin (c'est l'usage),
Au feu te condamnera;
Mais la plus sage...
Rira."(3)

The ending of the novel is equally impudent. Godard d'Aucour, on the other hand, tried to have the best of both worlds with Thémidore. In the Avertissement he proclaimed that

"Nous ne conseillons point aux âmes scrupuleuses de jeter les yeux sur ces aventures (sic), elles sont quelquefois chatouilleuses et capables d'excoiter des idées extrêmement éveillées"(4).

but he endeavoured to tack on a moral ending in the last three pages of his novel. Rétif de la Bretonne, the author of Monsieur Nicolas, insisted that, "C'est un livre utile qu'on lit ici, et s'il est amusant, ce n'est que son second mérite"(5), and even the ill-famed Marquis de Sade made regular moral

1. Amsterdam, 1783, p. v.

2. 1746.

3. Nerciat, Félicia, ou mes Fredaines (1775), in Oeuvre, Paris, 1910-1911, 2 vols. II, 11.

4. La Haye, 1745, p.vi.

5. Rétif de la Bretonne, Monsieur Nicolas, ou le Cœur humain dévoilé (1796-7), Paris, 1924, 4 vols., IV, 175.

claims for his works. In his Idée sur les Romans he contrasted his moral aims in Aline et Valcour with the works of Dorat and Crébillon fils:

"Je ne veux pas," he says, "faire aimer le vice; je n'ai pas, comme Crébillon et Dorat, le dangereux projet de faire aimer aux femmes les personnages qui les trompent, je veux, au contraire, qu'elles les détestent." (1)

To name all the writers who in the eighteenth century claimed, sincerely or with tongue in cheek, a moral utility for their novels, would be but to give a tedious catalogue. One can scarcely omit, however, the two writers whose names are perhaps the first to spring to mind when one considers this question, namely Richardson and Rousseau. The morality of both these writers may be somewhat unorthodox, but there is no reason to impugn the sincerity of their intentions. The very title Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded is sufficient illustration, without his numerous other declarations, of Richardson's moralising approach, whilst Rousseau wrote in his second preface to La Nouvelle Héloïse,

"J'aime à me figurer deux époux lisant ce recueil ensemble, y puisant un nouveau courage pour supporter leurs travaux communs, et peut-être de nouvelles vues pour les rendre utiles. Comment pourraient-ils y contempler le tableau d'un ménage heureux, sans vouloir imiter un si doux modèle? Comment s'attendriraient-ils sur le charme de l'union conjugale, même privé de celui de l'amour, sans que la leur se resserre et s'affermisse?"

He gave his answer to those who say that certain passages of the early part of his novel are quite as sensual as anything to be found in the recognised erotic novelists and this is perfectly true - when he wrote,

"Une honnête fille ne lit point de livres d'amour. Que celle qui lira celui-ci, malgré son titre, ne se plaigne point du mal qu'il lui aura fait: elle ment. Le mal était fait d'avance; elle n'a plus rien à risquer." (2)

1. Sade, Idée sur les Romans, Paris, Palimugre, n.d. (1947), p. 56; cf. also prefaces to Justine & Aline et Valcour.

2. Rousseau, La Nouvelle Héloïse, Garnier, I, p. xv.

In view of the prevalence among eighteenth-century fiction writers of the habit of making moral claims for their work, the question has to be asked whether Laclos was totally serious in upholding the moral utility of Les Liaisons dangereuses. In this connection we must bear in mind what we know of the character of Laclos himself, namely that he appears (admittedly, this evidence comes later) to have been a good husband and father or, in short, to have been of exemplary moral character. On the other hand we must not forget the truth of the remark made by Garat about Laclos in another connection, to the effect that what a man says (or, in this case, what a man writes in his letters or his prefaces) is not necessarily proof of his innocence(1).

Laclos's case stands or falls on the assumption that to be shown evil is to love virtue. This is his argument in a nut-shell. Of his more precise claims, the first is that he shows that "toute femme qui consent à recevoir dans sa société un homme sans mœurs, finit par en devenir la victime." This he certainly seems to show in the case of Mme de Tourvel and Valmont. Laclos, however, maintains that the fate of Mme de Tourvel illustrates a moral lesson which is true for all women, and he has to be right in this contention if his moral claim is to stand. There can be no doubt that Mme de Tourvel, like Samuel Richardson's Clarissa, is meant to be the most virtuous of women, but unfortunately one must express certain reservations on this point, and question whether the virtue of either the Présidente de Tourvel or Clarissa Harlowe is of quite such a high order as their respective

1. Garat, De la Conspiration d'Orléans, in Bibliothèque des Mémoires relatifs à l'Histoire de France pendant le 18e siècle, (ed. Barrière), vol. XXV, p. 430, Paris, 1862.

creators would have us believe. Whether a woman of such supposed piety and moral rectitude as Mme de Tourvel would ever allow herself to become involved with a man of Valmont's reputation is an extremely interesting question, and one into which we shall go at some length in the next chapter. For the moment it is sufficient to suggest that there may be some grounds for suspecting that what Faurie refers to as Mme de Tourvel's "auto-séduction" (1) was present in embryo before the Vicomte even appeared on the scene.

The second of Laclos's definite moral claims is that he shows that "toute mère est au moins imprudente, qui souffre qu'une autre qu'elle ait la confiance de sa fille." This sounds precisely the type of claim which one might expect from a man who was to consider writing a novel to demonstrate the delights of family life and a disciple of Rousseau. Indeed, it is certainly true that some stress is laid upon family ties in Les Liaisons. It is largely because there is no communication between Mme de Volanges and her daughter that Cécile comes to be seduced and depraved. It is this which makes Cécile such easy prey for the Marquise de Merteuil, of whom we soon find the young girl saying,

"C'est pourtant bien extraordinaire qu'une femme qui ne m'est presque pas parente prenne plus de soin de moi que ma mère! c'est bien heureux pour moi de l'avoir connue!"

This remark is occasioned by Mme de Merteuil's lending her some novels, but Cécile shows the real cause of her trust in the Marquise when she goes on to say that they are to go to the Opera together, and sit in the Marquise's box:

"Nous causerons aussi de mon mariage: car elle m'a dit que c'était bien vrai que j'allais me marier; mais nous n'avons pas pu en dire davantage. Par exemple, n'est-ce pas encore bien étonnant que Maman ne m'en dise rien du tout?" (2)

1. E. Faurie, Essai sur la Séduction, Paris, 1948, p. 173.
2. XXIX, 88.

There is indeed small wonder that a young girl should be astonished at such reticence on the part of her mother, particularly a young girl just out of the convent, surrounded by wedding preparations, and whose mother has often told her that "une Demoiselle devait rester au Couvent jusqu'à ce qu'elle se mariât."⁽¹⁾ Nor, given these circumstances, is it surprising to find Cecile, in her next letter to Sophie Carnay, accepting without question the unattractive picture painted by Mme de Merteuil of her husband-to-be, Gercourt:

"Mais d'abord il est vieux: figure-toi qu'il a au moins trente-six ans! et puis, Madame de Merteuil dit qu'il est triste et sévère, et qu'elle craint que je ne sois pas heureuse avec lui. J'ai même bien vu qu'elle en était sûre, et qu'elle ne voulait pas me le dire, pour ne pas m'affliger."⁽²⁾

Mme de Merteuil herself underlines this lack of family feeling which she exploits. Having arranged for Mme de Volanges to discover Danceny's letters to Cécile, the Marquise writes to Valmont:

"Ma seule inquiétude était que Madame de Volanges ne profitât de ce moment pour gagner la confiance de sa fille; ce qui eût été bien facile, en n'employant, avec elle, que le langage de la douceur et de l'amitié; et en donnant aux conseils de la raison, l'air et le ton de la tendresse indulgente."⁽³⁾

The conventional, bornée Mme de Volanges misses her opportunity to save her daughter, uses severity with her, and threatens her with the convent. This opportunity is never to return. Valmont remarks that on the morning after his seduction of Cécile, when she was obviously tired out, "pour la première fois, sa mère, alarmée de ce changement extrême, lui témoignait un intérêt assez

1. I, 36.
2. XXXIX, 106.
3. LXIII, 153.

tendre!"(1) Cécile's own reaction to this is extremely touching, ironical though the situation is to the reader. When her mother asks what is the matter, she bursts into tears and, as she tells Mme de Merteuil,

"Je croyais qu'elle m'allait gronder, et peut-être ça m'aurait fait moins de peine: mais, au contraire. Elle m'a parlé avec douceur! Je ne le méritais guère. Elle m'a dit de ne pas m'affliger comme ça."(2)

The irony continues. Mme de Volanges follows her daughter's example and seeks Mme de Merteuil's advice. In her letter the faults in her relationship with Cécile are clearly shown. She has been genuinely moved by what she takes to be Cécile's distress at being separated from Danceny, but which is really the aftermath of her night with Valmont. She complains that Cécile has always been timid with her, and yet when she is moved by her daughter's tears she turns her face away so that Cécile shall not see her emotion(3). This lack of comprehension is constant in Mme de Volanges, and finds its clearest expression at the climax of the book when she makes her pitifully inadequate guess at the nature of the scandal in which her daughter is involved.(4) If Laclos can be said to have realised any of his moral claims, then it is this demand for a trusting relationship between parent and child. Yet here again we are dealing with two specific individuals, a cold, rather stupid mother and a precocious, rather stupid child. These character-studies are far more important than any temuous general moral which one might attempt to draw from them.

Laclos's third moral claim for Les Liaisons is that young people will learn from it that "l'amitié que les personnes de mauvaises mœurs paraissent leur accorder si facilement n'est jamais qu'un piège dangereux, et aussi fatal à leur bonheur qu'à leur vertu." This declaration seems to accept the popular, and comforting, view - strengthened by Rousseau - that youth is the period of innocence

1. XCVI, 244. My italics.
2. XCVII, 246.
3. XCVIII, 248.
4. CLXXIII, 417-8.

and, if left alone, will develop virtuously. Certainly both Cécile and Danceny end up neither happy nor virtuous, but it is by no means certain, as seems implicit in Laclos's remark, that their moral downfall is caused solely by their coming into contact with Valmont and Mme de Merteuil. There is something rotten in their characters from the outset. The tendency towards sexual immorality is already there. Mme de Merteuil who, whatever else one may say about her, is undeniably a skilful judge of character, sums up Cécile accurately enough when she observes that she possesses "une certaine fausseté naturelle"; "cela n'a ni caractère ni principes"(1). Danceny is rather a different case. Valmont, in a letter to Mme de Merteuil acknowledges that the young man has "un fonds d'honnêteté qui nous gênera"(2). The marquise, however, scathingly dismisses the Chevalier in one sentence: "Ce Danceny est un enfant qui perdra son temps à faire l'amour, et ne finira rien"(3). Valmont revises his opinion and, having witnessed the growth of Danceny's duplicity, we are inclined to agree with the Vicomte when he says,

"Voilà bien les hommes! tous également scélérats dans leurs projets, ce qu'ils mettent de faiblesse dans l'exécution, ils l'appellent probité."(4)

There is in short no trace of a song of innocence about the portrayal of either Cécile or Danceny in Les Liaisons. What we are given is a view of humanity far less banal than this. Perhaps the chief fault of these two young people in a novel which, in the words of Janine Marat, is "la déléctation de l'intelligence et l'un de ses plus sûrs chefs-d'oeuvre... le roman même de l'intelligence pure"(5), is their stupidity. What lies behind this stupidity we shall

1. XXXVIII, 105 & 104.

2. XLIV, 120.

3. V, 44.

4. LXVI, 161.

5. J. Marat, Les 'Liaisons dangereuses', Roman de l'Intelligence pure, Revue de Suisse, 20 Nov. 1951, p. 138.

see in the next chapter, when we come to study the characters of the novel in some detail. It is not true, however, that Cécile and Danceny lose their virtue simply because they meet Valmont and Mme de Merteuil, although it is of course a fact that these two, "le couple, le mariage du mal"(1), as Giraudoux describes them, considerably accelerate the process!

Moreover, what is perhaps more important is that none of these three moral claims of Laclos, however unsatisfactorily or otherwise it may be realised, seems to have very much to do with the main theme of Les Liaisons dangereuses, which, as we have already indicated, is not the debauching of Cécile, nor even the downfall of the Presidente de Tourvel, but the conflict between Valmont and Mme de Merteuil. The other characters' relationships with one or other of these two may well be dangerous, but the most dangerous liaison of all is that of Valmont and Mme de Merteuil, and it is from the very beginning dangerous for both of them. It is in the light of these two dominant characters that we shall see the true significance of Mme de Tourvel, Cécile and the rest, and it is in the light of these two characters that the moral - if the novel has or needs one - is to be drawn.

The claims made by Laclos in his preface were the only ones upon which the contemporary public could base a judgement of the novel. The opinions of eighteenth-century critics and the general reader of the time, immediately after the publication of Les Liaisons are extremely interesting concerning the professed morality of the work, although it is true that they were on the whole more interested in determining to what extent Laclos's novel was a reflection of the manners of the society in which they lived. It is sig-

1. J. Giraudoux, Littérature, Paris, 1941, p. 85.

nificant that the attention of those critics who did busy themselves with the question of the novel's morality was taken not so much by the three principal claims of Laclos which we have noted, as by the problem of the morality of the dénouement - for in eighteenth-century fiction just as much in the twentieth-century cinema, at the end the villain was expected to receive his just deserts, in the form of exemplary punishment for his sins.

One or two critics, however, defended other aspects of the plot, and especially the character of Mme de Tourvel. Some indication of the effect produced by the Présidente, whose affinity with Richardson's *Clarissa* was noted from the very beginning(1), is given by the Comte de Tilly, who writes:

"Le portrait de Madame de Tourvel est adorable, et a fait verser bien des larmes à la jeunesse des deux sexes. Que de jeunes personnes aimeraient mieux mourir comme elle, que de vivre comme son odieuse rivale! Voilà un hommage à la vertu."

It is true that Tilly adds, "Mais aussi c'est là toute la part de la vertu dans ce livre"(2). As corroboration of the moral effect which Laclos's account of the fate of Mme de Tourvel could have, we are told that Mme de Vintimille, reading *Les Liaisons* in 1782, two years after her marriage, came to Letter CXXV, which opens with Valmont's cry of triumph at having defeated the Présidente; at this point, we are told,

"Elle jeta le livre et se dit: 'Quoi! je donnerais à un homme le droit de parler ainsi de moi? Non, jamais aucun de ces messieurs ne pourra se vanter de ma conquête!' Elle le racontait et ajoutait: 'Je me suis tenu parole'".(3)

This at least seems to lend support to Laclos's contention that his novel should

1. of Grimm, etc., *Corr. litt.*, XIII, 108-11: "une nouvelle Clarisse", For other parallels with Richardson's novel cf. Bachaumont, XX, 299; *O.C.*, 730; & La Harpe, *Corr. litt.*, XI, 473; *O.C.*, 727.
2. Tilly, *Mémoires*, I, 324-5. *O.C.*, 733.
3. Joubert, *Lettres à Mme de Vintimille*, pub. par André Beaunier, Paris 1921, Préface, xxi. Joseph Joubert (1754-1824): a selection of his *Pensées* was pub. by Chateaubriand in 1838; the complete end. appeared in 1842, published by Pierre de Raynal.

be given to young women on their wedding day! It should, however, be noted that Mme de Vintimille's reaction is based on nothing other than vanity - this is a piquant and far from insignificant fact. Beaunier, moreover, quite rightly adds that "les livres, comme les donneurs de conseils, ne nous persuadent que suivant nos goûts et nos propos délibérés."(1) If this observation is true with reference to Mme de Vintimille, it is not without its relevance to Les Liaisons dangereuses, in the sense that the fall of both Cécile de Volanges and Mme de Tourvel is preceded by a deliberate change of "donneur de conseils", a change to more indulgent advisers who will say what Cécile and the Présidente wish to hear.

On a more general, and vaguer plane, Alexandre Pieyre, to whom Mme Laclos later hinted that she would like him to write her husband's biography(2), wrote in a letter that whilst it was not his aim to write an apology of Les Liaisons, "d'autres l'ont tenté, et peut-être même y ont réussi auprès de quelques esprits impartiaux, qui ont excusé les moyens en faveur du but." He added that Laclos should not be condemned for "quelques pages, qui n'ont été nuisibles qu'à son repos, et, j'ose dire plus, qui peut-être ont quelquefois garanti la crédulité contre les pièges (sic) de la séduction."(3)

We have already mentioned that the first edition of Laclos's novel in English was prefaced by an essay on The Utility of Novels? ~~AND ALSO~~ by comments upon and criticism of this essay, which set out to condemn all novels outright. The author of these comments took up the challenges in Laclos's defence with none of the reservations of Pieyre. He saw that Laclos's case rested upon the idea

1. *ibid.*
2. B.N. MS. fonds français 12845, folio 130.
3. *ibid.*, folios 128-129.

that to depict vice is to make it detested. Thus he wrote:

"What is a novel? A correct picture of morals put in motion. What should be the aim of a novel? To blend instruction with amusement. When the morals of the actors are corrupt, is it allowable, with deference to decency, to draw them in their proper shades and colours? Undoubtedly it is; but with the greatest caution, lest by giving vice, whose contagion must be dreaded, its true, though seducing and agreeable aspect, without resisting, diminishing, or rendering useless the effect it may produce by the contrast of gentleness, peace and happiness, which virtue secures."(1) (sic)

The writer then goes on to say that Crébillon fils and Duclos go wide of this mark, and that their novels deserve the severest censure for allowing vice, with impunity, to "applaud its infamous triumphs." Such is not the case, however, with Laclos's novel:

"... Shall we not always feel a certain aversion, a kind of antipathy for Valmont and the Marchioness de Merteuil, notwithstanding the brilliant cast he has given two performers. Let some attention be paid to the skill with which he has contrasted them in the gentle, sensible and generous Madame de Rosemonde; how moving, how unaffected her virtue."(2)

Let it be said at once that to base a case for the moral utility of Les Liaisons on the minor character of Mme de Rosemonde is a very weak argument indeed. This reviewer's summary of that lady's character is none too accurate, and we may well have certain reservations about the "moving", "unaffected" nature of her virtue. This, however, is not the place to go into that problem.

This commentator sees Cécile's story as a warning to all mothers to be careful to whom they entrust the upbringing of their daughters - in other words, for one reader at least, Laclos achieved one of his moral aims:

"... a young person, who would be pleased, at first, with the brilliant character of the Marchioness de Merteuil, would soon change her opinion, and not be tempted to imitate her, when she would see the dreadful and exemplary (sic) punishment inflicted on this guilty woman. She will

1. Dangerous Acquaintances, London, 1784, I, x.
2. ibid., I, xi-xii.

shudder at the thought of the miseries to which one simple fault condemned Cecilia Volanges. Valmont perishing in the bloom of life, by a violent death, loaded with the contempt and disgrace of all men of worth, disowned even by the wicked, will deter all those, whose vanity and a desire to shine might induce them to copy such a character, from attempting to imitate him."(1)

This brings us to the question of the dénouement which, as we have already said, received most attention from contemporary critics so far as the morality of the book was concerned.

One critic(2) came out firmly in Laclos's favour on this point:

"Les Liaisons dangereuses remplissent parfaitement leur titre, et, malgré la réclamation générale élevée contre, on doit regarder ce roman comme très utile, puisque le vice, après avoir triomphé durant tout le cours de l'histoire, finit par être puni cruellement."

The hard fact is, however, that on this question of the dénouement, most critics took a very different line, thus earning for themselves, no doubt, the approval of people such as the Marquise de Coigny who, as we have mentioned(3), ceased to be at home for Laclos after the publication of his novel.

Grimm's successor mentions only one of the three explicit moral claims made by Laclos in his preface, and this he does only to declare that "l'extrême sécurité de Madame de Volanges sur la conduite de sa fille est peut-être ce qu'il y a de moins vraisemblable dans tout l'ouvrage." He does, however, add that this is to some extent justified by Merteuil's skill in manipulating people, and also by "cette confiance qu'une femme dont la vie fut toujours irréprochable, prend si naturellement dans tout ce qui l'entoure."(4) We have already said sufficient about Mme de Volanges's character to indicate to indicate that this last is a misunderstanding of her nature. She is more

1. *ibid.*, I, xviii-xix.
2. Bachaumont, XX, 299, 13 June 1782; *O.C.*, 730.
3. cf *supra*, p. 337.
4. Grimm, etc., *Corr. litt.*, XIII, 110.

guilty of stupidity than of virtuous trust, and indeed her virtue is not so real as it is ostentatious. Meister has some very harsh things to say about the dénouement of Laclos's novel:

"Toutes les circonstances de ce dénouement, assez brusquement amenées, n'occupent guère que quatre ou cinq pages; en conscience, peut-on présumer que ce soit assez de morale pour détruire le poison répandu dans quatre volumes de séduction, où l'art de corrompre et de tromper se trouve développé avec tout le charme que peuvent lui prêter les grâces de l'esprit et de l'imagination, l'ivresse du plaisir et le jeu très entraînant d'une intrigue aussi facile qu'ingénieuse?"

He concludes that one would find in society in general, and Parisian society in particular, "peu de liaisons aussi dangereuses, pour une jeune personne, que la lecture des Liaisons dangereuses de M. de La Clos." (1)

Similarly, La Harpe, in a sweeping condemnation of the novel, concludes by pointing out:

"Mais la plus honnête femme peut être défigurée par la petite vérole et ruinée par un procès. Le vice ne trouve donc pas ici sa punition en lui-même, et ce dénouement sans moralité ne vaut pas mieux que le reste." (2)

Tilly adds his condemnation in a more trivial way by saying that "la mort même de Valmont n'a aucune moralité, puisque son genre est rigoureusement condamnable." Tilly continues that "l'intervention du Père Anselme est un persiflage de son ministère," concluding that the novel is "composé avec un art trois fois coupable", the third element of guilt being represented by "le rôle de cette innocente, qui fait tout ce que feraient les plus scélérates, qui donne à sa mère tous les ridicules, aux jeunes filles tous les mauvais exemples." In short, says Tilly, Les Liaisons is "l'ouvrage d'une tête de premier ordre, d'un coeur pourri et du génie du mal." (3) One may feel it odd that the author of such memoirs as his could smugly denounce Les Liaisons.

1. *ibid.*, XIII, 109.

2. La Harpe, Corr. litt., Oeuvres, Paris, 1820, XI, 476; O.C., 728.

3. Tilly, Mémoires, I, 326; O.C., 734.

as "un livre auquel son auteur ne craignit pas de supposer un but moral, quand il était un outrage universel à la morale de toute la nation," full of "des tableaux plus répréhensibles que ceux de l'Arétin." (1) This last remark simply is not true. Although there may be more than a little political animosity present in Tilly's attitude towards Laclos, it should in fairness be pointed out that, morally, the Comte has been said to have been not so black as he has been painted. Havelock Ellis depicts Tilly as "a sentimental rouse", and adds that there is "an amusing irony in the fact that Tilly, who is still fettered by the old-world notion that Les Liaisons dangereuses was an outrage on morality, has sometimes himself been considered as the embodiment in real life of the accomplished seducer whom Laclos depicted, Valmont en personne." (2)

Whether or not Tilly was sincere in his condemnation of Les Liaisons, there is no doubt that he was, when he wrote his memoirs, agreeing with what had been the majority opinion in 1782 and immediately afterwards. D'Allonville (3) described "le trop libre roman de Laclos", of which he nevertheless admired the skill, as perhaps the most dangerous of all the novels of its type. Similarly, on the other side of the Channel, the London Monthly Review saw Laclos's work as "a daring outrage on every law of virtue and decorum", a "horrid and disgusting drama", skillfully written indeed, but such that the reviewer deemed it necessary, despite the author's talent, to "pass the severest censure on his principles." (4)

1. ibid., I, 318 & 325; O.C., 731 & 733.
2. Havelock Ellis, From Rousseau to Proust, London, 1936, pp. 194 & 207.
3. D'Allonville, Mémoires secrets de 1770 à 1830, 6 vols., Paris, 1838-45, I, 368-372; O.C., 735.
4. Monthly Review, LXXI, Aug. 1784, p. 149.

There can be no doubt that Meister is right when he says that the actual form taken by the dénouement is brought about in an extremely abrupt manner and in a very few pages, although it is by no means as sudden as the moral ending which Godard d'Aucour tacks on in the last three pages of Thémidore when, after a veritable orgy of scabrous details, including a rape, lascivious pictures in a convent, descriptions of the sexual act in unorthodox circumstances, the conventional use of boudoir mirrors and references to Petronius's Satyricon, Thémidore announces his intention of emulating the woman of more than averagely easy virtue, Rozette, by getting married. She herself marries a rich merchant and gives up her evil ways, thus finding happiness, and Thémidore professes, "Je l'estime même assez pour ne lui plus parler de galanterie."⁽¹⁾ Similarly, La Harpe is correct in pointing out that the most virtuous of women could be disfigured by small-pox or ruined by the loss of a lawsuit, and that therefore "le vice ne trouve donc pas ici sa punition en lui-même." This is singularly relevant, because it is not only Valmont and Merteuil who suffer at the end of Les Liaisons. The reputedly virtuous characters suffer quite as much. If Mme de Merteuil is disfigured and Valmont killed in a duel, it is equally true that Mme de Tourvel loses her reason and eventually dies, that Cécile enters a convent which will be a living death to a person of her character, although she does so of her own free will, and that Danceny, the Chevalier de Malte, departs for that island, full of bitterness and disillusionment as he leaves Cécile, of whom he says, "C'est assez d'être obligé de renoncer à l'aimer! il m'en coûterait trop de la haïr."⁽²⁾ Although in a footnote the "editor" of the letters hints at a "suite des aventures de Madem-

1. G. d'Aucour, Thémidore, La Haye, 1745, II, 134.
 2. CLXXIV, 421.

oiselle de Volanges", (1) the reader is very far from feeling that this sequel would be any happier than her lot in Les Liaisons, and still further from feeling that they would include the Chevalier. Danceny's bitterness shows in his declaration to Mme de Rosemonde:

"Je pars pour Malte: j'irai y faire avec plaisir, et y garder religieusement des vœux qui me séparent d'un monde dont, si jeune encore, j'ai déjà eu tant à me plaindre; j'irai enfin chercher à perdre, sous un ciel étranger, l'idée de tant d'horreurs accumulées, et dont le souvenir ne pourrait qu'attrister et flétrir mon âme." (2)

Ultimately, all these characters are at least as dreadfully scarred as is Mme de Merteuil by her small-pox. Mme de Merteuil's financial punishment is negligible: moreover, she manages to make off with a considerable sum in silver and jewels (3). Apparently aware of the inadequacy of this ending, for any moral purpose, in his final footnote Laclos regrets that for the moment he cannot tell the reader of "les sinistres événements qui ont comblé les malheurs ou achevé la punition de Madame de Merteuil." (4) Such is the insufficiency of the dénouement and so impressive is the character of the Marquise, however, that despite this last minute precaution of Laclos's, the reader finds himself wondering whether, despite her small-pox and the loss of an eye, Mme de Merteuil will not continue to dominate events in Holland, whither it is believed she has fled. That it is not virtue that triumphs at the end of Les Liaisons is emphasised by another episode. Prévan, a Valmont in embryo, reappears at the Théâtre Italien at the height of the scandal:

"Dès qu'on l'a aperçut," Mme de Volanges tells Mme de Rosemonde, "tout le monde, hommes et femmes, l'entoura et l'applaudit... M. de Prévan a été, le même soir, fort accueilli de tous ceux des Officiers de son Corps qui se trouvaient là, et on ne doute pas qu'on ne lui rende bientôt son emploi et son rang." (5)

1. O.C., 423.

2. CLXXIV, 421.

3. CLXXV, 422, pace Dorothy R. Thelander (Laclos and the Epistolary Novel, Geneva, 1963, pp. 67-8 & p. 99, n. 58).

4. O.C., 423.

5. CLXXIII, 419.

Thus, not only is Mme de Merteuil's humiliation made complete, but vice remains, re-emerging like a phoenix from the flames.

Virtue is not triumphant; nor is virtue persuaded by the events which close the novel that to refrain from dabbling in vice will bring it any reward whatsoever, for the very simple reason that there is no character in the book who can legitimately be considered a really virtuous person. We shall elaborate upon this point at a later stage. It can, however, be seen here and now that there is not the slightest hint that virtue reaps a reward greater than the things of this world. In Clarissa, which might well, as W. L. Phelps points out(1), be called Virtue Triumphant, just as Pamela was named by its author Virtue Rewarded, Richardson attempted to show just this in the rather sickly apotheosis which he contrives for his heroine towards the end of the work. There is no such character in Les Liaisons. Mme de Tourvel has none of Clarissa's ultimate serenity(2). Danceny's departure to take up the vows of his order in Malta and Cécile's retirement to a nunnery are far from performing any such function.

Moreover, from an aesthetic point of view the dénouement is unsatisfactory. The clash between Valmont and Merteuil is essential and inevitable. It is the culmination of the main theme of the novel. The way in which it is brought about in the end, however, is extremely clumsy. The struggle throughout has been a battle of the intelligence and the will, and this has nothing whatsoever in common with these easy, unsubtle devices of duel, disease and financial impoverishment. The aim may well have been to satisfy the moral

1. Richardson, Clarissa, London, 1932, 4 vols., I, xii.
2. cf. CXLVII; CXLIX; CLIV; CLX; CLXI.

requirements of the time by meting out punishment to Valmont and Mme de Merteuil. Indeed it is possible that from the outset Laclos sincerely meant to write a work of moral utility. The fact is, however, that by this stage the impact of any such aim has been lost. Ultimately, Les Liaisons dangereuses is not about the danger of giving in to sexual temptation as a result of keeping bad company. Mme de Tourvel, whatever Laclos may have intended, is not the heroine. The real interest of the novel lies for us - and for the eighteenth-century reader (hence in good measure the outcry!) - in the fascination of the clash between Valmont and Merteuil and in what they represent.

Meister said of Laclos,

"Il a cédé à l'attrait d'embellir ses modèles pour les rendre plus piquants, et c'est par là même que la peinture qu'il en fait est devenue bien plus propre à séduire ses lecteurs qu'à les corriger."(1)

He picked out, "parmi les épisodes qui enrichissent cette ingénieuse production", the story of the Three Inseparables, adding that "l'aventure de Mme de Merteuil avec ce même Prévan est peut-être encore plus piquante."(2) We have already mentioned these episodes as two examples of the mastery of the intelligence of the novel, and it is certainly readily conceivable that these were among the passages most popular when it first appeared, perhaps for this, perhaps for other reasons, not least among which was no doubt a desire to identify Laclos's characters with real-life personages.(3) It is very difficult to believe that the novel sold so well simply because of its "spicy" passages for, despite Tilly's comparison with Aretino, Les Liaisons is relatively chaste in this respect for a novel with

1. Grimm, etc., Corr. litt., XIII, 109
2. ibid., XIII, 110-111
3. cf. infra.

such a plot, and readers who sought this kind of thing had plenty of other books to go to and in which they could find a far richer selection. In these circumstances, it cannot be these few passages which caused the outcry against the novel which almost ~~most~~ resulted in its sale being banned(1). It may well be indeed that Laclos originally had a genuine moralising intention and aimed to write a new Clarissa but that, as Meister suggests, he gave in to the temptation to embellish Valmont and Mme de Merteuil, with the result that they came to assume dimensions previously undreamed of, and so that, in the words of Seylaz, "Beaucoup plus qu'il ne donnait à ses lecteurs une version française de Clarisse Harlowe, c'est en réalité une Anti-Clarisse qu'il avait écrite."(2)

This, however, is mere conjecture, and the sincerity of Laclos's professed moral aim cannot conclusively be proved or disproved. What is known for certain, on the other hand, is that not only did Laclos claim a moral purpose in his preface, but also, in the years afterwards, he consistently repeated these claims, and showed pleasure whenever anyone attributed moral worth to his work. The earliest example of the author's defence of the morality of Les Liaisons after publication is to be found in his correspondence with Mme Riccoboni, during April 1782.

Mme Riccoboni wrote to Laclos to remind him that a novelist must set out to instruct as well as to please, and went on to say that

"On n'a pas besoin de se mettre en garde contre des caractères qui ne peuvent exister, et j'invite M. de Laclos à ne jamais ordonner le vice des agréments qu'il a prêtés à Mme de Merteuil."(3)

.. cf. Métra & Bachaumont, supra p. 360.
 .. Seylaz, op. cit., p. 97.
 .. O.C., 711.

Laclos's reply to this, amid much flattery of Mme Riccoboni's talents as an author ("Quand ses lecteurs.... voudront connaître tout ce que l'esprit et les grâces peuvent ajouter à la tendresse, à la vertu, M. de Laclos les invitera à lire Ernestine, Fanny, Catesby, etc., etc., etc."(1)), was to compliment her on being in a position to refuse to believe in "l'existence des femmes méchantes et dépravées", but at the same time to assure her, "avec chagrin, mais avec sincérité, qu'il ne pourrait effacer aucun des traits qu'il a rassemblés dans la personne de Mme de M. sans mentir à sa conscience, sans taire au moins une partie de ce qu'il a vu."(2) He therefore considers it right, "d'avoir voulu, dans l'indignation de ces horreurs, les dévoiler, les combattre, et peut-être en prévenir de semblables."(3) As though to encourage his critic to have second thoughts, he enclosed a complimentary copy of Les Liaisons.(4)

Mme Riccoboni's reply to this was somewhat acid. She contented herself with pitying those who mixed with such people as Laclos's principal characters, if they existed, and tartly congratulated him upon at least succeeding in pleasing the public(5). This letter is written in such a tone as to indicate that Mme Riccoboni now considered the correspondence closed. Laclos, however, was not satisfied. He wrote to her again and protested that he had set out to "peindre les noirceurs que des femmes dépravées s'étaient permises, en couvrant leurs vices de l'hypocrisie des

1. O.C., 712.

2. "Observer, sentir et peindre," he was to write in his article on Fanny Burney's Cecilia, "sont les trois qualités nécessaires à tout Auteur de Romans." (O.C., 525; cf also epigraph to L.D.)

3. O.C., 711.

4. O.C., 712.

5. O.C., 713.

mœurs."(1) In stating this, he was merely reiterating what he had already said in his Préface du Rédacteur, where he had written that

"Les hommes et les femmes dépravés auront intérêt à décrier un Ouvrage qui peut leur nuire, et comme ils ne manquent pas d'adresse, peut-être auront-ils celle de mettre dans leur parti les Rigoristes, alarmés par le tableau des mauvaises mœurs qu'on n'a pas craint de présenter."(2)

To some extent Laclos's prognostication was borne out by the facts: Mmes de Genlis and de Coigny, whom we have seen at the head of the crusade against Les Liaisons and its author, were far from being paragons of virtue.

Mme Riccoboni replied that such hypocrites, like Tartuffe, eventually met their doom at the hands of the law(3). Laclos countered this argument by saying that "Tartuffe n'est point puni par les lois, mais par l'autorité", and added, "Je fais cette remarque parce qu'il me semble que le droit du moraliste, soit dramatique, soit romancier, ne commence qu'où les lois se taisent."(4) His parting shot in defence of his novel was that

"Le tableau en est attristant, je l'avoue; mais il est vrai; et le mérite que je reconnais à tracer des sentiments qu'on désire d'imiter, n'empêche pas, je crois, qu'il ne soit utile de peindre ceux dont on doit se défendre."(5)

Laclos never moved from this position that the novelist must set out to give moral instruction as well as to please his public, a position which was, */mr* as we have shown, anything but uncommon in eighteenth-century France, although there were still those who looked down on the novel as an inferior, trivial genre. In his article on Fanny Burney's novel Cecilia, which appeared in the

1. O.C., 715.
2. O.C., 33.
3. O.C., 716.
4. O.C., 720.
5. O.C., 721.

Mercure de France in 1784(1) and in which, apart from his letters to Mme Riccoboni, he gives the clearest indication of what he considered to be the nature of the novel, we read,

"Comment trouver inutiles des Ouvrages qui nous apprennent ce qu'il nous importe le plus de savoir? Tels sont pourtant les Romans.... Ne faut-il pas qu'un Roman, comme tout autre Ouvrage, amuse, instruisse, intéresse? Et de ce qu'aucune route n'est prescrite pour parvenir à ce but nécessaire, en conclura-t-on qu'il est plus facile de ne pas s'égarer? Nous serions tentés de croire cependant que peu d'ouvrages demandent une plus grande connaissance de l'esprit et du coeur de l'homme, et cette connaissance ne nous paraît pas si facile à acquérir(2). Elle seule sans doute, peut faire le mérite d'un Roman, mais quand elle s'y trouve, nous pensons que l'Ouvrage devient à la fois agréable et utile. Ce dernier mot ne passera pas sans réclamation; mais qu'on nous dise donc où l'on peut apprendre ailleurs à connaître les mœurs, les caractères, les sentiments et les passions de l'homme."(3)

He would be a brave man indeed, who refused to acknowledge in the author of Les Liaisons dangereuses a considerable knowledge "de l'esprit et du coeur de l'homme." The malaise common amongst readers of the novel is partly due to the fact that, as Laclos himself says, this kind of knowledge is hard to come by. As a result, the reader is led to wonder what kind of a man could paint such a picture. Hence the public reaction towards Laclos recorded in the Mémoires secrets of Bachaumont and his successors:

"Parce qu'il a peint des monstres on veut qu'il en soit un, foenum habet in cornu, longe fuge."(4)

Laclos nonetheless continues to appear embarrassingly unlikely to justify this reaction. One of the most interesting episodes in his life in this con-

1. In three parts, on the 17th and 24th April and the 15th May 1784; O.C., 523-545.

2. Laclos even went so far as to consider that women are more suited than men to be novelists (cf. O.C., 525).

3. O.C., 523-524.

4. Bachaumont, etc., Mém. secr., XX, 250, 14th May 1782. The Latin quotation is from Horace, Satires, Book I, IV, line 34.

nection in his meeting with the Bishop of Pavia(1) during his Italian campaign with the army of the Consulate. Laclos says that the Bishop, concerning whom we know little more than the name, was in the habit of telling all and sundry that Les Liaisons was "un ouvrage très moral et très bon à faire lire, particulièrement aux jeunes femmes." (2) This remark, which Marcel Ruff can accept at face value(3), ties up, of course, with Laclos's own preface. But we do not know enough about the Bishop of Pavia to decide to what extent he meant this remark seriously, or whether he had his tongue in his cheek at the time; nor do we really know how seriously Laclos took the "digne Evêque"'s summary of his work. It seems probably, however, that Laclos believed in the sincerity of the remark, unless we can detect a touch of ironical amusement in another comment made by Laclos about the same ecclesiastic just after they had met for the first time:

"J'étois logé chez l'Evêque qui s'est trouvé parler françois, qui a une assez bonne bibliothèque et avec lequel j'ai beaucoup causé, à tel point qu'il m'a donné une lettre de recommandation pour un savant d'icy, et que je lui ai promis de lui envoyer, (devine quoi), les Liaisons dangereuses qu'il désire tenir de l'auteur." (4)

Another Italian echo makes one think that Laclos may have been fascinated by, or had a complicity with, the wit and intelligence of Mme de Merteuil and Valmont.

In a letter to his wife he writes,

"Voltaire a dit de l'amour: 'Étoffe de la nature que l'imagination a brodée'; les Italiennes font un grand usage de l'étoffe, sans faire aucun cas de la broderie. On cite ce mot de je ne sais quelle princesse qui, lisant, dans un de nos romans de Chevalerie, une longue conversation entre le héros et sa maîtresse, s'écria: 'À quoi bon tous ces discours, puisqu'ils sont seuls?' Surement cette princesse était italienne." (5)

1. The Bishop of Pavia at this time was one Jos. Bertieri, who had been translated from Como to Pavia on the 26th March 1792 (cf. GAMS, Series Episcoporum Ecclesiae Catholicae, Ratisbonae, 1873, pp. 801 & 787).

2. L.I., 248.

3. M. A. Ruff, L'Esprit du Mal et l'Esthétique baudelairienne, Paris, 1955, p. 46.

4. L.I., 171.

5. L.I., 236.

This in no way alters the fact that the overall impression conveyed by Laclos's letters is of a man both sentimental and moral, and this outburst, if such it may be called, may well be nothing more than the result of a moment of pique at being separated from his wife and children in a country which he did not like. When we find him, shortly afterwards, saying that he has an idea for a novel of which the aim will be to "rendre populaire cette vérité qu'il n'existe de bonheur que dans la famille"(1), this is more consonant both with the general tone of Laclos's correspondence and what we know to be his professed ideas on the function of the novel.(2)

Mme Riccoboni, as we have seen, would not accept Laclos's arguments concerning the morality of his novel. Yet she was captivated by his talents as a writer and by his "style si aimable". The result was that she wrote to him in the following terms:

"Changez de système, Monsieur, ou vous vivrez chargé de la malédiction de la moitié du monde, excepté de la mienne, pourtant. Car je vous pardonne de tout mon coeur, et je vous excuserai même, autant que je le pourrai sans me faire arracher les yeux."(3)

This failure to be convinced by Laclos's argument that his intention was to produce a work of positive moral utility, and at the same time this desire to forgive the author of such an excellent book as Les Liaisons, expresses in a few words the malaise which the reader of Laclos's novel inevitably experiences. It may well be the finest conclusion at which to arrive, for, whatever Laclos's intentions, he succeeded in creating an outstanding work of art.

1. L.I., 238.

2. It may also be mentioned here that a review of the Maréchal de Richelieu's Mémoires appeared in the Journal des Amis de la Constitution (no. XI, 8 Feb. 1791, pp. 521-2) under Laclos's editorship, referring to this work as justification of the "fictions atroces ou scandaleuses, à l'aide desquelles les romanciers dévoilaient et combattaient les caractères infâmes qu'ils mettaient en scène". This may or may not be a reference to L.D., but the passage is more relevant to a subsequent chapter, vide infra Chapter 5 & ~~chapter 7~~.

3. O.C., 717.

The moral question will in all probability never be resolved. Mme Riccoboni's parting shot was to say to Laclos,

"Permettez-moi donc de terminer une dispute dont nos derniers neveux ne verraient pas la fin, si elle continuait."(1)

The dispute has continued over the years, and Mme Riccoboni has been proved quite right. All shades of opinion have been expressed. The Prince de Ligne wrote,

"Qu'on me pardonne de croire que les Liaisons Dangereuses sont moins dangereuses que la Nouvelle Héloïse et quantité de romans, Cécile apprend aux petites filles, et la présidente aux femmes de bien, les ruses dont elles doivent se garantir..."(2)

Rabbe's Biographie universelle et portative des contemporains(3) declared that there was in the novel "je ne sais quelle délectation d'immoralité dont il est impossible qu'il ne résulte pas un argument très fort contre les intentions de l'auteur."

More latterly, Servais Étienne has declared that

"L'oeuvre compte... par un fond moral auquel je crois, malgré les complaisances scabreuses, malgré les mots d'une rare perversité qu'il dicte à Cécile et qu'il mêle à dessein dans son babil de pensionnaire, malgré la situation dans laquelle il la place, savamment ménagée pour le plaisir des raffinés et pour sa propre délectation.

Le sujet du moins est moral, si le livre ne l'est pas. Non seulement par comparaison avec tant d'autres, mais parce que la séduction y est présentée comme un calcul de la méchanceté..."(4)

Havelock Ellis saw Laclos's novel, along with the works of Marivaux and Crébillon fils, as morality transformed into brilliant art(5), whilst Francis Carco differentiated between Laclos on the one hand and Crébillon fils and Andréa de Nerciat

1. O.C., 722.

2. Prince de Ligne, Oeuvres choisies, littéraires, historiques et militaires, Genève, 1809, 2 vols., II, 305.

3. Paris, 1834, t. III, p. 28, col. 1.

4. S. Étienne, Le Genre romanesque en France depuis l'apparition de la "Nouvelle Héloïse" jusqu'aux approches de la Rév., Bruxelles, 1922, p. 386.

5. Havelock Ellis, From Rousseau to Proust, London, 1936, pp. 189-90.

on the other, declaring that it is incorrect to see Les Liaisons as "un roman d'alcôve".

"En effet," he sais, "l'oeuvre est morale. Les âmes éprises d'absolu et qui se plaisent à séparer les actes individuels du tourbillon des forces sociales, ne peuvent que s'estimer satisfaites au dénouement. Le vice y recoit sa juste punition...."(1)

André Maurois, more definitely and with no such irony, takes a similar line:

"La coutume est de tenir Les Liaisons dangereuses pour un livre immoral. À la vérité, c'est un livre de moraliste. Or, un véritable moraliste peint toujours un monde immoral, parce qu'il nous met en garde contre le monde tel qu'il est. Si la nature était morale, la morale n'existerait pas, ni les moralistes.... Evoquez, à travers La Rochefoucauld, les romans qu'il aurait pu écrire. Vous trouverez cent Liaisons dangereuses."(2)

Louis Martin-Chauffier, in similar vein, wrote an interesting pastiche of a letter from Laclos to Mme Riccoboni, in which he makes Laclos defend the morality of his novel. Part of it reads as follows:

"À moins de me tromper moi-même sur mes intentions, ou bien de les avoir trahies en tentant de les réaliser, je ne crois pas avoir manqué à la dévotion que l'on doit à la morale; et si mon ouvrage n'aboutit pas à donner le dégoût de son pire ennemi, les hommes sont plus pervers que je n'osais l'imaginer. Pouvais-je supposer qu'à dévoiler le vice je le rendrais plaisant et qu'il présentât tant d'attraits que sa peinture, pour affreuse qu'elle fût, en rehaussât le goût?....
..... Mes héros, dit-on, sont affreux. Le vice qui les rend affreux doit donc paraître dégoûtant. Cependant on le tient pour dangereux...."(3)

This raises an interesting point. After all, Crébillon and Rétif de la Bretonne were accepted without the scandal which Laclos had caused by publishing Les Liaisons, and one wonders whether the protests of those who attacked the morality of the novel, from Mme de Genlis and company down to more recent times, are as moral as they claim to be, or whether they may not represent a tacit recognition that Laclos has hit home, and revealed something unpleasant and yet which is fundamental

1. F. Carco, Introd., L.D., Paris, Cité des Livres, 1931, 2 vols., I, ii-iii.
2. A. Maurois, Sept Visages de l'Amour, Paris, 1947, pp. 106-7.
3. L. Martin-Chauffier, Correspondances apocryphes, Paris, n.d. (1923), pp. 69-70; 72.

to human nature, something which we do not like to admit.

There have been several writers in modern times to take the opposite view from that of Carco, Maurois, Cazamian (who said that "the cynicism is shocking, but the moral aim is quite incontrovertible"(1)), and the others. Richard Aldington maintains that Laclos had his tongue firmly in his cheek when he wrote the end of the novel with its "divine vengeance". "The edifying end was tacked on to stop the quacking of censors and pious folk in general." (2) Some indication of the conflict of opinion within the various camps on the moral issue can be seen in the fact that Saintsbury who, as we have mentioned, unlike Aldington refused even any aesthetic value to Les Liaisons, retracted slightly on one point and declared, "I am unable to find any redeeming point in it, except that some ingenuity is shown in bringing about the dénouement by a rupture between the villain-hero and the villainess-heroine..." (3) This ingenuity in itself serves a moral purpose, but admittedly the moral is the trite one that thieves fall out, and if this is all the moral good done by the novel and it has no other merit, then Saintsbury is right in saying that "it is scarcely worth one's while to read six hundred pages of very small print in order to learn this." (4) The Catholic writer Bernard Guyon writes that

"Dès l'apparition des Liaisons dangereuses les théologiens ont, à juste titre, signalé comme fort dangereuse cette oeuvre qui, sous prétexte de nous mettre en garde contre 'le danger des liaisons' (5), nous décrit avec une complaisance inquiétante les victoires du vice sur la vertu et, après nous avoir montré le bonheur dans le crime, croit trop facilement se mettre en règle avec la morale par une série de dénouements aussi tragiques que peu vraisemblables." (6)

1. L. Cazamian, A History of French Literature, Oxford, 1955, p. 280.
2. R. Aldington, Introduction to Great French Romances..., London, 1946, p. x.
3. G. Saintsbury, op. cit., I, xiv.
4. ibid.
5. Cf. B.N. MS. fonds fr. 12845, fol. 35; this was Laclos's original choice of title. The Marquise de Saint-Aubin had already published Le Danger des Liaisons, ou Mémoires de la Baronne de Blénon (Geneve, 1763), which probably accounts for Laclos's change of mind.
6. B. Guyon, La Chute d'une honnête femme, in a special number of the periodical l'Année d'Or entitled De l'Enfance au Mariage, Paris mai-août 1948, p. 167.

Perhaps the most amusing of all the attacks on the morality of Laclos's novel, and one written from a very different angle from that of M. Guyon, is that contained in the Vrais Mémoires de Cécile de Volanges. Rectifications et Suite aux Liaisons dangereuses(1), an anonymously published modern skit on Laclos's work done by Lucas de Peslouan, into which Laclos himself is brought as an extremely unsavoury character in the rôle of Mme de Volanges's lover! In her own preface to this work, "Cécile", anxious to show that she is not so stupid as Laclos had painted her, says of Les Liaisons that

"Ajoutant l'hypocrisie à l'invention, l'auteur voulut donner à ce livre, tout rempli d'obscénités, un air de vertu."(2)

And so the argument goes on, sometimes seriously, sometimes less so. Several of the writers from whom we have so far quoted, notably Servais Étienne, express reservations before coming down on one side or the other concerning Laclos's novel's intention and worth. Carco, a great admirer of Baudelaire, could scarcely fail to regard the whole question with suspicion. This tendency towards a new, more non-committal point of view becomes apparent at the end of the nineteenth century. Paul Bourget, writing of Les Liaisons in his Sensations d'Italie(3), said,

"Si ce livre est périlleux comme tous ceux où les passions sont trop profondément étudiées, il n'est pas immoral, et il ne pouvait l'être. On est trop porté à confondre ces deux termes, et à croire que l'influence d'un ouvrage est uniquement dans cet ouvrage."

Another critic, writing at the end of the nineteenth century, André le Breton, urged,

"Ne soyons dupes ni de la préface ni du titre. La vérité est que Laclos ne s'inquiète ni de corriger ni de pervertir ses lecteurs; il fait minutieuse-

1. Written, in fact by Lucas de Peslouan, 2 vols., Paris 1927.
2. Vrais Mémoires..., I, 3.
3. P. Bourget, Sensations d'Italie, Paris, 1891, p. 295.

ment et froidement sa besogne d'analyste. Son but, à lui, est de faire oeuvre d'art."(1)

Henri de Régnier saw Les Liaisons as essentially a work of moralising intention, but confessed that "sa célébrité, il faut le dire, a je ne sais quoi de trouble et de suspect."(2) More recently, Jean-Jacques Salomon has written that "le lecteur d'aujourd'hui est aussi voyeur que celui de 1782, et l'immoralité la plus impardonnable d'est toujours d'être amoral."(3)

Now the finished novel, as it stands before us, may well be amoral, except for the trite moral of the awkward dénouement and one or two equally platitudinous and trivial "messages" in the text, to the effect that it is dangerous for a mother to entrust her daughter to someone else's care, and so on. The overall picture is not didactic in any obvious sense, but rather a view of life from which the author in the main, and setting aside the preface, seems remarkably absent. But to say that the finished novel has no real moralising effect throws no light upon the intentions of its author. Mme de Staël, in her Essai sur les fictions, declared that to depict vice is necessarily harmful(4). One may doubt the truth of this, for surely, to give only one side of life, to depict the world as pure sweetness and light, must in itself be quite as dangerous as the depiction of vice. One has more sympathy for Mme de Staël, however, when she goes on to say that

"La moralité des romans tient plus au développement des mouvemens intérieurs de l'âme, qu'aux événemens qu'on y raconte: ce n'est pas la circonstance arbitraire que l'auteur invente pour punir le crime, dont on peut tirer une utile leçon..."(5)

1. A. Le Breton, Le Roman, ^{français} au XVIII^e s., Paris, 1898, p. 332.
2. H. de Régnier, Portraits & Souvenirs, Paris, 1913, pp. 19 & 10.
3. J.-J. Salomon, Liberté et Libertinage. Les "L.D.", in Temps Modernes, July 1949 p. 58.
4. Mme de Staël, Oeuvres compl., Paris, 1820-2, II, 200.
5. *ibid.*, II, 204.

It may well be that we shall find that, in Les Liaisons dangereuses, Laclos gives a picture quite as one-sided as, although very different from, that advocated by Mme de Staël. However, it is equally possible that we shall find that the account he gives us of the "développement des mouvemens intérieurs de l'âme" makes us aware of a tendency latent in every human personality, and that thus, in a way far more profound and subtle than the mere illustration of elementary rules of conduct or the punishment of the villains by a deus ex machina, a phenomenon which occurs but rarely in real life, Les Liaisons does make us aware of the dangers within us and, in the end, serves a genuine moral purpose.

This also, however, refers only to the effect of the book and not to the aims of its author. We have shown that Laclos consistently defended the purity of his intentions, but unfortunately this evidence cannot be taken upon trust for, except for the preface (which itself may be nothing more than a matter of form, as were so many similar prefaces during the eighteenth century), it all comes after the publication of the novel, and after the scandal had burst over Laclos's head. The resounding effect of this scandal was, as we have seen, so great that it was useful to political pamphleteers who, seven or eight years later, sought to blacken the name of the Duc d'Orléans's secretary. Nothing could be more natural, after all, for Laclos to attempt to exculpate himself after the event.

Here we find ourselves face to face with the "Laclos enigma". All we know about Laclos's subsequent life, especially his private life, tends to support the view that he may well have had a sincere moral intention in writ-

ing his novel. Unfortunately, matters are not so easy as that. Pierre

Lievre said of Crébillon films that

"On se laisse facilement aller à l'idée qu'un écrivain qui a si finement peint l'amour, et l'amour inconstant, devrait avoir éprouvé par lui-même les complications de ce sentiment. C'est donc avec une sorte de désappointement que l'on ne réussait qu'à placer trois ou quatre femmes dans sa vie." (1)

Crébillon's marriage to an Englishwoman who was, although of illustrious descent, far from wealthy, a marriage which lasted ten years until his wife's death in 1756, does not fit in with the preconceived idea one tends to have of Crébillon, any more than Laclos's long and apparently blissful marriage fits in with the idea of him which one might set up as a result of reading only Les Liaisons.

Lievre continues,

"Mais c'est une faiblesse critique de vouloir toujours trouver un parallèle évident entre l'existence d'un écrivain et ses productions. On ne se peint pas toujours dans ses livres mais on y expose d'aventure la vie que l'on regrette de n'avoir pas menée." (2)

A similar phenomenon in reverse is the case of Nivelle de la Chaussée(3), who was a real "homme de la Régence" in his contes and in his private life, and who reserved all his sensibility for his plays(4). What Lièvre says about Crébillon applies to a considerable extent to Laclos, and perhaps, in the last resort, the Laclos enigma, this apparent dichotomy between the man and the novel, is of no real importance. After all, no one attributes to Shakespeare or to Racine the crimes which are committed in their plays.

Ultimately it is impossible to determine what went on inside Laclos's mind

1. P. Lievre, Préface to Crébillon's Égaréments, Paris, Divan, 1929, p. xv.
2. *ibid.*, p. xviii.
3. Nivelle de la Chaussée (1692-1754), the creator of the comédie larmoyante (La fausse antipathie, 1733; Le Préjugé à la mode, 1735; Paméla, 1743; l'Ecole des mères, 1744).
4. cf. André Bellesort, XVIII^e siècle et Romantisme, Paris, 1941, p. 66.

as he wrote his novel. René Lalou says of him, in his Défense de l'Homme,

"J'en viens presque à douter si, dans son impertinente préface, l'auteur se moque, ou si vraiment il ne s'imaginait pas 'rendre service aux moeurs, comme il dit.'"(1)

It is, of course, possible that not only did Laclos start out with a moralising intention, but also that he was naïve enough to believe that he had fully realised this ambition. And yet it is difficult to believe that a man who could write such a subtle analytical work as Les Liaisons could be as naïve as that. The fact remains that did we not possess Laclos's letters to his wife and family, all written some time after the publication of his novel, and which throw such a pleasantly sentimental light on his private life, we should doubtless accept his Préface and his Avertissement de l'Éditeur, with their touches of irony alongside their moral claims, as nothing more than further examples of a common eighteenth-century convention. The "editor" says that such persons as appear in this collection of letters, concerning which he has "de fortes raisons de penser que ce n'est qu'un Roman", could not possibly exist in "ce siècle de philosophie, où les lumières, répandues de toutes parts, ont rendu, comme chacun sait, tous les hommes si honnêtes et toutes les femmes si modestes et si réservées." Proof of this lies in the fact that "nous ne voyons point aujourd'hui de Demoiselle, avec soixante mille livres de rente, se faire Religieuse, ni de Présidente, jeune et jolie, mourir de chagrin."(2) If, as seems possible, this Avertissement, together with the admission in the Préface du Rédacteur that for safety's sake young people, with the exception of young girls on their wedding day, should be kept away from Les Liaisons, was intended chiefly as an eye-catching sales point, then it succeeded. The book sold like hot cakes. It may perhaps be added, as a conclusion to this discussion of Laclos's professed moral

1. R. Lalou, Défense de l'Homme (Intelligence et Sensualité), Paris, 1926, p.163.
2. O.C., 29.

aims, that to give such a book as Les Liaisons dangereuses to a Cécile on her wedding day would^{do} neither harm nor good. By that time it would be too late. This brings us back to the contention that the corrupting influence of works of art should not be exaggerated. They appeal to something already existing in the individual mind, and may just as well do good by acting as a safety-release.(1)

If Laclos had a serious moral intention when he set out to write this book, then he somehow lost it on the way, for it is by no means the pre-dominant feature of the completed work. The fact that we decide that any moral aim that there may have been is not fully realised does not, however, make Les Liaisons into a manual of corruption. The chief impression left by it is of profound and subtle analysis, and this is where its amorality lies. But from this analysis we get a picture of human nature which, as we shall see in the next chapter, is far from pleasant. In this sense, Robert Kemp was not very wide of the mark when he wrote:

"Moralisant, ce merveilleux livre ne l'est pas. Moral, tout au fond? Oui, il dégoûte des perfides. Il enferme le plus infernal, le plus terrifiant portrait de méchante qui existe. À qui comparer Merteuil. À Richard III?"(2)

1. There was, some years ago, a trial in Blois in which a girl and her lover were accused of infanticide. The case caused a considerable stir in France at the time, as the defence pleaded that the accused couple had been motivated by the ideas expressed in the writings of André Gide. The murder, it was argued, was in fact an acte gratuit. This amounted to a suggestion that the real murderer was Gide. The girl and her lover were, however, found responsible for their action, and convicted.

2. R. Kemp, La Vie des Livres, Paris, 1955, p. 35.

4. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF "LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES"

We have said that if there was any profound moral intention in Laclos's mind when he set about composing Les Liaisons, it failed to find adequate expression in the completed novel, and that the chief impression left by the work is one of subtle and quite profound psychological analysis, implying a particular view of human nature. This view is far from being indulgent or optimistic. We shall therefore now cast aside the moral issue and, basing our inquiry on the text of the novel itself, examine the psychology of Laclos's characters.

Baudelaire saw in Les Liaisons "beaucoup de sensualité", and "très peu d'amour excepté chez Mme de Tourvel"(1). Although in a sense this is true, it is perhaps not altogether true in the way Baudelaire means. We have already said enough on this subject to indicate that, except in the case of Cécile de Volanges, this sensuality is far from obvious and, in Valmont, Mme de Merteuil and the Présidente de Tourvel, is disguised to such an extent as almost to lose its character. Basically, it is not the physical delights of sex in which the Vicomte and the Marquise are interested. As for the absence of love except in Mme de Tourvel, we shall have more to say about this shortly. In other words, Baudelaire's emphasis is not altogether accurate. His cryptic notes on Laclos's novel come nearer to the point when he writes,

"L'amour de la guerre et la guerre de l'amour. La gloire. L'amour de la gloire....

L'amour du combat. La tactique, les règles, les méthodes. La gloire de la victoire.

La stratégie pour gagner un prix très frivole."(2)

1. O.C., 740.

2. O.C., 739.

The prize won by these exponents of the strategy of seduction is indeed far more frivolous than they realise, as we shall see when we come to study the basic falsity of the portrayal of Mme de Tourvel.

A better description of the essence of Les Liaisons would be "beaucoup de vanité." The fact that this vanity finds its expression through sex is largely a historical accident. Allied with the theme of vanity is that of boredom, of the intellect with nothing to do. This once again raises historical questions, and we shall have more to say on both these points when we come to consider the value of Laclos's novel as an objective reflection of the manners of eighteenth-century Parisian society.

The main plot, as we have said, is neither the seduction of Mme de Tourvel nor that of Cécile de Volanges, but the conflict between Valmont and Mme de Merteuil. Vanity is the basis of this relationship and the cause of the final crisis. If we examine these two characters in this light we shall see that vanity is the whole meaning of their lives and the reason for the inevitability of their final conflict.

Very early on in the novel, Valmont himself demonstrates the primacy of vanity in his and Mme de Merteuil's characters and half-unconsciously gives a hint of the forthcoming clash between them when he writes to the Marquise,

"... conquérir est notre destin; il faut le suivre; peut-être au bout de la carrière nous rencontrerons-nous encore."

In the same breath his vanity makes him go on to attempt to establish his superiority over his accomplice:

"... car, soit dit sans vous fâcher, ma très belle Marquise, vous me suivez au moins d'un pas égal."

The verb suivre is significant here. His statement that if the god of love were to judge them by their works the Marquise would become "la Patronne de quelque grande ville", whereas he himself would be "au plus un Saint de village"(1), apart from being an ironical reference to the religious jargon he hears in the society of the Présidente, is also, paradoxically, not a recognition of Mme de Merteuil's superiority over him but an attempt to win her back for himself and thus prove his superiority over her by appealing to her own vanity.

We have already shown how his choice of Mme de Tourvel rather than the easy Cécile as a worthy adversary is arrived at, and it is of course the greater difficulties which he expects to come across in this conquest which appeal to Valmont's vanity. This is emphasised by his attempts to impress Mme de Merteuil over this matter:

"Vous-même, ma belle amie," he tells her, "vous serez saisie d'un saint respect, et vous direz avec enthousiasme: 'Voilà l'homme selon mon coeur.'"(2)

This determination to inspire a "saint respect" in others, this desire for domination, is a constant theme throughout the novel, and not only in the characters of Valmont and Mme de Merteuil.

It is one of the subtleties of the epistolary technique as it is used in Les Liaisons dangereuses that Valmont frequently is enabled in his hypocritical letters to Mme de Tourvel to describe his own kind whilst at the same time denying that he is one of them. Thus we find him on one occasion protesting that all he has ever been guilty of is weakness of character:

1. IV, 40.
2. IV, 41.

"Qu'ai-je fait, après tout, que ne pas résister au tourbillon dans lequel j'avais été jeté? Entré dans le monde, jeune et sans expérience; passé, pour ainsi dire, de mains en mains, par une foule de femmes, qui toutes se hâtent de prévenir par leur facilité une réflexion qu'elles sentent devoir leur être défavorable; était-ce donc à moi de donner l'exemple d'une résistance qu'on ne m'opposait point? ou devais-je me punir d'un moment d'erreur, et que souvent on avait provoqué, par une constance à coup sûr inutile, et dans laquelle on n'aurait vu qu'un ridicule?..."

The reader, of course, is well aware that Valmont is no mere victim of a corrupt society into which he has been thrown by the force of circumstances, and that his attitude and "principes" are far more positive than those of one who has done no more than give way to the temptations which are the accepted thing in that society; but such is the consummate art of Laclos that, in this collection of letters in which scarcely a word written by any of the characters can safely be accepted at its face value, Valmont is able in negative terms to describe the essential vanity of his own character to the very woman whom he is trying to seduce by convincing her of his frankness:

"Mais, je puis le dire, cette ivresse des sens, peut-être même ce délire de la vanité, n'a point passé jusqu'à mon coeur..."(1)

What Valmont is in fact doing here is to appeal to Mme de Tourvel's own vanity. But more of that later.

Valmont shows all the traditional concern of the rake to secure publicity for his successes and the concomitant social celebrity.

"Soyez tranquille," he tells the Marquise, "je ne reparaitrai dans le monde que plus célèbre que jamais..."

Here we find him living his triumphant return to Paris, and his vanity projects dreams of apotheosis:

"Une fois parvenu à ce triomphe, je dirai à mes rivaux: 'Voyez mon ouvrage, et cherchez-en dans le siècle un second exemple!'"

"Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!" The Vicomte is here speaking of his intended seduction of Mme de Tourvel, but his vanity and his desire for celebrity cause him to object to Mme de Merteuil's attempts to belittle his achievements with Cécile,

"comme si ce n'était rien, que d'enlever en une soirée, une jeune fille à son Amant aimé, d'en user ensuite tant qu'on le veut et absolument comme de son bien, et sans plus d'embarras d'en obtenir ce qu'on n'ose pas même exiger de toutes les filles dont c'est le métier; et cela, sans la déranger en rien de son tendre amour; sans la rendre inconstante, pas même infidèle...."(1)

To punish the Marquise for thus decrying his inventiveness, Valmont refuses to tell her of his plans for the future. He treats her as his inferior, and deigns to turn from his "grands projets" to discuss her lesser ones, pouring scorn on her decision to take up Danceny and, as the reader has by this time come to anticipate, appealing to her vanity:

"Eh! ma chère amie, laissez-le adorer sa vertueuse Cécile, et ne vous compromettez pas dans ces jeux d'enfants.... Je vous le dis sérieusement, je désapprouve ce choix, et quelque secret qu'il restât, il vous humilierait au moins à mes yeux et dans votre conscience."(2)

In so doing, however, Valmont shows his real motives. He is jealous, and his vanity is aroused - already, after being told of Mme de Merteuil's night in her petite maison with Beller Roche, he has reacted in a similar way, declaring,

"Tenez, ma belle amie, tant que vous vous partagez entre plusieurs, je n'ai pas la moindre jalousie: je ne vois alors dans vos amants que les successeurs d'Alexandre(3), incapables de conserver entre eux tous, cet empire où je régnais seul. Mais que vous vous donniez entièrement à un d'eux! qu'il existe un autre homme aussi heureux que moi! je ne le souffrirai pas; n'espérez pas que je le souffre...."(4)

This imperious tone again underlines the inevitability of the catastrophe.

1. CXV, 299.
2. CXV, 300. Italics in the text.
3. This habit of likening himself to military heroes is one of the clearest expressions of Valmont's vanity.
4. XV, 61.

Valmont's determination to subjugate Mme de Merteuil is further illustrated by the coldness of the way in which he congratulates her on her triumph over Prévan(1). His vanity in this instance is wounded by the contemplation of the Marquise's purity of method in this enterprise, which is proof of what he is continually half-admitting to himself, her superiority over him. To reverse matters he has to give an even greater example of tactical excellence and this, of course, is what he aims to do in seducing the Présidente. This desire to perform the supreme masterpiece of seduction accounts for his refusal to copy the methods of another. It would be easy, he says, to get into Mme de Tourvel's room at night, and even to copy Lovelace's technique and drug her, thus making her "une nouvelle Clarisse." But, he exclaims,

"... après plus de deux mois de soins et de peines, recourir à des moyens qui me soient étrangers! me traîner servilement sur la trace des autres, et triompher sans gloire!..."(2)

And so he rejects the idea. Vanity also accounts for the tone in which he chides Mme de Merteuil for lecturing him on the inadvisability of writing to the intended victim when it is possible to speak to her. He informs her that he is perfectly well aware of this: "ce sont les plus simples éléments de l'art de séduire."(3)

The seduction of Mme de Tourvel, then, is intended to be Valmont's own personal masterpiece, something which only he could achieve, and only in his own way. It is to be the greatest triumph of his career. And yet despite his deeply-entrenched vanity, when the Présidente resorts to fleeing from Mme de Rosemonde's château at the very moment when Valmont thought he had her

1. XCVI, 239.
2. CX, 286.
3. XXXIV, 95.

within his grasp, the Vicomte is reduced to acknowledging his inferiority to Mme de Merteuil and his dependence on her.

"Adieu ma belle amie," he writes to her; "s'il vous vient quelque idée heureuse, quelque moyen de hâter ma marche, faites-m'en part. J'ai éprouvé plus d'une fois combien votre amitié pouvait être utile; je l'éprouve encore en ce moment; car je me sens plus calme depuis que je vous écris; au moins, je parle à quelqu'un qui m'entend, et non aux automates près de qui je végète depuis ce matin..."(1)

Although the Vicomte slips this in with a casual air at the end of his letter, almost as an afterthought, the admission is none the less complete, and Mme de Merteuil does not lose the opportunity of humiliating him in her reply:

"C'est que réellement vous n'avez pas le génie de votre état; vous n'en savez que ce que vous en avez appris, et vous n'inventez rien. Aussi, dès que les circonstances ne se prêtent à vos formules d'usage, vous restez court comme un Écolier..... Et quand vous avez fait sottises sur sottises, vous recourez à moi! Il semble que je n'aie rien autre chose à faire que de les réparer. Il est vrai que ce serait bien assez d'ouvrage."(2)

Mme de Merteuil's superiority is heavily underscored by the way in which she controls the outcome of Valmont's affair with Mme de Tourvel, to deprive him of his masterpiece.

There is a hint of genuine feeling in Valmont for Mme de Tourvel. This militates against his showing that purity of method which is his aim, for it means that he is not altogether the master of the situation. We see this touch of what, for want of a better term, we shall for the time being call love, in conflict with Valmont's vanity in his announcement of his triumph over the Présidente(3). However, vanity predominates, and on the strength of this victory Valmont goes on to treat Mme de Merteuil with scant respect. He says that he is now in a position to devote a portion of his time to her, and urges her,

1. C, 259.
2. CVI, 274-5.
3. CXXV, 320-1.

"Dépêchez-vous donc de renvoyer votre pesant Belleruche, et laissez là le doux Danceny pour ne vous occuper que de moi."(1)

This tone is not calculated to please the Marquise, and she tartly puts him in his place in terms which are remarkably similar to those used by Valmont himself on an earlier occasion:

"J'ai pu avoir quelquefois la prétention de remplacer à moi seule tout un sérail; mais il ne m'a jamais convenu d'en faire partie.... Qui, moi! je sacrifierais un goût, et encore un goût nouveau, pour m'occuper de vous? Et pour m'en occuper comment? en attendant à mon tour, et en esclaves soumises, les sublimes faveurs de votre Hautesse..."(2)

Valmont hastily tries to back-pedal, and desperately attempts to defend himself against Mme de Merteuil's insinuations that he is in love with the Présidente(3).

In his next letter, we see even more clearly to what extent his vanity has been wounded by Mme de Merteuil:

"Ainsi, vous me croyez amoureux, subjugué?..."(4)

He offers to prove to the Marquise that he is not in love with the Présidente. He mentions that he has not been neglecting Cécile, and then goes on to speak of a night spent with the prostitute Emilie. He constantly reiterates that he is not in love with Mme de Tourvel and, referring to the Emilie incident, points out that his affair with the Présidente might well be over by now, but that he has started it up again. Vanity is once again behind the reason he puts forward here:

"C'est que, d'une part, je n'ai pas trouvé décent de me laisser quitter; et, de l'autre, que j'ai voulu vous réserver l'honneur de ce sacrifice."(5)

Thus we see that his final breach with Mme de Tourvel is the result of his vanity exacerbated by Mme de Merteuil's taunts. He sends the "ce n'est pas ma

1. CXXV, 328.
2. CXXVII, 331.
3. CXXIX, 334-5.
4. CXXXIII, 342.
5. CXXXVIII, 356.

faute" letter(1). It should be noted that Mme de Merteuil does not ask him to send it. It is simply the last stage of her war on his vanity, and Valmont walks blindly into her trap, proving her superiority by allowing himself to become a tool in her hands.

We have, however, by no means seen the last of Valmont's vanity. Its next manifestation is in the form of a desire to reconquer Mme de Tourvel:

".... Quoi! si je voulais me rapprocher d'elle, elle pourrait ne le plus vouloir....? et croyez-vous, ma belle amie, que je doive le souffrir? Ne pourrais-je pas par exemple, et ne vaudrait-il pas mieux tenter de ramener cette femme au point de prévoir la possibilité d'un raccommodement, qu'on désire toujours tant qu'on l'espère? je pourrais essayer cette démarche sans y mettre d'importance, et par conséquent, sans qu'elle vous donnât d'ombrage. Au contraire! ce serait un simple essai que nous ferions de concert; et quand-même je réussirais, ce ne serait qu'un moyen de plus de renouveler, à votre volonté, un sacrifice qui a paru vous être agréable." (2)

This is one of the clearest examples of Valmont's tacit recognition of Mme de Merteuil's superiority over him. Just as when the Présidente had fled from Mme de Rosemonde's country house, we find the Vicomte once again turning to Mme de Merteuil for assistance. But this is not the real point of the passage. Here again, we suspect that purity of method is not Valmont's only concern. There is once again a hint of genuine feeling, and the Vicomte, ingenuously trying to convince Mme de Merteuil that his sole interest is in following their avowed principles, in fact is offering her proof that *gh* places *∫* a lower value on her than he does on the Présidente. His phrase, "... et quand-même je réussirais", is sufficient indication, despite his highly suspect offer to sacrifice Mme de Tourvel once again, that he considers that even if he can enlist the Marquise's vast array of talents on his side it is unlikely that he will be able to win back the Présidente. To twist a well-worn cliché, he is

1. CXLII, 363.
2. CXLIV, 366.

telling Mme de Merteuil that "this thing is bigger than both of us", and such a suggestion would not be likely to appeal to the Marquise, even if she had the slightest intention of helping him. To cap it all Valmont, already thinking of trying to win Mme de Tourvel back, clumsily follows this up by asking Mme de Merteuil for his reward for abandoning the Présidente. Here we see him like a dog begging for a biscuit after having been put through its tricks.

Mme de Merteuil loses no time in completing his humiliation:

"Sérieusement, Vicomte, vous avez quitté la Présidente? vous lui avez envoyé la Lettre que je vous avais faite pour elle. En vérité, vous êtes charmant; et vous avez surpassé mon attente! J'avoue de bonne foi que ce triomphe me flatte plus que tous ceux que j'ai pu obtenir jusqu'à présent. Vous allez trouver peut-être que j'évalue bien haut cette femme, que naguère j'appréciais si peu; point du tout: mais c'est que ce n'est pas sur elle que j'ai remporté cet avantage; c'est sur vous: voilà le plaisant et ce qui est vraiment délicieux."(1)

As for his plan to renew his liaison with Mme de Tourvel, she is at a loss to understand his stupidity. She points out that while she was inciting him to destroy the Présidente, she never forgot that he had for a while had the audacity to place Mme de Tourvel on a higher plane than her, and adds that once he was foolish enough to send the letter, it was all over:

"Ah! croyez-moi, Vicomte, quand une femme frappe dans le coeur d'une autre, elle manque rarement de trouver l'endroit sensible, et la blessure est incurable."(2)

Valmont's reaction to this final onslaught on his vanity is to threaten Mme de Merteuil with open war, but once again he shows his sense of his own inferiority by still trying to avoid this:

"... je m'étonne, je l'avoue, que ce soit moi que vous ayez entrepris de

1. CXLV, 367.
2. CXLV, 368.

traiter comme un écolier. Oh! qu'avec toute autre femme, je serais bientôt vengé! que je m'en ferais de plaisir! et qu'il surpasserait aisément celui qu'elle aurait cru me faire perdre! Oui, c'est bien pour vous seule que je peux préférer la réparation à la vengeance..."(1) a/

If Valmont is graciously prepared to forego this sadistic pleasure in the case of Mme de Merteuil, it is largely because he entertains grave doubts as to his capacity to carry it out. Nevertheless, the wound in his vanity is deep, and he therefore is prepared to resort to menaces. As for Danceny, he says,

"Je ne me crois pas fait pour cette humiliation, et je ne m'attends pas à la recevoir de vous."(2)

Valmont should have realised that any reunion between himself and Mme de Merteuil was out of the question, simply on account of their vanity. Any such arrangement would mean that one or other must play a subordinate rôle, and this idea is intolerable to them both. This is made clear by the Marquise when she writes to Valmont,

"Savez-vous, Vicomte, pourquoi je ne me suis jamais remariée?... c'est uniquement pour que personne n'ait le droit de trouver à redire à mes actions... Et voilà que vous m'écrivez la Lettre la plus maritale qu'il soit possible de voir!"(3)

Valmont's attempts to dominate Mme de Merteuil are still more bitter and threatening in tone in his next letter(4), and this contrasts admirably with her curt and yet laconic reply written on his letter, "Hé bien! la guerre," to show her selfconfident sense of superiority.

Thus the inevitable open war is declared. Vanity continues to dictate Valmont's tactics, and having failed to intimidate the Marquise, he seeks to humiliate her through Danceny. He tells the Chevalier that, so far as his hopes of marriage with Cécile are concerned, all obstacles have now been re-

1. CLI, 381.

2. CLI, 382.

3. CLII, 383.

4. CLIII, 385-6.

moved, and points out that Mme de Volanges is not at home (she is in the convent looking after Mme de Tourvel). He adds that even according to Danceny's "nouveaux principes" a night with Cécile is too good to be missed. The most he risks by breaking his appointment with Mme de Merteuil is a minor row, certainly not a breach(1). Danceny is convinced, and goes to see Cécile.

The next day Mme de Merteuil receives an ironical letter from Valmont, enquiring as to whether she enjoyed her night with Danceny, and goading her vanity with the thought that Danceny prefers the young Cécile to her. "What," Valmont asks, "did it cost me to humiliate you like this?":

"... un léger sacrifice, et quelque peu d'adresse. J'ai consenti à partager avec le jeune homme les faveurs de sa Maîtresse."

His vanity prompts him to express the hope that she has learned that "il vaut mieux m'avoir pour ami que pour ennemi." (2)

Mme de Merteuil's reaction to this is a brief note hissing with venom(3). The way is now clear for the final act in this conflict of vanities, the catastrophe which, however clumsy Laclos's choice of the concrete form which it takes, is an aesthetic necessity. "Conquérir est notre destin; il faut le suivre," Valmont has said earlier. Their destiny is now played out, and that are no longer in command of the situation. Symbolic of this is the fact that Valmont's mocking letter and the Marquise's venomous reply to which we have just referred are the last we hear from them directly. They write none of the last sixteen letters of the novel. This emphasises that the real climax is the open conflict between them. The clumsy use of duel and disease is merely "business".

1. CLV, 388-9.
2. CLVIII, 393-4.
3. CLXIX, 395.

In what has gone before, we have inevitably touched upon the manifestation of vanity in Mme de Merteuil, as well as examined that passion in Valmont. More must, however, be said concerning the Marquise if we are adequately to show to what extent she is ruled by vanity. It has already been said that she is superior to Valmont in the manipulation of people. It should further be made clear that both she and the Vicomte are, in their different ways, fully aware of this superiority, however unwilling Valmont may be to admit the fact.

Mme de Merteuil's mocking, commanding tone is established from the very outset:

"Partez sur-le-champ," she orders Valmont, "j'ai besoin de vous. Il m'est venue une excellente idée, et je veux bien vous en confier l'exécution. Ce peu de mots devrait suffire; et, trop honoré de mon choix, vous devriez venir, avec empressement, prendre mes ordres à genoux..."(1)

Beneath the light cajolery of this letter there is a basic seriousness, and the fact that Mme de Merteuil should dare to speak to Valmont in this tone at a time when he is planning the greatest triumph of his career is sufficient proof of her self-assurance, and an adequate indication of the shape of things to come. The fact that she meets with resistance from the Vicomte only strengthens her determination to dominate him. As it is, she continues in the same forthright manner throughout this letter, which is liberally dotted with terms such as "je veux donc bien vous instruire de mes projets," and "J'exige que demain à sept heures du soir, vous soyez chez moi."(2) Valmont's reply sheds still more light on the Marquise's superiority. "Ne vous fâchez pas et écoutez-moi"(3), he writes - his use of the negative indic-

1. II, 37.

2. II, 37-8.

3. IV, 41.

ates a certain degree of insecurity, and thus his imperatives are less powerful and effective than those of Mme de Merteuil. This contrast between the basically positive character of the Marquise and the basically negative character of Valmont is sustained throughout most of the book and is particularly apparent in the account of the Prévan affair. The Vicomte is rarely positive en connaissance de cause; the Marquise always is.

To counter Valmont's refusal to be her agent in the service of "l'amour et la vengeance"(1) by ruining Cécile, Mme de Merteuil immediately appeals to his vanity, for she knows that this is his weak spot:

"Amie généreuse et sensible, j'oublie mon injure pour ne m'occuper que de votre danger; et quelque ennuyeux qu'il soit de raisonner, je cède au besoin que vous en avez dans ce moment.

Vous, avoir la Présidente de Tourvel! mais quel ridicule caprice!... Je vous le dis en amie, il ne vous faudrait pas deux femmes comme celle-là, pour vous faire perdre toute votre considération.... Allons, Vicomte, rougissez vous-même, et revenez à vous. Je vous promets le secret.

..... quel rival avez-vous à combattre? un mari! Ne vous sentez-vous pas humilié à ce seul mot?"(2)

This is her reaction to his confession that

"J'ai bien besoin d'avoir cette femme, pour me sauver du ridicule d'en être amoureux: car où ne même pas un désir contrarié?"(3)

This confession, in itself a manifestation of Valmont's vanity, is at the same time a sign of a weakness in his "principles", for no true roué would admit even to himself, never mind in a letter to an accomplice - that he was in any danger of falling love with his intended victim. This weakness is exploited by the Marquise, who throughout the novel seeks to wound Valmont's vanity by insinuating that he is in fact in love with Mme de Tourvel, backing up this line of argument with yet further appeals to his vanity by repeating her warn-

1. II, 37.
2. V, 42-3.
3. IV, 42.

ing that his reputation is in danger.(1)

There is always more than one facet to anything said by Laclos's characters, and this is clearly illustrated in Letter X, in which Mme de Merteuil once more attacks Valmont's vanity, and simultaneously shows that vanity is the mainspring of her own character.

"Déjà vous voilà timide et esclave," she tells him; "autant vaudrait être amoureux. Vous renoncez à vos heureuses témérités. Vous voilà donc vous conduisant sans principes, et donnant tout au hasard, ou plutôt au caprice."(2)

She says that if he absolutely must have Mme de Tourvel, there is only one way to go about it. In Mme de Merteuil's view the Présidente, like all women, seeks at the same time "la gloire de la défense et le plaisir de la défaite," and so, immediately after taunting Valmont for acting without principles, she goes on to advise him to forget these principles, counselling something very much like rape:

"Eh! depuis quand voyagez-vous à petites journées et par des chemins de traverse? Mon ami, quand on veut arriver, des chevaux de poste et la grande route!"(3)

The truth of the matter is that Mme de Merteuil is already jealous of Mme de Tourvel's hold over Valmont. Hence her endeavour to get the Vicomte to abandon the rules of the chase. It offends her vanity to think that someone should replace her even in the slightest degree as the controller of human destinies. She is quite justified, according to the principles of rouerie, in warning Valmont of the dangers of allowing himself to be seduced by the Présidente's charms, but she offends against these same principles in advising Valmont to descend to straightforward rape, which would mean that Mme de Tour-

1. cf. CXIII, 291, where she warns Valmont that his long absence from Paris has been noticed and occasioned rumours that he is detained in the country by "un amour romanesque et malheureux": "Revenez donc Vicomte, et ne sacrifiez pas votre réputation à un caprice puéril."

2. X, 52. Laclos's italics.

3. X, 52-3.

val would become the very opposite of a worthy opponent, and would completely nullify Valmont's "victory". It is again Mme de Merteuil's vanity which lies behind her decision, once she has realised that Valmont will not be dissuaded from having the Présidente, not to sleep with him herself until he has succeeded in his enterprise:

"Par cet arrangement... je deviendrai une récompense au lieu d'être une consolation; et cette idée me plaît davantage..."(1)

Whether she ever intended to sleep with Valmont again is open to conjecture. What is certain, however, is that she has now decided to exploit the Vicomte's fixation in order to demonstrate that she is superior both to Valmont himself and to Mme de Tourvel. She seeks to transform what Valmont intends as his masterpiece, the seduction of the Présidente, into a mere exercise to please her, by forcing the Vicomte to place a higher value on her than on Mme de Tourvel. The way in which she ultimately demonstrates her superiority over Mme de Tourvel and Valmont is, however, far more drastic than this. She makes Valmont, as we have already indicated, sacrifice in a very real sense the Présidente on her altar.

It should be emphasised that this metaphorical expression is not gratuitous. Mme de Merteuil herself says, although admittedly about the way she controls Mme de Volanges and Cécile,

"Me voilà comme la Divinité; recevant les vœux opposés des aveugles mortels, et ne changeant rien à mes décrets immuables."

After all, she says, in the words of Gresset's comedy, Le Méchant,

"Les sots sont ici-bas pour nos menus plaisirs."(2)

It is this desire to be God, to pull all the strings in the marionette show, which is Mme de Merteuil's strongest characteristic. This is how she is dif-

ferentiated from Valmont who, despite all his boasting, remains on a far more trivial plane. Such is the startling power with which Mme de Merteuil is portrayed, that the reader begins to feel that she cannot fail, and it is this, allied with a certain unwilling complicity, an active, positive desire that she shall not fail, which accounts in large measure for the reader's dissatisfaction with the moral dénouement. The Marquise is a hypnotic character. Morally, the reader may know that she is wrong, but intellectually he is with her almost all the way.

Whatever, then, may have been her original intentions with regard to renewing a liaison with Valmont, Mme de Merteuil ultimately comes not only to see that this is impossible, but also to tell Valmont so. She foresees the inevitable conflict(1), and recognises the impossibility of recapturing the past. She seems prepared to admit that this last, if possible, would be desirable, for she says of her earlier relationship with Valmont that "c'est le seul de mes goûts qui ait jamais pris un moment d'empire sur moi." Beneath the language of sensual pleasure there seems for one fleeting moment to be a hint of something more profound and more sincere. And yet one comes to doubt the sincerity of every word uttered by the Marquise, and therefore one feels obliged to question the sincerity of this profession. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that this remark occurs in the bibliographical Letter LXXXI, where we find Mme de Merteuil at her most honest(2). However, despite her past feelings, says the Marquise, the present is very different. Any attempt to resurrect the relationship would be "une véritable folie".

1. As V. appears unconsciously to have done earlier: cf. his "Conquérir est notre destin... peut-être au bout de la carrière nous rencontrerons-nous encore" (IV, 40).

2. LXXXI, 205.

Beneath her irony it is not impossible to detect a little sadness when she writes,

"N'avez-vous pas encore remarqué que le plaisir, qui est bien en effet l'unique mobile de la réunion des deux sexes, ne suffit pourtant pas pour former une liaison entre eux? et que, s'il est précédé du désir qui rapproche, il n'est pas moins suivi du dégoût qui repousse? c'est une loi de la nature, que l'amour seul peut changer; et de l'amour, en a-t-en quand on veut?"

This is the very voice of disenchantment and boredom.

"Mais dites-moi, Vicomte," she continues, "qui de nous deux se chargera de tromper l'autre? Vous savez l'histoire de ces deux fripons qui se recommurent en jouant: Nous ne nous ferons rien, se dirent-ils, payons les cartes par moitié; et ils quitterent la partie. Suivons, croyez-moi, ce prudent exemple, et ne perdons pas ensemble un temps que nous pouvons si bien employer ailleurs."(1)

The unfortunate fact is, of course, that when one cheat considers himself more skilled than the other, he will set out to prove it. Mme de Merteuil renews her offer to grant Valmont one more night, but such is the caution inspired by her habitual duplicity, that one is uncertain whether or not to attribute this to a concession to nostalgia for time past, a hint of "true love" for Valmont, especially as she promptly goes on to ask him to postpone their night together.

She returns to hinting at love -

"Savez-vous que je regrette quelquefois que nous en soyons réduits à ces ressources! Dans le temps où nous nous aimions car je crois que c'était de l'amour, j'étais heureuse; et vois, Vicomte!... Mais pourquoi s'occuper encore d'un bonheur qui ne peut revenir? Non, quoi que vous en disiez, c'est un retour impossible. D'abord, j'exigerais des sacrifices que sûrement vous ne pourriez ou ne voudriez pas me faire, et qu'il se peut bien que je ne mérite pas; et puis, comment vous fixer? Oh! non, non, je ne veux seulement pas m'occuper de cette idée; et malgré le plaisir que je trouve en ce moment à vous écrire, j'aime mieux vous quitter brusquement. Adieu, Vicomte."(2)

But this is no more than a Machiavellian move to persuade Valmont to walk into her trap. Although we need not perhaps totally exclude all possibility of

1. CXXXI, 339.
2. CXXXI, 340.

some almost completely hidden element of genuine feeling for Valmont in the Marquise, she is far too caught-up in her intellectual game of domination for this to have any real effect on her conduct, and the only feeling she now has for him is that of the hunter for his prey. The sacrifice she mentions will soon be shown to be the cruel abandonment of the Présidente and the consequent enthronement of Mme de Merteuil as Valmont's superior. This is a superb pièce of acting designed to make Valmont sacrifice Mme de Tourvel to her, and is in perfect accord with her principles. The climax is reached when, reiterating her charge that Valmont is in love with the Présidente, and insinuating that he must have humiliated himself considerably to win back Mme de Tourvel's favour after the *Émilie* episode, Mme de Merteuil goes on to tell him the story of the "Ce n'est pas ma faute" letter(1).

Once he has copied out this letter and sent it to the Présidente, the Marquise seizes the opportunity of telling him of the pleasure she derives from the fact that "ce n'est pas sur elle que j'ai remporté cet avantage", and of underlining the fact that it is by appealing to his vanity that she has defeated him:

"Oui, Vicomte, vous aimiez beaucoup Madame de Tourvel, et même vous l'aimez encore; vous l'aimez comme un fou: mais parce que je m'amisais à vous en faire honte, vous l'avez bravement sacrifiée. Vous en auriez sacrifié mille, plutôt que de souffrir une plaisanterie. Où nous conduit pourtant la vanité!"

The reason for her action is her own vanity:

"... je n'ai pas oublié que cette femme était ma rivale, que vous l'aviez trouvée un moment préférable à moi, et qu'enfin, vous m'aviez placée au-dessous d'elle."(2)

1. CXLI, 361-2.
2. CXLV, 368.

The use by Mme de Merteuil of "un moment" is doubly significant here. It shows the absolute nature of the Marquise's desire for domination - she will not tolerate being placed elsewhere than at the centre of things even for a moment - and at the same time it clearly illustrates the blindness of her vanity in this respect, for as she writes she lets her pen make the assumption that Valmont's preference for the Présidente was only temporary. The idea that anyone could be permanently preferred to her in the field of sensual pleasure is one that she is scarcely able even to contemplate.

Valmont, utterly enraged by the discovery of Danceny in Mme de Merteuil's boudoir, now has a motive of jealousy even stronger than in the case of Belleruche or of Prévan, because the choice is more insulting. His vanity leads him to send the Marquise a furious letter, expressing his astonishment "que ce soit moi que vous ayez entrepris de traiter comme un écolier," and saying that she is the only woman for whom he is prepared to forego the pleasures of a terrible vengeance(1). This hesitation, contrasted with Mme de Merteuil's determined course of action in the parallel if more fully developed case of Valmont's "infidelity" with Mme de Tourvel, serves further to underline his relative weakness. Vanity is now in complete control of the two main characters of Laclos's novel, and is the force behind Mme de Merteuil's reply, in which she ironically depicts herself as a weak woman frightened to death by the Vicomte's threats(2). After all, she sarcastically says, she has nothing with which to threaten him in return - nothing she might say or do would disturb the calm and brilliance of his life, for the most she could do would be to have him exiled from France. But then this, she humorously suggests,

1. CLI, 381.
2. CLII, 382-5.

would mean nothing to him, for after all, the French Court might leave him alone if he fled the country. This is the clearest indication we have as to the nature of the secret of Valmont's possessed by the Marquise, a secret presumably political in character. In fact, of course, to have to leave France would mean the end of Valmont's brilliant career as a man of the world. After this icy sarcasm Mme de Merteuil throws off all attempt at disguise, and her fury blazes forth:

"Savez-vous, Vicomte, pourquoi je ne me suis jamais remariée? ce n'est assurément pas faute d'avoir trouvé assez de partis avantageux; c'est uniquement pour que personne n'ait le droit de trouver à redire à mes actions. Ce n'est même pas que j'aie craint de ne pouvoir plus faire mes volontés, car j'aurais bien toujours fini par là; mais c'est qu'il m'aurait gêné que quelqu'un eût eu seulement le droit de s'en plaindre; c'est qu'enfin je ne voulais tromper que pour mon plaisir, et non par nécessité. Et voilà que vous m'écrivez la Lettre la plus maritale qu'il soit possible de voir!..."(1)

So far, we have spoken of Mme de Merteuil's vanity on the same level as that of Valmont, but this passage seems to indicate that it might more justly be seen on a completely different plane, and not so much as vanity, which is the idle trumpeting of qualities either insignificant or imaginary, but rather as pride, which is the just awareness of real qualities within oneself. Some critics have taken this a step further and seen the novel, so far as Mme de Merteuil is concerned, as a feminist tract, the expression of the realisation by the fair sex that they are not weak and should not be content to play a dreary second fiddle to man, as has traditionally been their rôle. This argument we shall examine more fully at a later stage.

The Marquise twits Valmont with his own avowed principles:

"... et après tout, une femme n'en vaut-elle pas une autre? ce sont vos principes..."(2)

.. CLII, 383.

.. CLII, 384.

This may be an expression of revolt against the downtrodden and despised position of womanhood (although this was by no means as bad as all that!), but more immediately it is a highly successful attack on Valmont's vanity, and a demonstration of Mme de Merteuil's personal superiority over him. She remains true to her principles throughout, whereas he shows himself not as the seducer it should be his aim to be, but as the seduced, as Mme de Merteuil's victim. He is completely in her thrall. The Marquise rubs this in in the conclusion to her letter(1): if he can become charming again she will be nice to him, and that is more than he deserves - "En vérité, je suis trop bonne." Valmont is stung by this to a reply in the same belligerent tone. He elicits only Mme de Merteuil's laconic "Hé bien! la guerre." (2)

The last thing we hear from the Marquise is in her hate-filled brief reply to Valmont's letter in which the latter describes with what ease he has enticed Danceny away from her. Her brief note is venomous from beginning to end:

"Je n'aime pas qu'on ajoute de mauvaises plaisanteries à de mauvais procédés; ce n'est pas plus ma manière que mon goût. Quand j'ai à me plaindre de quelqu'un, je ne le persifle pas; je fais mieux: je me venge. Quelque content de vous que vous puissiez être en ce moment, n'oubliez point que ce ne serait pas la première fois que vous vous seriez applaudi d'avance, et tout seul dans l'espoir d'un triomphe qui vous serait échappé à l'instant même où vous vous en félicitiez. Adieu." (3)

This note presages the final catastrophe and the ruin of both Valmont and the Marquise herself along with the destruction of their artificially ordered world in which the intelligence reigns supreme.

This downfall comes about because each continually attacks the vanity of the other; but vanity is only the outward manifestation of the deeply-hidden reason for the catastrophe. If we go to the heart of the matter we see that

- CLIII, 385.
- CLIII, 386.
- CLIX, 395.

vanity itself, which plays such an important part in the psychology of both Mme de Merteuil and Valmont, is in fact the very reverse of a rational thing. Thus, their world was built on basically unsound foundations. In fact, as we shall see, neither of these characters was as intellectually in control of himself as he liked to think. Each ignored, or at least pushed aside, elements in his character which were non-rational. This is particularly true of Valmont, who is by no means as objective in his approach to Mme de Tourvel as he likes to pretend. Mme de Merteuil realises this, as we have seen, and makes great play with it in appealing to the Vicomte's vanity. It is this weakness - if such it may be called - in Valmont's diabolical character which is his saving grace as an artistic creation, and which makes him more credible, more "life-like", than the Marquise. She herself is far more of an abstraction than Valmont, but even she shows a suspicion of a weakness in her attitude to both Danceny and Valmont. This side of the two accomplices we shall consider shortly, but for the moment we are concerned with the manifestations of vanity in Les Liaisons.

We have shown at some length how vanity is deeply ingrained in the relationship of Valmont and Mme de Merteuil one with the other, and in their relationships with Cécile, Mme de Tourvel, Danceny and Prévan, all of whom they set out to treat as things, as marionnettes. It is also manifest in their treatment of Gercourt (of whom Mme de Merteuil says, "Prouv ons-lui donc qu'il n'est qu'un sot"(1)), of the Dutch lover of Emilie ("Le petit homme ne se possédait pas de joie, dans l'attente du bonheur dont il allait jouir", says Valmont; "il m'en parut si satisfait, qu'il me donna envie de

1. II, 38.

le troubler; ce que je fis en effet"(1)) and of the Vicomtesse de M., who tells Valmont that in the presence in the same house-party of her lover Vressac it will be impossible for them to spend a night together: "Jusqu'à là," says Valmont, "je n'avais cru que lui dire une honnêteté: mais ce mot d'impossible me révolta comme de coutume. Je me sentis humilié d'être sacrifié à Vressac, et je résolus de ne le pas souffrir: j'insistai donc."(2)

None of this is surprising, and that vanity should be clearly apparent in the relations of Valmont and Mme de Merteuil with the minor characters of the novel is only a logical consequence of their characters as outlined above. There are, however, two other important points to be underlined concerning the psychology of Les Liaisons dangereuses. The first is a point which has been made by several writers, namely that there is no happy ending for any of the characters - all meet with death, violent or otherwise appalling (in the case of the Présidente preceded by insanity), or are at least sadly disillusioned about their fellow human beings. The second point has been, for the most part, ignored, but it is at least as important as the first, namely that in all the characters, major and minor, and even in the seemingly virtuous ones amongst them, vanity is paramount.

Little need be said concerning vanity in Prévau. Once we have seen this passion in operation in Mme de Merteuil and in Valmont, it becomes obvious in Prévau whose code of conduct in the sexual plane is almost identical with theirs, as we have seen in the story of the Three Inseparables. Vanity is the foundation-stone of Prévau's attitude towards Mme de Merteuil.

1. XLVII, 125.
2. LXXI, 169.

The bragging, sporting tone of the roué is admirably caught in Letter LXX(1), where he boasts that the Marquise will be quite incapable of resisting his charms. He talks of her as game, a quarry to be pursued with the superior skill and intelligence of the hunter, and he concludes, "Je ne croirai à la vertu de Madame de Merteuil, qu'après avoir crevé six chevaux à lui faire ma cour." That he is unsuccessful in his endeavour is neither here nor there: it is simply that his vanity comes into conflict with an equally strong vanity, which has at its service an even stronger tactical intelligence.

Cécile de Volanges is a rather more interesting case. She comes from the convent, it is true, as an ingénue, but her vanity is already well-developed, and is fed at every opportunity by the scheming Marquise. Hand in hand with vanity in all the characters of Les Liaisons dangereuses goes duplicity, overt in the case of Valmont and Mme de Merteuil, less overt and even unconscious in some of the other characters. The tendency towards perversity and duplicity is well marked in Cécile from the very outset, when she already foresees, even if only semi-consciously, the possible necessity of hiding things from her mother in her writing desk(2). Her vanity, too, is soon apparent in the scene in which she mistakes a shoemaker for a suitor. This episode, as a result of which she decides that when married she will not patronise this particular shoemaker, admirably combines elements of bruised adolescent vanity, spite and coquetry. It is a brilliant touch by Laclos, and foreshadows the entire development of Cécile.

We soon discover that the young girl is totally preoccupied with herself(3).

1. p. 166.
2. I, 35.
3. III, 39.

She is fascinated by men, who, she feels sure, are all talking about her. The last sentences of Letter III show her chagrin at the idea that people could in any way criticise her. Although she has about her the shreds of innocence, Mme de Merteuil sums her up more than adequately when she says that sooner or later Cécile would make a cuckold of Gerccourt(1).

Cécile's latent sensuality becomes ever more apparent with her declaration concerning Danceny: "C'est bien dommage qu'il soit Chevalier de Malte!..."(2). This is heightened by the excited way in which she recounts that Danceny has started to write to her:

"C'est peut-être mal de baiser une Lettre comme ça, mais je n'ai pas pu m'en empêcher."(3)

This last clause puts into a nutshell her morality, or lack of it. On the other hand, if her vanity leads her to believe that no one has ever been in her position before(4), we cannot be too hard on her on that score, for this is a fault of all young lovers, but when we find her more bothered about not knowing how to set about writing her letter in a good style than about the actual fact of writing, then this is something more than a grammarian's concern, and the case for leniency is weakened(5).

It is not long before Mme de Merteuil, after a suitable show of hesitation, is actively encouraging Cécile to write to Danceny(6). Cécile's expressed motive for turning to the Marquise for advice is significant. It is pure vanity:

"Elle me traite toujours comme un enfant, Maman."(7)

1. II, 38.
2. VII, 48.
3. XVI, 63.
4. XVIII, 65-6.
5. XVIII, 67.
6. XXIX, 87.
7. XXVII, 85.

(It is true that there is some justification for Cécile's remark, as we shall see. But then, Cécile is a weak rather than a wicked character, and it is usually possible to find some kind of excuse for her.) The result of this highly dangerous liaison is that Cécile's vanity and moral degradation proceed apace. The Marquise lends her books to help her in the art of love, and to perfect her style, making her promise to say nothing to her mother about these books, on the hypocritical but nonetheless valid grounds that would seem to be a reflection on the way in which Mme de Volanges had had her daughter educated. Cécile remarks in this context that Mme de Merteuil takes more interest in her than does her own mother(1). This is one of Laclos's alleged moral lessons(2).

The Marquise sums up Cécile by saying that "cela n'a ni caractère ni principes", but that she possesses "une certaine fausseté naturelle." Almost in the same breath Mme de Merteuil lays bare the young girl's vanity when she describes Cécile's belief that she has persuaded her to act as go-between for herself and Danceny. In the words of Mme de Merteuil:

"Aussitôt que je me suis aperçue qu'elle croyait m'avoir convaincue par ses mauvaises raisons, j'ai eu l'air de les prendre pour bonnes; et elle est intimement persuadée qu'elle doit ce succès à son éloquence."(3)

For the reader, the degree of presumption in Cécile to believe that her eloquence could convince such a person as Mme de Merteuil is incredible.

Cécile has an attack of conscience not long after this, and prays for "la miséricorde divine" upon her sins(4). But Mme de Merteuil is unperturbed by this sudden fit of religion, and points out to Valmont that by continually praying God to help her forget Danceny, Cécile is in fact making sure that she can think

1. XXIX, 88.
2. Préf. du Réd., p. 32.
3. XXXVIII, 104-5.
4. XLIX, 128-9.

of him continually(1).

The process has gone too far. Cécile is too weak, and too sure that she knows best (she may ask for advice from Sophie, but never has the slightest intention of taking it if it does not suit her(2), and that she is, in a word, unique. Her weakness of character is epitomised by her remark to Sophie that the latter does now know "comment il est difficile de dire non, quand c'est oui que l'on veut dire"(3), and her increasing sensuality by the hint of lesbianism when she likens the feelings she has for Danceny to those she has for Mme de Merteuil(4).

In all the aspects of Cécile's moral character it is her weakness which is to be emphasised. Her sensuality and her vanity have none of the positive quality of Mme de Merteuil's. Laclos continually and skilfully stresses this. It is shown in the reference to "les bonnets et les pompons" in the first sentence of her first letter(5), and again when Mme de Volanges discovers the letters from Danceny in the writing-desk. When asked what they are, says Cécile, "Je ne sus lui répondre autre chose que ce n'était rien."(6) "Nothing": this is a child's reaction, and this fluffy creature remains a child, even in the depths of her depravity. That Laclos is able to convey this is a measure of his consummate skill in character portrayal.

An important step forward in the development of Cécile's vanity is taken when she ceases to confide in her convent friend Sophie(7). Sophie disapproves of the whole affair with Danceny, and Cécile will not listen to advice which she

1. LI, 132.
2. cf. XVIII, 67.
3. LV, 139.
4. LV, 140.
5. I, 35.
6. LXI, 148.
7. p. 178, footnote.

does not like. Now she is completely in the hands of Mme de Merteuil and Valmont, and her ultimate downfall is only a matter of time. It is not long delayed. Valmont, as we know, does not stop at seduction. His and Mme de Merteuil's plan is to deprave Cécile utterly. We see the results in her laughter at the smutty tales which Valmont tells her about her mother(1), and in the letter which, at Valmont's dictation, she writes to Danceny:

"Oh! vous avez là un bien bon ami, je vous assure! Il fait tout comme vous feriez vous-même."(2)

One can almost hear Cécile sniggering as Valmont dictates this description of himself to her.

Cécile then is a vain and rather stupid person. Both of these characteristics she inherits from her mother, Mme de Volanges. The latter is a pompous "honnête femme", who boasts of her "indulgence" as her principle virtue when she is trying to warn Mme de Tourvel about Valmont(3). She shows how firmly Mme de Merteuil's reputation is entrenched when she says that the virtuous Marquise is the only woman ever to have withstood the Vicomte(4). In saying this she sets forth two of her own chief characteristics: firstly, she is incapable of forming independent judgements and of basing her opinions on anything other than the veneer of social respectability or acceptability; secondly, when she does form an opinion, it is usually wrong. With all this, she is nevertheless well-meaning.

Mme de Volanges is by no means as deeply religious as she tries to appear. Her yard-stick in matters of morality is not whether her religion forbids any

1. CIX, 283.
2. CXVII, 305.
3. IX, 50.
4. IX, 51.

particular line of action, but whether society frowns on it... Her daughter shows us that she is tolerant of illicit affairs:

"On m'a bien dit que c'était mal d'aimer quelqu'un....; ou bien est-ce que ce n'est un mal que pour les demoiselles? car j'ai entendu Maman elle-même dire que Madame D... aimait M. M... et elle n'en parlait pas comme d'une chose qui serait si mal..."(1)

This fact, taken in conjunction with the stories told by Valmont about Mme de Volanges to Cécile (although Valmont does not claim that these stories are true(2)), and Mme de Merteuil's significant remark about her,

"Et puis je n'ignore pas que la bonne Dame a eu ses petites faiblesses comme une autre, dans son jeune temps..."(3),

indicates that Mme de Volanges' morality is merely the respectability of a society woman d'un certain âge, bent on keeping clear of scandal.

Despite Mme de Tourvel's assurances, Mme de Volanges insists that Valmont is "une liaison dangereuse", and says that even if he were redeemed, public opinion would still be against him, "et ne suffit-elle pas (i.e. public opinion) pour régler votre conduite?" She admits that she receives Valmont socially, because he has "un beau nom, une grande fortune, beaucoup de qualités aimables": but then, that is no more than "une inconséquence de plus à ajouter à mille autres qui gouvernent la société."(4)

Viewed against this background, the form taken by Mme de Volanges's vanity is easy to guess. It is a form common to many society-conscious matrons, and is by no means confined to France: it is a desire and determination to manage

1. XXVII, 85.
2. cf CX, 287.
3. CVI, 276.

4. XXXII, 91-2. It would require a very long stretch of the imagination to see this passage as support for Vailland's thesis that Les Liaisons is pre-eminently a revolutionary pamphlet.

other people's lives, in the firm conviction that she, Mme de Volanges, knows best. This managing is done without any reference to the real problems involved, and is based solely on social desirability and correctness. This is the explanation of her warnings to Mme de Tourvel concerning Valmont. This busybodying nature of hers is shown in a swift touch by Valmont himself in other circumstances, after Mme de Tourvel has fled from Mme de Rosemonde's château:

"Madame de Volanges, que d'abord j'avais soupçonnée d'être complice, ne paraît affectée que de n'avoir pas été consultée sur cette démarche."(1)

The faults of Mme de Volanges's relationship with her daughter have already been shown in Cécile's complaint that her mother always treats her as a child. After all, she has been brought from the convent to be married! This insouciance for her daughter's welfare continues until the egocentric Mme de Volanges suddenly discovers Cécile's letters from Danceny. Then, this limited and conventional but well-characterised woman tells the Chevalier "never to darken her door again" in terms just as hackneyed as the English cliché indicates. Her use of pompous and conventional phrases such as "une retraite austère et éternelle" and her hope that he will return Cécile's letters so as to "ne laisser aucune trace d'un événement dont nous ne pourrions garder le souvenir, moi sans indignation, elle, sans honte, et vous sans remords"(2), all this is typical of the woman. Mme de Merteuil underlines Mme de Volanges's stupidity over the discovery of the letters: if she had been gentle she could have won Cécile's confidence, but instead she used severity, and threatened her daughter with the convent, thus throwing Cécile further into the arms of the Marquise(3).

1. C, 258.
2. LXII, 149-50.
3. LXIII, 153.

Had Mme de Volanges cared more for her daughter the whole tragedy might have been averted. Only once do we find her doing anything of the sort. This occasion, which has already been mentioned, is when she is genuinely moved by what she takes to be her daughter's distress at being separated from Danceny but which is really her fatigue after an exhausting night with Valmont(1). She turns to the worst possible person, Mme de Merteuil(2), for advice, and says that she will not force Cécile to marry Gercourt if she is really in love with Danceny, adding that she disapproves of forced marriages and that if she has been she/tempted to choose a husband for Cécile, it is only because she conceived it her duty to "l'aider de (son) expérience." (3) This trait admirably throws light on her meddling vanity, her belief that she knows best. She still admits that Gercourt is "un parti meilleur" (4) than Danceny (this factor is important in Mme de Volanges's psychology), but declares that her daughter's welfare is more important than all this, "et j'aime mieux compromettre mon autorité que sa vertu." Unfortunately, however, these good resolutions come too late. The harm has been done and, in any case, Mme de Volanges has chosen by far the worst possible confidante.

Mme de Volanges always says "the right thing" - witness her expression of affliction at the death of Valmont(5). Her letters are full of pious platitudes, but no real feeling is to be found in them, with the one exception noted above. Her hackneyed remarks on Providence(6) are a case in point, and her fears about

1. XCVI, 244, & XCVIII, 247.

2. It is true that she thinks Mme de Merteuil the best person, but we have already shown this to be the result of an incapacity to see through people which contrasts with her overweening vanity and love of offering others advice about personal relationships.

3. XCVIII, 248.

4. XCVIII, 249.

5. CLXV, 402.

6. CLXV, 404.

Cécile's "sensibilité si active", coming as they do right at the denouement, are somewhat late in the day(1).

When the scandal about Mme de Merteuil begins to break and Cécile flees to a convent, Mme de Volanges is totally at a loss to understand what is going on. Having earlier been convinced by Mme de Merteuil's cunning appeal to her vanity that what matters is not what Cécile wants but what is seemly(2), Mme de Volanges's first thought now is that Gercourt will soon be back, and in consequence her first question is "Faudra-t-il rompre ce mariage si avantageux?"(3) Her guess at the true situation is pathetically inadequate. She fears that Danceny has seduced Cécile and that Cécile as a result became jealous of Mme de Merteuil. Even so, she is prepared to let Danceny marry Cécile if he has enough decency left. This is dictated by her sense of respectability. Danceny should do "the right thing". Indeed, he should be flattered(4). Here, for the last time, we have Mme de Volanges's uncomprehending vanity speaking. In this refusal to see things as they are and not as she hopes them to be, she shows a mentality closely akin to that of her daughter, who refuses to accept any advice contrary to her desires. But the evil is, of course, far graver than Mme de Volanges can guess, and she is forced to follow Mme de Rosemonde's world-weary example, and observe silence.

Vanity is the common characteristic shown by all the correspondants in this epistolary novel. Valmont's servant Azolan is no exception to the rule. He is/

1. *ibid.*

2. CIV, 266.

3. CLXX, 413-4 cf. also (413) how the purely conventional nature of Mme de V's religious faith is underlined: "Quelque respect que j'aie pour la vocation religieuse, je ne verrais pas sans peine, et même sans crainte, ma fille embrasser cet état. Il me semble que nous avons déjà assez de devoirs à remplir, sans nous en créer de nouveaux; et encore, que ce n'est guère à cet âge que nous savons ce qui nous convient." (My italics).

4. CLXXIII, 418.

disparaging comments about the noblesse de robe, when his master suggests that in furtherance of their common cause he should join Mme de Tourvel's household, illustrate this point:

"Pour ce qui est d'entrer au service de Madame de Tourvel, en restant à celui de Monsieur, j'espère que Monsieur ne l'exigera pas de moi..... Assurément je n'irai pas porter la livrée, et encore une livrée de Robe, après avoir eu l'honneur d'être Chasseur de Monsieur."(1)

It should be noted in parenthesis that this is a case of the servant outdoing the master in snobbery, for there is no sign in Valmont of any such class-consciousness or sense of superiority over the noblesse de robe. It is worth noting too that Azolan, like the other characters, is motivated by self-interest and vanity, and that he also attributes this trait to other people, as in the episode when he warns Valmont that it is better not to stress to the Presidente's maid that it is important for her to hold her tongue about Valmont's interest in her mistress's letters. Otherwise, says Azolan, she will realise how very important the secret is, and may decide that it is more to her advantage to sell it to her employer(2). Azolan is certainly under no illusions as to the part which vanity plays in his employer's make-up - witness the gay "soft-soaping" of Valmont in Letter CVII(3):

Mme de Rosemond's steward, M. Bertrand, also shows the marks of vanity, although in his case they take on a rather different guise. Like Mme de Rosemonde herself, M. Bertrand is sympathetically treated by Laclos. He is the perfect representation of the faithful old family retainer. His vanity shows itself in the form of self-association with the family which he serves, and in his vigorous

CVII, 280.
XLIV, 117-8.
pp. 277-80.

assertions to the effect that Valmont died in a manner worthy of the family name(1). Thus, Bertrand says of Danceny,

"... malgré le peu que je suis, je ne lui en disais pas moins ma façon de penser,"

and adds

"Mais c'est là que M. le Vicomte s'est montré véritablement grand....."

He ends by asking Mme de Rosemonde to excuse his temerity in daring to "mêler mes douleurs aux vôtres" on the occasion of the death of "ce précieux appui d'une maison si illustre."(2) He is proud of his ability, as an old and loyal servant, to speak to Mme de Rosemonde almost as to an equal(3).

Vanity is declared to be the key-stone of the character of Gercourt, who writes only one of the letters in Les Liaisons(4). It is true that the only suggestion of vanity in action which can be laid at his door is gross impoliteness to Mme de Volanges in postponing once again his long-delayed marriage to her daughter, for the sake of the self-indulgence of a trip through Italy. This is not very grave, and indeed he says that if Mme de Volanges insists he will come straight back to France for the wedding. Nevertheless he must be well aware that Mme de Volanges is too bound by the social conventions, including those of politeness and the desire to make a wealthy match for her daughter, to do anything of the kind. Thus Gercourt is safe in his minor self-

1. A modern equivalent of the same phenomenon of association is noted in P. Willmott's & M. Young's Family & Class in a London Suburb: "Of the 257 skilled manual workers in the general sample 49% said they were "upper-middle," "middle" or "lower-middle; of the 98 semi-skilled or unskilled 43%. Woodford is not unusual in having manual workers who put themselves into the middle-class, only in the proportion doing so. The rule seems to be that the more the middle-class predominates in a district the more working-class people identify themselves with it..."(Thus Bertrand, mixing (on a limited scale) with the aristocracy, seeks to associate himself with it to the utmost.) London, 1960. Extract in The Observer, 20/11/1960, p. 21.

2. CLXIII, 399-400.

3. cf. ibid. & CLXVI, 405.

4. CXI, 289. It is interesting & significant that M. de Tourvel is the only person mentioned of whom no real character traits are shown.

indulgence. Far more important and revealing is the light shed on his character from another source, Mme de Merteuil, whom we know to be, whatever else, a brilliant analyst of character. She tells us that Gercourt himself has been a sufficiently skilful rake to snatch a conquest away from no less formidable a rival than Valmont himself, and that moreover she herself had once considered him a worthy lover.

"Vous avez été ennuyé cent fois, aussi que moi," she tells Valmont, "de l'importance que met Gercourt à la femme qu'il aura, et de la sotte présomption que lui fait croire qu'il évitera le sort inévitable....."(1)

Presumptuous vanity indeed in Gercourt, if he thought that he could escape the vengeance of Valmont and Mme de Merteuil!

Important though may be the existence in the minor characters of that same vanity which we have found in Valmont and Mme de Merteuil, more important for a full understanding of the almost horrifying effect of the psychological analysis of Les Liaisons dangereuses is the fact that this same vanity is at the heart of the characters who at first sight seem to stand for virtue. Vanity in Valmont and Mme de Merteuil, well and good. Vanity in Mme de Volanges we are prepared to shrug off, for she is only a rather stupid woman of fashionable society. Similarly with Danceny who, Knight of Malta or not, is merely a boy ready to sow his wild oats, and with Cécile who, as we have seen, is from the outset ripe for corruption, given the necessary impetus. Bertrand's vanity is of a harmless kind, which we are prepared to accept with an indulgent smile, and Gercourt is only a very minor character. As for Azolan, he is, as Valmont himself says, merely a "vrai valet de Comédie." (2) But Mme de Rosemonde, Père Anselme, the Présidente de Tourvel - surely these must be different! Such, however, is not

1. II, 38 & footnote.

2. XV, 62.

the case(1).

Mme de Rosemonde is certainly one of the most sympathetic characters in Laclos's novel, and may at first sight appear to be devoid of vanity. The thought that any such vice could be dominant in her was certainly far from the mind of the book's advocate in the introductory essay to the English translation of 1784. Defending the morality of the novel this writer contrasts Valmont and Mme de Merteuil with the former's aunt, describing her as "the gentle, sensible and generous Mme de Rosemonde," and exclaiming, "how moving, how unaffected her virtue!"(2) . Gentle she certainly is, and generous, in the sense of kindhearted as well as the other sense. Sensible she also is, but in the sense of trusting to sentiment or sensiblerie, and this quality is in itself a clue to the nature of her vanity. A key passage in this connection comes in Letter VIII, where we find the Présidente describing Mme de Rosemonde to Mme de Volanges:

"Cette femme est toujours charmante: son grand âge ne lui fait rien perdre; elle conserve toute sa mémoire et sa gaieté. Son corps seul a quatre-vingt-quatre ans; son esprit n'en a que vingt."(3)

The mention of memory here is of some importance, for Mme de Rosemonde's vanity takes the form of vicarious pleasure enjoyed through living once again the amorous exploits of her youth in Mme de Tourvel. Her body is forced to admit its age, but her heart is loth to do so. (It is not by accident that she prefers to call herself Mme de Tourvel's "sister" rather than her "mother"(4).) Thus she

1. Vanity is indeed even to be found in Père Anselme, whom Valmont makes into an entremetteur: cf. CXXIII - his eagerness to be instrumental in such a fine conversation & his pompous sermonising style.

2. London, 1784, I, xii.

3. VIII, 49.

4. CXII, 291.

is not surprised at the cause of Mme de Tourvel's abrupt departure from the château. "Une longue expérience" has enabled her to analyse this, and she adds, with some satisfaction,

"Je vois qu'il en est encore comme au temps passé."

Mme de Rosemonde herself clearly has a "past":

"Je ne croyais guère être jamais dans le cas de revenir sur des souvenirs si éloignés de moi, et si étrangers à mon âge," she writes to the Présidente. "Pourtant, depuis hier, je m'en suis vraiment beaucoup occupé, par le désir que j'avais d'y trouver quelque chose qui pût vous être utile."

Yet she offers Mme de Tourvel no practical advice: "Que puis-je faire, que vous admirer et vous plaindre?" Her indulgence shows itself yet more clearly when she says that even if Mme de Tourvel succumbs she will have "la consolation d'avoir combattu de toute (sa) puissance." (1) This is not far from the philosophy of Mme de Merteuil. We have already seen that the Marquise professes woman's favourite passions to be "la gloire de la défense et le plaisir de la défaite." (2)

Mme de Rosemonde, then, offers Mme de Tourvel no constructive help. She leaves her in the hands of Providence, seeing her own rôle as one of support and consolation. She clearly enjoys the spice of the situation, which calls back memories of her own youth (3). In so doing she continually talks to her friend of Valmont which, of course, is what the Présidente wants, and why she chooses the dowager rather than Mme de Volanges as her confidante, just as Cécile abandons Sophie for the more agreeable advice of Mme de Merteuil.

The irony of the positioning of Letter CXXVI is masterly. Mme de Rosemonde congratulates the Présidente on the conversion of Valmont to religion

1. CIII, 264.
2. X, 52.
3. CIII, 265.

when Mme de Tourvel has already been seduced by him. This makes the letter something of a reflexion on God's Providence, to which Mme de Rosemonde has entrusted the Présidente, and which she here says is responsible for Valmont's conversion. A parallel with Sade's rebellion in Justine against the trite rewarding of virtue in fiction immediately springs to mind.

Mme de Rosemonde is a woman of the world. She shares the Présidente's grief over the seduction, but expresses a profound truth when she says that

"L'homme jouit du bonheur qu'il ressent, et la femme de celui qu'elle procure. Cette différence, si essentielle et si peu remarquée, influe pourtant, d'une manière bien sensible, sur la totalité de leur conduite respective.... Plaire n'est pour lui qu'un moyen de succès; tandis que pour elle, c'est le succès lui-même.... Enfin, ce goût exclusif, qui caractérise particulièrement l'amour, n'est dans l'homme qu'une préférence, qui sert, au plus, à augmenter un plaisir, qu'un autre objet affaiblirait peut-être, mais ne détruirait pas; tandis que dans les femmes, c'est un sentiment profond, qui non seulement anéantit tout désir étranger, mais qui, plus fort que la nature, et soustrait à son empire, ne leur laisse éprouver que répugnance et dégoût, là même où semble devoir naître la volupté."(1)

This letter is cited by the English defender of the work's morality(2) as "in my opinion, alone sufficient to counterbalance, at least, the impression.... Valmont, and the infamous accomplice in his crimes, could make." It is, in fact, nothing of the sort. Certainly it bears with it a warning that such happiness as Mme de Tourvel may find in her love will not last, but its overall effect is hedonist in its indulgence:

"Ce que je vous demande seulement, c'est de vous souvenir que plaindre un malade, ce n'est pas le blâmer. Eh! qui sommes-nous, pour nous blâmer les uns les autres? Laissons le droit de juger, à celui-là seul qui lit dans les coeurs; et j'ose même croire qu'à ses yeux paternels, une foule de vertus peut racheter une faiblesse."(3)

The Providence of this paternal God in which Mme de Tourvel has trusted

1. CXXX, 337.
2. Dangerous Connections, London, 1784, I, xii.
3. CXXX, 338.

instead of in decisive action has already been found wanting, and will be found still more inadequate when Mme de Rosemonde discovers the full horror of the situation. After the final catastrophe she tells Danceny,

"il ne reste qu'à pleurer et à se taire."(1)

Even the old woman of the world is nauseated. But there is nothing to be done about it. Mme de Rosemonde appeals to "les bornes prescrites par les Lois et la Religion" as the source of happiness(2). But this is the shocked, world-weary woman speaking. She has herself ignored these limits of which she speaks in titillating her own vanity with thoughts of youth by her passive attitude towards the Valmont-Mme de Tourvel relationship. She is as much guilty of using other people for her own pleasure as Mme de Merteuil or Valmont, even if she only does so, as it were, passively. Right up to the end she refuses to adopt a more positive attitude, and refuses to go into details about the catastrophe in her letters to Mme de Volanges. Of the disastrous events which have overtaken them she writes,

".... laissons-les dans l'oubli qui leur convient; et sans chercher d'inutiles et d'affligeantes lumières, soumettons-nous aux décrets de la Providence, et croyons à la sagesse de ses vues, lors même qu'elle ne nous permet pas de les comprendre."(3)

The utter inadequacy of such passive trust in Providence is thus brought out here quite as strongly, and far more subtly, by Laclos in the quiet self-abandonment of Mme de Rosemonde and the rest to their own basic penchants for pleasure as by Sade in the more extreme and less likely blind trust of Justine who, after all her vicissitudes, is still blessing Providence as she is struck by lightning(4). All Laclos's "virtuous" characters are reluctant to combat vice with positive action(5). They are all possessed by a

1. CLXXI, 414.

2. *ibid.*, 415.

3. CLXXII, 417.

4. Sade: Justine, ou les Malheurs de la Vertu, Paris, 1957, p. 414.

5. This is in line with the type of morality claimed by Laclos for his work: cf. Préface du Rédacteur, p. 32.

peculiar lethargy, a tendency to capitulate to some factor in their own personalities, a factor which in every case can be identified as vanity in one form or another. In the case of Mme de Rosemonde vanity takes the form of a desire to relive vicariously the amorous pleasures of her youth. Vanity is also present in Mme de Tourvel, and is the cause of her downfall; but its manifestation is both more complex and better-concealed.

Mme de Tourvel is a character who improves with acquaintance, from the aesthetic point of view. At first reading she appears to be the traditional virtuous dévoté who succumbs to trickery; and indeed it is true that there is a certain degree of convention about her rôle in the book. But as we re-read and re-read Les Liaisons dangereuses it becomes apparent that her character is far more subtle than this, and far more human, so that in the end we are tempted to come to the conclusion that she is Laclos's greatest creation, greater than Mme de Merteuil, who is made so much larger than life that her impact is mitigated; and considerably greater than Valmont, who is far closer to the traditional rake than the Présidente is to the traditional virtuous victim. It will now be our aim to show that, despite outward appearances, vanity is of capital importance in the psychological structure of the Présidente de Tourvel.

As we have already intimated, many critics seem to be dazzled by the awe-inspiring virtuosity of Mme de Merteuil and Valmont in the pursuit of pleasure in vice, and in consequence to overlook the subtlety of the portrayal of Mme de Tourvel. There can, as has already been remarked(1), be little doubt that

1. cf. supra, pp. 403-4. 381-2.

like Richardson's *Clarissa*, Mme de Tourvel is meant to be the most virtuous of women. However, whatever the intention, this is not the case in fact. The Présidente is no beguiled paragon of virtue. Her vice, her besetting sin, is of a very delicate, almost totally unconscious type, but it is nevertheless real. Her own vanity leads to her downfall far more than the tactics of Valmont which are, indeed, nothing more than a brilliant exploitation of this vanity. Faurie coined a very happy phrase when he spoke of the "auto-séduction" of Mme de Tourvel(1). This point is seized upon by the Catholic writer Bernard Guyon who, whilst recognising that ever since its publication Les Liaisons has been seen by theologians as highly dangerous, remarks that,

"Le roman de Laclos ne s'en est pas moins imposé à l'attention des moralistes par son rigoureux souci de vérité psychologique, en quoi réside son mérite majeur. En lui ils ont trouvé matière à de précieuses réflexions pour la conduite des âmes dont ils sont chargés."(2)

In other words, Les Liaisons dangereuses now becomes not a manual of libertinage but a manual for the guardians of virtue(3). Some of the moral lessons which Guyon draws are suspect, but one can have nothing but respect for his analysis of the character of Mme de Tourvel as portrayed by Laclos,

Guyon points out that the Présidente is not a victim of the senses, although she is far from being an "insensible", as the episode in which Valmont helps her across a ditch shows(4). In the main, however,

"Sa tentation n'est pas une tentation sensuelle. Elle est d'abord une tentation de curiosité et une tentation d'orgueil."(5)

1. J. Faurie, Essai sur la Séduction, Paris, 1948, p. 173.
2. B. Guyon, La Chute d'une Honnête Femme; special no. of L'Anneau d'Or entitled Del'Enfance au Mariage, Paris, May-Aug. 1948, p. 167.
3. The full title of this periodical is L'Anneau d'Or. Revue internationale de spiritualité familiale.
4. Guyon, op. cit., p. 168. & VI, 46.
5. Guyon, *ibid.*

Replace the word "orgueil" by "vanité", and Guyon is absolutely correct.

Curiosity and vanity in Mme de Tourvel are inseparable. Her curiosity takes the form of wondering how such a charming, intelligent, witty man as Valmont can be the cruel, perverted roué which his reputation makes him out to be. This, linked with her vain disbelief that his attitude towards her can possibly be the same as towards other, ordinary, women, is what determines her to solve the mystery, and put spies on his tail.

Let us now examine the Présidente's vanity in greater detail. We have mentioned that the ditch episode shows that Mme de Tourvel is by no means as austere as she would appear. This, although by no means her principal temptation, is nevertheless not to be discounted. One of the chief tactics employed by Valmont and Mme de Merteuil is to force their adversaries to acknowledge their own latent sensuality. A more important factor in the downfall of Mme de Tourvel appears in the same letter as Valmont's account of this revelation of a sensual tendency which ^{he} ~~his~~ is anxious to exploit ("Ce seul mot m'a éclairé. Dès de moment, le doux espoir a remplacé la cruelle inquiétude."(1)) This more significant trait of the Présidente's character is revealed when Valmont remarks, "Elle veut, dit-elle, me convertir"(2), and we soon find a similar remark appearing under Mme de Tourvel's own pen:

"Je ne le connaissais que de réputation..... mais il me semble qu'il vaut mieux qu'elle.... Vous qui le connaissez, vous conviendrez que ce serait une belle conversion à faire."(3)

As though this vain desire to redeem the irredeemable were not enough, she

1. VI, 46.
2. VI, 47.
3. VIII, 49.

soon shows us that her vanity is not confined to the things of God. She soon confesses to an affection for the Vicomte, even though she is not prepared to admit that it is anything more than a sisterly liking:

"Enfin, si j'avais un frère, je désirerais qu'il fût tel que M. de Valmont se montre ici. 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." (1)

Her reasons for performing good works are shown to be suspect when, after Valmont has carefully arranged a show of beneficence towards the villagers for her benefit, she professes that he must be redeemable - her vanity will not allow her to believe that such an act could be performed by a profoundly wicked man:

"Quoi! les méchants partageraient-ils avec les bons le plaisir sacré de la bienfaisance?"

This use of the word "plaisir" clearly shows into which channels her sensuality is normally directed. She concludes that Valmont has merely been unfortunate enough to fall into bad company, from which, she implies, she can win him back:

"M. de Valmont n'est peut-être qu'un exemple de plus du danger des liaisons."

This remark, in the mouth of Mme de Tourvel, sets off the title of the work in all its irony. She adds, "Je m'arrête à cette idée qui me plaît." (2) In other words, like Cécile, she will believe only what she wishes to believe.

Another form taken by vanity in the Présidente is that of self-justification, the belief that her own command of words and ideas is great enough to convince Valmont, just as Cécile equally vainly (in both senses of the word) believes that

1. XI, 56-7.
2. XXII, 74.

her eloquence can win over Mme de Merteuil. It is this vanity of self-justification which dictates her first letter to Valmont, together with "l'idée de me voir confondue avec les femmes que vous méprisez." (1) Once she has been foolish enough to enter into correspondence with Valmont her resistance crumbles rapidly, and we find the desire to have the last word, to justify herself, at the root of this decay. Even in this first letter she sees that she should have taken Mme de Volanges's advice and avoided him (2), but it is four days before she actually does anything about this. She decides to send him away; "au moins," she says, "j'y ferai mon possible". Her vanity plays a part even here:

"Je ne serai pas même fâchée de le tenter; et d'avoir une occasion de juger si, comme il le dit souvent, les femmes vraiment honnêtes n'ont jamais eu, n'auront jamais à se plaindre de ses procédés. S'il part comme je le désire, ce sera en effet par égard pour moi..." (3)

She is, in the event, weak enough to ask for his departure as a "grâce." (4)

We soon find her once again referring to the idea that Valmont must not confuse her with ordinary women, and this time in a letter to the Vicomte himself. The order in which she places her reasons for requesting his departure is significant, and shows that her main concern, like Mme de Volanges's, is for respect of social convention rather than for true morality. She is more upset by the means (5) employed to get the "Dijon" letter to her than by the fact:

1. XXVI, 82. There is a significant and ironical parallel between this and similar remarks of the Présidente and that of Mme de Merteuil resounding to Valmont her triumph over Prévan: "Ecoutez, et ne me confondez plus avec les autres femmes." (LXXXV, 214.)
2. XXVI, 83.
3. XXXVII, 103-4.
4. XL, 109.
5. And upset not because it came disguised as one from her husband, but because she had to read it in public with the resultant possibility of discovery.

"Le moyen surtout, j'ose dire peu délicat, dont vous vous êtes servi pour me faire parvenir la dernière (lettre), sans craindre au moins l'effet d'une surprise qui pouvait me compromettre... devrait donner lieu de ma part à des reproches aussi vifs que justement mérités.....

Avertie déjà.... par mes amis, j'ai négligé, j'ai même combattu leur avis 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 lieu de se plaindre de vous. Aujourd'hui que vous me traitez comme elles, que je ne peux plus l'ignorer, je dois au public, à mes amis, à moi-même, de suivre ce parti nécessaire (i.e. sending him away)." (1)

This letter again shows her eternal mania for self-justification.

However, Valmont's departure changes little. She is now prepared to talk of love with him by letter. Her passion for discussion leads her on, and here we have a fine piece of subtlety, the vanity of the woman shown in her denial of vanity:

"Je n'ai pas la vanité qu'on reproche à mon sexe; j'ai encore moins cette fausse modestie qui n'est qu'un raffinement de l'orgueil; et c'est de bien bonne foi que je vous dis ici, que je me connais bien peu de moyens de plaire: je les aurais tous, que je ne les croirais pas suffisants pour vous fixer. Vous demander de ne plus vous occuper de moi, ce n'est donc que de vous prier de faire aujourd'hui ce que déjà vous aviez fait, et ce qu'à coup sûr vous feriez encore dans peu de temps, quand même je vous demanderais le contraire." (2)

This is dictated by her knowledge that he is back in Paris, amongst the "ordinary" women with whom, she is determined, she must not be confused, and of whom she is so readily jealous.

Valmont's tactics are never predetermined. He has no hard and fast method of seduction which he employs irrespective of the personality of his victim. To the contrary, the whole brilliance of his method lies in its flexibility, in his power to adapt the tactics by which he attains his eternal goal to suit each individual prey. Sufficient evidence of this is Letter LII, in which he appeals

1. XLI, 110-11.
2. L, 130.

simultaneously to Mme de Tourvel's vanity and her love of argumentation:

"Vous ne croyez ni à mes promesses, ni à mes serments: eh bien! il me reste un garant à vous offrir, qu'au moins vous ne suspecterez pas; c'est vous même. Je ne vous demande que de vous interroger de bonne foi; si vous ne croyez pas à mon amour, si vous doutez un moment de régner seule sur mon âme, si vous n'êtes pas assurée d'avoir fixé ce coeur, en effet, jusqu'ici trop volage, je consens à porter la peine de cette erreur..... Permettez-moi, Madame, de vous prier de répondre positivement à cet article de ma Lettre." (1)

As a result of this we see the Présidente's defences crumble still further.

She still puts forward reasons for not giving way to the Vicomte, and the chief of these remains the same:

"Comme vous traitez les femmes que vous avez séduites! avec quel mépris vous en parlez!" (2),

but she is approaching the end of her resistance.

It is a pertinent question whether a really virtuous woman, one who possessed more than the outward trappings of virtue, would ever allow herself to reach this degree of intimacy with a man of Valmont's reputation. Mme de Tourvel's real fear is not dictated by virtue but by vanity, and it is only vanity which now stands between her and capitulation. At the end of this letter comes the anguished cry, "De quel droit venez-vous troubler ma tranquillité?" and her declaration that this is the last letter that Valmont will ever receive from her (3). The portrait of Mme de Tourvel is a brilliant analysis of a mediocre woman who, if left alone, would probably be perfectly faithful, physically, to her husband. As it is, however, she has been roused from her ^{peaceful} tranquil rut and is quite unable to cope with the situation. The inadequacies of her defences will be examined in more detail soon.

1. LII, 135.
2. LVI, 141.
3. LVI, 142.

Mme de Tourvel does write to Valmont again: her mania for self-justification brings this about. Her letter is divided into three clear points, a fact which underlines this fondness for playing with ideas to prove that she is right(1). She offers him friendship. This is one step nearer to the inevitable, and is as naïve a step as that of Cécile de Volanges in making a similar offer to Danceny(2). The Présidente's letter ends with an almost open declaration of love, her only hesitation arising from the fear of remorse.

In Letter LXXVIII, she gives in once again to her love of argument. Here again we see that what worries and alarms her most is not the liaison as such but the fear of public opinion, the fear of being found out(3). Finally she admits that she loves Valmont:

"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..."(4)

Her vanity is defeated and she is now waiting for the death-stroke. Her flight from the château(5) is but the last desperate twist and turn of the prey to escape the ever-nearing hounds. It serves only to delay the inevitable kill. As she says to Mme de Rosemonde during this temporary lull,

"Je n'ai sauvé que ma sagesse, la vertu s'est évanouie."(6)

This is probably the nearest she ever comes to honesty with herself, for throughout she has precious little real virtue, only social wisdom. In this same letter she condemns her own vanity, her presumption in thinking that she could control

1. LXVII, 162-3.
2. XXVIII, 86.
3. LXXXVIII, 187.
4. XC, 230.
5. C, 256.
6. CII, 262.

the situation(1).

Thus it may be thought that now at least she is on the way to true Christian virtue, the humility of the person who knows his own limitations. And indeed this might be so, were she left alone. But Valmont is not going to abandon his prey at this late stage. Mme de Tourvel is by no means redeemed ("Même en vous écrivant," she tells Mme de Rosemonde, "je m'égare encore dans des vœux criminels."(2)), and Valmont does not long leave her retreat undisturbed. There comes his final piece of Machiavellian manoeuvring in which he even succeeds in making an unwitting ally of Mme de Tourvel's confessor, and then the seduction. Mme de Tourvel's retreat is by no means as Christian as it might be. Before the actual physical seduction Valmont achieves his aim in ravishing her from the God whom she worships. When she hears of the Vicomte's supposed conversion she becomes jealous of God himself, a sentiment which Laoclos presents admirably, and without a shade of exaggeration:

"M. de Valmont ne s'occupe plus ni de moi ni de son amour; et ne veut plus que réparer, par une vie plus édifiante, les fautes ou plutôt les erreurs de sa jeunesse(3)";

and again,

"Je sais qu'il ne m'appartient pas de sonder les décrets de Dieu; mais tandis que je lui demande sans cesse, et toujours vainement, la force de vaincre mon malheureux amour, il la prodigue à celui qui ne la lui demandait pas, et me laisse, sans secours, entièrement livrée à ma faiblesse."(4)

In this letter she says of Valmont that "mes souffrances me seront chères si son bonheur en est le prix."(5) She means, of course, Valmont's eternal happiness, and it is a wonderful piece of irony that this is precisely the argument which she will use to justify her ultimate submission to the Vicomte, Her

1. CII, 263.
2. CII, 263.
3. CXXIV, 316.
4. CXXIV, 316-7.
5. CXXIV, 317.

reaction to the seduction is both complicated and revealing. She continues to have a sense of guilt(1), but no longer seems even prepared to try to do anything about it. Her self-abandon is complete and rapturous, and Valmont's love is henceforth her sole reason for life: "Valmont est heureux, et tout disparaît devant cette idée." (2) This is a repetition, with a difference, of her earlier declaration made when she thought that Valmont had turned to religion, with which this paragraph begins. The difference is a very important one: namely that God is no longer even the ostensible creator of her happiness. Valmont has replaced the divinity. Thus she speaks of consecrating herself to the Vicomte:

"Je l'aime avec idolâtrie, et bien moins qu'il ne le mérite." (3)

There is at the same time another important element in the subtle reaction of the Présidente to her seduction. It is true that in one sense God comes to be replaced by the Vicomte in her eyes, but it is equally true that in another sense it is the Présidente herself who acquires divine attributes. For a while she had thought that Valmont had turned to God, and as a result was jealous of her creator. This turns out not to be the case, and when she has given herself to the Vicomte she likes to think of herself as the sole cause of Valmont's happiness. Thus, by a complicated mental process, her vanity reaches its highest peak and she becomes God, the dispenser of happiness, in her own eyes, quite as much as Valmont or Mme de Merteuil ever sought to do, while at the same time she remains the worshipper of Valmont, so that the Vicomte has indeed, in two senses, ravished her from the Christian God.

After this complete abandonment of everything, the "Ce n'est pas ma faute"

1. CXXVIII, 333.
2. CXXXII, 341 My italics.

letter comes not only as a tremendous shock but as the supreme humiliation of her vanity. The last shred of meaning is torn from the life of this ardent but none too intelligent sentimentalist. Insanity is the only refuge.

After the above outline of the progress of vanity in Mme de Tourvel it is important to examine the weapons which she might, given the persona which she likes to project of herself, have been expected to take up and use in her own defence against the advances of Valmont. All these weapons, as we shall see, are in Mme de Tourvel's hands apparent and not real. They are morality, religion, and conjugal love.

Mme de Tourvel is, on the fact of it, a "virtuous" woman. Even if we ignore the first doubt which springs to mind, namely whether a truly virtuous woman would have in the first place allowed herself to become embroiled with a rake of Valmont's reputation, she does, after all, put up a reasonably lengthy fight. It is even probable that Laclos intended her to be considerably more virtuous than she actually is. He suffered accidentally the fate of Pygmalion. If the Présidente is intended to be the conventionally virtuous married woman of much literature of the erotic type, then she fails, as almost all these women fail, to be convincing. If she is intended, as seems likely, to be the pure embodiment of all the virtues, then she fails even more abysmally. But she fails here to achieve a different and a greater victory. She is above all a woman who is not what she thinks she is. Let us examine her morality. From the very outset she appeals to her conviction of her personal dignity, and her belief in the real value of the laws of society, which she has always accepted without question. We have already brought a considerable amount of

evidence to show this, but the stock is by no means exhausted:

"Non," she tells Valmont, "je n'oublie point, je n'oublierai jamais ce que je me dois, ce que je dois à des noeuds que j'ai formés, que je respecte et que je chéris."(1)

But this is empty rhetoric, and such a morality is helpless in these circumstances. In the words of Bernard Guyon,

"... les mots eux-mêmes qu'elle emploie ne nous avertissent-ils pas que nous sommes ici en présence de sentiments non personnels, d'une morale conventionnelle?"(2)

This language proves indeed, were any proof required now that we have seen her over-riding concern for the social forms in her reactions to the Vicomte's advances, that her morality is a mere routine acceptance of social convention, without personal conviction to back it up.

Personal conviction is again found wanting in her religion. There is no real faith behind her daily prayers, her pious conversations with old Mme de Rosemonde, her daily attendance at mass and her charitable works(3). On two occasions Mme de Tourvel does seek a refuge in God. The first of these comes immediately after Valmont's first declaration. They are disturbed in the salon, and the Présidente retires to her room.

"J'y allai," says Valmont, "mais la clef était en dedans. Je me gardai bien de frapper; c'eût été lui fournir l'occasion d'une résistance trop facile. J'eus l'heureuse et simple idée de tenter de voir à travers la serrure, et je vis en effet cette femme adorable à genoux, baignée de larmes, et priant avec ferveur."(4)

The other occasion is when for the first time she allows him into her room. Valmont has asked her to admit her feelings for him. The Vicomte once again des-

1. LXXVIII, 188.
2. B. Guyon, op. cit., p. 171.
3. IV, 41.
4. XXIII, 78.

cribes the scene:

"Ma belle amie (he is writing to Mme de Merteuil), les beaux yeux se sont en effet levés sur moi, la bouche céleste a même prononcé: 'Eh bien! oui, je...' Mais tout à coup le regard s'est éteint, la voix a manqué, et cette femme adorable est tombée dans mes bras. A peine avais-je eu le temps de l'y recevoir, que se dégageant avec une force convulsive, la vue égarée, et les mains élevées vers le Ciel.... 'Dieu... Ô mon Dieu, sauvez-moi,' s'est-elle écriée; et sur-le-champ, plus prompte que l'éclair, elle était à genoux à dix pas de moi." (1)

Much could be made of this last example. Certainly, it throws as much light upon the cynicism of the Vicomte as upon the faith of Mme de Tourvel, but nevertheless Valmont's comic view of the episode serves to indicate that there was less sincerity in the Présidente's action than she would have had him think.

These two cases are too isolated and too brief to allow us to take them as more than histrionic and sentimental effusions with little solid faith behind them. This sentimental aspect is important. Many novels of the eighteenth-century stress the sense of sentimental well-being to be derived from good works, and Valmont himself explicitly refers to it on the occasion of his own deliberate act of hypocritical charity:

"J'avouerai ma faiblesse; mes yeux se sont mouillés de larmes, et j'ai senti en moi un mouvement involontaire, mais délicieux. J'ai été étonné du plaisir qu'on éprouve en faisant le bien; et je serais tenté de croire que ce que nous appelons les gens vertueux, n'ont pas tant de mérite qu'on se plaît à nous le dire." (2)

These strictures might be applied not only to Mme de Tourvel's charity (after all, she is, as we have seen, jealous of the pleasure Valmont gets from helping the villagers), but to her religion as a whole. There is no sign of real substance about either. Valmont seeks his pleasure one way. Mme de Tourvel, initially, seeks hers another way. The ease with which she ultimately substitutes Valmont

1. XCIX, 253-4.
2. XXI, 72.

for God in her life is a token of their basic similarity.

Conjugal love is even more difficult to find in Mme de Tourvel than well-grounded religious conviction. We have already said that we know less about the Président de Tourvel than about any other person mentioned in Les Liaisons. As Guyon puts it,

"Non seulement il est absent matériellement - peu importe après tout - mais il l'est spirituellement." (1)

All we are told about M. de Tourvel is contained in Valmont's acid description of the Président's letter to his wife as a

"mélange indigeste de détails de procès et de tirades d'amour conjugal." (2)

This at least implies some genuine affection on the part of the Président. There is, moreover, no evidence of a forced marriage, and this makes it all the more important that there is no sign of a reciprocal affection in the Présidente.

We have already mentioned her reference to

"des noeuds que je respecte et que je chéris."

This is not the language of a woman really in love. It is perhaps arguable that love is not absolutely essential to a lasting, harmonious marriage. Be that as it may, at no time does Mme de Tourvel seek to join her husband or to have him recalled from Dijon as a protection against Valmont. If she takes offence when Valmont gets a letter to her by making it purport to be one from her husband, this is not at all because she considers this an intrusion into the sanctity of marriage, but simply because such a letter, received in the salon of Mme de Rosemonde's chateau, might cause her publicly to give herself away by her reaction.

1. B. Guyon, op. cit., p. 171.
2. XLIV, 119.

A capital point is that, after her defeat, the idea of the suffering she will cause her husband never even occurs to her. She is basically selfish. Her husband is the least of the obstacles which Valmont has to overcome.

Vanity, then, expresses itself in all the characters of Les Liaisons dangereuses. An important point is that the unsavoury picture of human nature presented by the novel contains no simple antithesis between good characters and evil characters. Valmont and Mme de Merteuil are not vice personified; nor is Mme de Tourvel virtue personified. We have just shown that Mme de Tourvel, who is an artistic creation of the highest order, is in fact far from the tiresome, conventional dévoté which she may appear to be at first reading. Similarly, Valmont occasionally shows a hint of genuine feeling for the Présidente, and is continually mocked by Mme de Merteuil on this score. Even she, although she is very near to being a personification of vice, and therefore a more staggering, if less convincing, character than Valmont, shows just a suggestion of nostalgia for their earlier liaison, for something more permanent and more sincere.

Vanity presupposes a sense of one's own superiority over one's fellows, and a continual assertion of this: "Les sots sont ici-bas pour nos menus plaisirs". Thus, a desire for domination is the theme of the novel, a desire to be what Roger Vailland, Laclos's latter-day disciple, calls in the title of his novel, one of Les Souverains. This desire for domination is obvious in Mme de Merteuil and Valmont. It exists too in Mme de Volanges's desire

to run the lives of those around her. It exists even in Mme de Rosemonde, in the manner in which she projects herself into the battle between Valmont and the Présidente de Tourvel in an endeavour to recapture the past and vicariously to re-live the triumphs of her youth. The desire for domination exists too, in a naïvely tragi-comic way, in Cécile, who is foolish enough to think that she can twist Mme de Merteuil round her finger, and in Danceny's desire to cut a figure in the world. Finally, it exists in Mme de Tourvel's desire to convert the most celebrated of all the rakes, and then in her determination that, come what may, he shall not confuse her with the other women he has had.

The book, basically, is not about love, not even about sex, nor even about the abuse of sex. Primarily it is about vanity in its various forms, although this vanity in almost all the characters finds its expression through sex. The aim of Valmont and Mme de Merteuil is to satisfy their own vanity and desire for domination not only by displays of technical skill (Mme de Merteuil and Prévau; Valmont, Vressac and the Comtesse), but also by obliging the naïve and "virtuous", Cécile, Danceny and Mme de Tourvel, to admit to the existence within them of a desire for sexual gratification. In so doing they destroy them as social human beings and make them things, marionnettes. It is this desire for domination - intellectual domination expressed through sex - which, as we have said, is the cause of the final clash between Mme de Merteuil and Valmont. Each is trying to oblige the other to admit to thingness, and neither will do so. The result is the downfall of them both in the physical sense? The fact that one is disfigured

and the other dies is no real answer to the problem they pose, and one feels that the instinct of the writer of the Vrais Mémoires de Cécile de Volanges in making Mme de Merteuil rise from the ashes is the right interpretation of the footnote with which Laclos closes the novel.

It is true that Mme de Tourvel meets her downfall too. But, if one must bring moral questions into aesthetic matters(1), then it should be pointed out that even this is no reason for condemning Les Liaisons dangereuses as an immoral book for, as we have shown, Mme de Tourvel is not Virtue.

André Maurois has described Les Liaisons as a book "qui nous met en garde contre le monde tel qu'il est"(2). Something will be said of Laclos as a novelist of manners in the next chapter. How far can it be said, however, that Laclos catches something not only of the behaviour of man in his own time, but something also which the twentieth-century reader, say, can recognise as having validity in his situation? Certainly Laclos makes us see in his characters elements of humanity which are immutable, but some of his creations in fact seem to cease almost to be characters as such and to become grotesque monsters. Mme de Merteuil (and to a lesser degree Valmont) is a particular case in point.

As an intellectual exercise the book is exciting and stimulating, but the excitement and the stimulation are of the kind which one derives from solving crossword puzzles when one is familiar with the way in which the man who sets them is likely to think. One knows the type of clues to expect.

1. The Lady Chatterley's Lover case has proved, if proof were needed, that far too many people are still given to this pastime.

2. Maurois, Sur les Liaisons dangereuses..., Paris, 1946, p. 23.

Similarly with Laclos one knows the kind of motives which govern the actions of his characters, and one derives intellectual enjoyment from the remorseless logic with which these motives are put into action and developed. The exaggeration of this single-mindedness is such, however, as to make one doubt its strict relevance to general experience of human life. Laclos, then, exaggerates in one direction, much as the sentimental novels of the eighteenth century exaggerate in another direction. This having been said, it must be re-emphasised that Les Liaisons exercises a remarkable hypnotic power over the reader, whose disbelief is perfectly willingly suspended as he reads.

The picture, from the moral point of view, is certainly black. Mme de Merteuil's description of Cécile ("Cela n'a ni caractère ni principes") is perfectly accurate, and not even in Mme de Tourvel do Mme de Merteuil and Valmont come across a person with a strong and sincerely accepted code of principles with which to oppose them. Laclos prefaces his novel with a remark to the effect that all women who admit into their society a man without principles must inevitably become his victim. He should have said "all women without principles". One still likes to believe, despite Laclos, that there are women who (particularly when forewarned as the Présidente is by Valmont's reputation) have principles strong enough either to avoid mixing with such men or, better still, to meet them in society without necessarily being led into adultery. Mme de Tourvel's faults were in her vanity and, despite her ostentation, her lack of firm principles.

Viewed in this light, the book is of high, if not of the very highest

value. It is the story of the downfall of a woman who is not what she seems to others or to herself. This means, of course, that Valmont's triumph over her is not of the high worth which he thought, for he was mistaken in her qualities when he wrote to Mme de Merteuil,

"Vous connaissez la Présidente de Tourvel, sa dévotion, son amour conjugal, ses principes austères. Voilà ce que j'attaque; voilà l'ennemi digne de moi; voilà le but où je prétends atteindre..."(1)

The Vicomte may have set out to prove that even the greatest virtue could be corrupted, but all he succeeds in proving is that Mme de Tourvel is not the true embodiment of virtue. Mme de Tourvel is an artistic creation of the highest order, and were the book to stand or fall upon the success with which she is created it would indeed be a masterpiece. But this is not where the weakness of the novel lies.

Rakes certainly exist, and presumably always will. Here, however, we are called upon to accept one in partnership with a woman so supreme in vice as Mme de Merteuil, forming what Giraudoux calls "le couple, le mariage du mal"(2). Intellectually, aesthetically, whilst we are actually reading the book, we do accept them. But when the moment of willing suspension of disbelief is over and one looks back at them, this becomes far more difficult. Both these characters are, as we have already pointed out, nearer to convention than Mme de Tourvel, who can stand in her own right. They are part of the rules of the game, but they remain a game, no matter how stimulating for the intellect that game may be.

1. IV, 41.

2. J. Giraudoux, Littérature, Paris, 1941, p. 85.

5. "LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES" AS A NOVEL OF MANNERS AND AS A REVOLUTIONARY TRACT

We have seen that, whatever the purpose behind the picture of human society drawn by Laclos in Les Liaisons dangereuses, there can be no doubt that it is far from a pleasant one. The aim of the first part of the present chapter is to attempt to determine to what extent this picture is a valid reflection of French society about the time when Laclos was writing, a few years before the great upheaval of the French Revolution. In other words, was the eighteenth century in France as corrupt as the society presented by Laclos, or is the latter purely or principally a figment of the novelist's imagination?

We are justified in going back a little in time before the actual publication of Les Liaisons in our endeavour to discover how far this work reflects the manners of eighteenth-century French society, and this we shall do, although there is also a claim that Les Liaisons reflects exactly contemporary society (1). Our enquiry therefore must rest on two main lines of approach. We must determine to what degree it is possible to see Laclos's novel as a roman à clef and, on a wider plane, irrespectively of whether or not Laclos puts certain disguised but identifiable historical figures into action, we must seek to discover to what degree Les Liaisons dangereuses is acceptable as a general reflection of the state of French society at this time.

Contemporary reactions are important in connection with both approaches suggested in the last paragraph. We have already seen the success with

1. Or a portion of it. Almost exclusively, Laclos is concerned with the aristocracy.

which the novel met. Two thousand copies were sold in less than a month. This success was doubtless to some degree simply a succès de scandale. It is at least arguable that this reception, not only in France but also in England(1) amounts to a tacit recognition that Laclos has hit home, and yet the many adverse reactions to his work need mean nothing more precise, in terms of eighteenth-century morals, than a more or less conscious realisation, such as we have already suggested, that Laclos had penetrated to something within all men, something which they prefer to keep hidden, but which is part of universal human nature and is the particular characteristic of no one historical period. However true this may be of the critics, it remains a fact that there was a long tradition amongst the public of seeking the identity of the characters of works of fiction in real life. Laclos himself denied that his novel was a roman à clef(2), although he always maintained that it had its roots in real life. The ambivalent nature of public reaction, on the one hand denying the possibility of the existence of such characters as he portrays, on the other indignant that they are portrayed whilst simultaneously attempting to identify them, is remarked upon by Laclos himself in a letter to Mme Riccoboni:

"Mais, poursuit-on, vous créez des monstres pour les combattre; de telles femmes n'existent point. Supposons-le, j'y consens: alors, pourquoi tant de rumeur? Quand Don Quichotte s'arma pour aller combattre les moulins à vent, quelqu'un s'avisa-t-il d'en prendre la défense? On le plaignit, on ne l'accusa point."(3)

1. cf. Monthly Review, LXXI, August 1784, p. 149, quoted supra pp. 343-4.
2. Although Tilly's evidence suggests the opposite: cf. infra.
3. Second letter to Mme Riccoboni, O.C., p. 714.

All this amounts to, of course, is a claim for general psychological truth rather than accuracy in portraying a particular individual in the character of Mme de Merteuil, and Laclos becomes even more precise on this point in the same letter:

"On insiste et l'on me demande, Mme de M. a-t-elle jamais existé? Je l'ignore. Je n'ai point prétendu faire un libelle, mais quand Molière peignit le Tartuffe, existait-il un homme, qui, sous le manteau de la religion, eût entrepris de séduire la mère dont il épousait la fille, de brouiller le fils avec le père, d'enlever à celui-ci sa fortune et de finir par se rendre le délateur de sa victime pour échapper à ses réclamations? non sans doute, cet homme n'existait pas; mais vingt, mais cent hypocrites avaient commis séparément de semblables horreurs: Molière les réunit sur un seul d'entre eux et le livra à l'indignation publique.....

..... Mme de M. n'est pas plus une Française qu'une femme de tout autre pays. Partout où il naîtra une femme avec des sens actifs et un coeur incapable d'amour, quelque esprit et une âme vile, qui sera méchante, et dont la méchanceté aura de la profondeur sans énergie, là existera Mme de M....."(1)

Here we have a direct profession by Laclos of a composite, Classical technique in the creation of character, an attempt to transcend the particular in order to arrive at the universal. It is worth noting here that even in the possibly apocryphal conversation with Tilly, to which closer reference will shortly be made, Laclos implies that there may be at least two real-life ingredients in Mme de Merteuil, the mistress of the man "qui porte un nom célèbre dans les sciences" and the equally mysterious "marquise de L.T.D.P.M."

Despite Laclos's disclaimer, however, controversy raged around the question of whether his characters were imitated from life. The critics were divided as to Laclos's accuracy. Some claimed that such a character as Mme de Merteuil was quite impossible. Others took a very different view, although this is not to say that they necessarily claimed to recognise specific people of the day in

1. *ibid.*, pp. 714-5. My italics.

the novel. Mme Riccoboni, as we have already seen, hastened to the defence of her sex, remarking,

"On n'a pas besoin de se mettre en garde contre des caractères qui ne peuvent exister."(1)

In that case it might not be unreasonable to ask why Mme Riccoboni thought fit to write so energetically in the defence of the honour of Frenchwomen, a point raised by Laclos himself in his remark about Don Quixote. He had remarked in an earlier letter to Mme Riccoboni,

"M. de L. commence par féliciter Mme R. de ne pas croire à l'existence des femmes méchantes et dépravées; pour lui, éclairé par une expérience plus malheureuse, il assure avec chagrin, mais avec sincérité, qu'il ne pourrait effacer aucun des traits qu'il a rassemblés dans la personne de Mme de M. sans mentir à sa conscience, sans taire au moins une partie de ce qu'il a vu."(2)

This remark must, of course, be taken in conjunction with his comparison of Molière's technique in creating Tartuffe and his own in creating the Marquise. He is not claiming here that he can point to an individual model for his character. Mme Riccoboni's reaction to this was to content herself with the icy comment,

"Si, comme vous l'assurez, ce caractère affreux existe, je m'applaudis d'avoir passé mes jours dans un petit cercle, et je plains ceux qui étendent assez leurs connaissances pour se rencontrer avec de pareils monstres."(3)

This comment shows a misunderstanding of Laclos's point. It is impossible to determine how far this misunderstanding is intentional.

By contrast, Grimm's successor Meister, in the Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique(4) says that such a society as Laclos depicts is not

1. Laclos, first letter to Mme Riccoboni, O.C., p. 711.
2. Second letter to Laclos, O.C., p. 713.
3. Paris, 1880, XIII, 108 (O.C., 723)
4. La Harpe, Corr. litt., Lettre CLIII, in Oeuvres, Paris, 1820, XI, 473 (O.C. 727)

so difficult to find:

"Il n'y a pas d'ouvrage en effet, sans en excepter ceux de Crébillon et de tous ses imitateurs, où le désordre des principes et des mœurs de ce qu'on appelle la bonne compagnie et de ce qu'on ne peut guère se dispenser d'appeler ainsi, soit peint avec plus de naturel, de hardiesse et d'esprit: on ne s'étonnera donc point que peu de nouveautés aient été recues avec autant d'empressement."

La Harpe, on the other hand, denies the contention that the picture painted by Laclos is representative of a social field as wide even as that suggested in the Correspondance:

"Un des plus grands défauts de ces sortes de romans, c'est de donner pour les mœurs du siècle (c'est ainsi que l'auteur s'exprime dans son épigraphe), ce qui n'est au fond que l'histoire d'une vingtaine de fats et de catins qui se croient une grande supériorité d'esprit pour avoir érigé le libertinage en principe, et fait une science de la dépravation."(1)

Even so, La Harpe does recognise that such people existed at the time. In a way, although in more measured and reasonable tones, D'Allonville goes further when he writes:

"Parmi tous les ouvrages de ce genre, je n'en excepte qu'un seul, le plus dangereux peut-être de tous, mais aussi le plus vrai: c'est le trop libre roman de Laclos. Il ne peint à la vérité qu'une société particulière, mais les traits en sont tracés d'après nature, et il n'est personne qui ne puisse citer plusieurs des originaux qui les lui ont fournis. Les Liaisons dangereuses n'offrent cependant pas autre chose qu'une galerie bien disposée de portraits extrêmement ressemblants, et prendre ces physionomies pour un type commun deviendrait une grossière erreur."(2)

Here is encouragement indeed for those who seek to discover a "key" to the novel. More than one attempt has been made in this direction, and they must be examined.

Before we go on to make this examination, however, it should be stated quite clearly that the discovery of an irrefutable key to the characters would by no means be the last word on them. The pure roman à clef, like the pure novel of

1. La Harpe. Corr. litt., Lettre CLIII, in Oeuvres, Paris, 1820, XI, 473 (O.C. 727)
2. D'Allonville, Mémoires secrets de 1770 à 1830, 6 vols., Paris, 1838-45, I, 368-721

manners, is bound to be ephemeral, partaking to a considerable degree of the nature of the gossip-column. Indeed, it is surely true that a novel which lends itself in detail to such an approach is by that very fact demonstrating a weakness in its composition as a work of art. The term "roman à clef", like that of "novel of manners", is merely a convenient label, for it is impossible to divide the novel into absolutely watertight compartments. Whether or not it is possible to attach either of these labels to Les Liaisons, the principal value of the work lies elsewhere, as we have tried to show. F.C. Green has said of the novel of manners, and his remark can be equally applied in a sense to the roman à clef, that its "caractère essentiel.... est.... sa fidélité à la vie réelle... Il ne faut pas y chercher... une analyse des passions ou des sentiments."(1) As we have said, it is hopelessly artificial to attempt to divide the novel into watertight compartments, and it is hoped that the previous chapter has gone some way towards showing that Les Liaisons does in fact present us with "une analyse psychologique des passions (et) des sentiments", and a penetrating one at that.

The attempt by society to create a key to such novels as Les Liaisons dangereuses is perfectly understandable. Quite apart from the pleasure to be gained from malicious gossip, such a key acts as an effective defence for society itself which thus, in the words of Henri de Régnier(2),

"réduit au particulier ce qui risquait d'être général. Elle diminue la portée du tableau en y dénonçant des ressemblances personnelles, et préfère, au lieu qu'il y ait des Valmont, qu'il n'y ait tout au plus qu'un M. de Valmont."

1. F.C. Green, La Peinture des Mœurs de la Bonne Société dans le Roman Français de 1715 à 1761, Paris, 1924, p. 13.
2. H. de Régnier, Portraits et Souvenirs, Paris, 1913, p. 13.

Furthermore, when society is not unanimous, when there are several keys (as is the case with Les Liaisons), this tactic may well have a boomerang effect. Society, it may be argued, in pointing to more than one possible list of originals, is tacitly acknowledging that the author has not merely, as Laclos puts it, "prétendu faire un libelle", but that he has gone further than this and laid bare fundamental human nature.

The first and most important of the keys to Les Liaisons is offered by Tilly(1). This key is the nearest in time to the publication of the novel and the one which, on the surface at any rate, has the greatest claim to serious consideration, since Tilly claims the authority of Laclos himself. We have already expressed certain reservations concerning the advisability of accepting Tilly's evidence at face value, but it is necessary briefly to outline the information which he professes to have obtained from Laclos in London(2).

1. Tilly, Mémoires, I, 318-27.
2. Even if we accept that the conversation actually took place, about ten years before Tilly wrote his Mémoires, it should be noted that Tilly admits that he had to harry Laclos before he could get any information out of him at all: "enfin l'ennui me le livra." (I, 321) There is even a certain amount of evidence which might indicate that Laclos was putting on an act: Tilly notes that "ces expressions un peu oratoires (which he puts into italics) me frappèrent d'autant plus que sa conversation froide et méthodique n'était nullement de cette couleur-là." (I, 322, note) It should be remembered that after 1782 Laclos (wrongly, as we have tried to show) was often confused with Valmont, and seen as a Machiavelli. One wonders whether here he may not be deliberately trying to live up to Tilly's expectations, the more so as what he is alleged to have said conflicts with his earlier letters to Mme Riccoboni. Once again, "foenum habet in cornu, longe fuge".

According to Tilly, "le mystère de (ce) livre" amounts to the following:

1) Valmont is based on one of Laclos's fellow-officers at the time he was working on the Ile de Ré, near La Rochelle: "un de mes camarades qui porte un nom célèbre dans les sciences... un homme spécialement né pour les femmes et pour les perfidies dans lesquelles elles sont maîtresses passées: en un mot, si c'eût été un homme de cour, il aurait eu la réputation de Lovelace, et aurait été de meilleure compagnie que lui. Il m'avait pris pour son confident; je riais de ses espiègleries et l'aidais quelquefois de mes conseils."

2) As for Mme de Merteuil, according to Tilly, Laclos told him that this same comrade-in-arms had a mistress "qui valait bien Mme de Merteuil", but added "mais c'est à Grenoble que je vis l'original dont la mienne n'est qu'une faible copie, une marquise de L.T.D.P.M., dont toute la ville racontait des traits dignes des jours des Impératrices Romaines les plus insatiables. Je pris des notes et je me promis bien de les réaliser en temps et lieu."

3) Laclos is alleged to have told Tilly that "l'histoire de Prévan était arrivée il y a longtemps à M. de Rochech..., officier supérieur des mousquetaires: il en fut déshonoré; on en rirait à présent."

In addition to all this, Tilly tells us that Laclos confessed, "j'avais par devers moi quelques petites historiettes de ma jeunesse, qui étaient assez piquantes." Thus we are to believe that this is the part of Les Liaisons which is based on real life. "J'inventai le reste," Laclos is supposed to have said, "le caractère de Mme de Tourvel surtout, qui n'est pas commun."

Let us begin with Mme de Merteuil, and the "marquise de L.T.D.P.M.", who is said to have been so notorious in Grenoble, where Laclos was stationed

between 1769 and 1775. The temptation to interpret these letters as "de la Tour du Pin-Montauban", one of the oldest families in Dauphiné, is almost irresistible. Things are complicated by the fact that, as Georges Cucuel points out in his study on La Vie de Société dans le Dauphinois au dix-huitième Siècle(1), Laclos may have met two marquises of this name during his stay there.

The first of these is Françoise-Victoire d'Hugues, who was born on the 7th February, 1727, and married René-Louis de la Tour du Pin, marquis de Montauban (1713-1767) in 1747. There is no evidence whatsoever that she was a Messalina. Moreover, although she was, by the time Laclos may have known her, a widow like Mme de Merteuil, she was also over forty years old and the mother of nine children - all of which suggests that she is an unlikely candidate for the role of Laclos's inspiration for Mme de Merteuil.

However, whilst Laclos was in Grenoble, the city possessed a second Marquise de Montauban, the daughter-in-law of the one described above. At first sight she may appear a more promising candidate, for she was none other than Louise-Françoise-Alexandrine de Tencin, great niece of the notorious Mme de Tencin, the mother of D'Alembert. She was born in 1751, and on the 13th February 1771 married Armand-François, Marquis de Montauban (1750-1810), by whom she had two sons, born in 1772 and 1773. Here again, however, there is no evidence to suggest a loose life, unless it be that in 1772, when Laclos may have known her, her husband fought a duel with a M. de Sayve, who was an

1. in Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France, 42e année, pp. 344-374 (The section Autour des 'Liaisons dangereuses' occupies pp. 354-366.

officer in the dragoons, and that there was at the time a hint that she had been involved in another affair with a M. de Montgay(1). This is far too tenuous for us to be able to say that the lady was even one of the several models upon whom Laclos insists in his correspondence with Mme Riccoboni he based the character of Mme de Merteuil. The marquise died in 1787. There is one more important claimant for the position of model for Mme de Merteuil, but for reasons of convenience she will be considered separately later on.

There are even more possibilities for the original of Valmont whom Laclos, according to Tilly, described as "un de mes camarades, qui porte un nom célèbre dans les sciences." Cucuel suggests two possibilities here. The first is Gaspard Monge (1746-1818), the inventor of descriptive geometry, who in 1792 was Ministre de la Marine, and with whom Laclos certainly had contacts(2). Monge, who was one of the founders of the École Polytechnique, was still very much alive at the time of Laclos's supposed conversation with Tilly, a fact which could account for the discretion of the reference. Cucuel's second suggestion is another mathematician, Jean-Baptiste Meusnier de La Place (1754-1793), a colleague of Lavoisier who, like Laclos, was a general, and who was killed at the siege of Mainz. Fernand Drujon(3) notes, and discounts, the unlikely suggestion that the relationship between Mme de Merteuil(4) and Valmont was based on that between Mme de Souza, the wife of the Portuguese ambassador at the French Court, and the Chevalier de Choiseul. Another pos-

1. Cucuel, op. cit., & R. Peter, La Dame aux Repentirs, Paris, 1939, p. 11.
2. cf. supra Part I.
3. F. Drujon, Les Livres à Clef... Étude de Bibliographie critique et analytique, Paris, 1885, I, cols. 546-7.
4. Like the Bibliographie Gay, Drujon's book consistently refers to Mme de Verteuil, perhaps an indication that the book was more talked about than read in the 19th.

sibility is that mentioned by René Peter(1), namely that Valmont was based upon the brother of Dieudonné Gratel de Dolomieu (1750-1801), a celebrated geologist whom we know went on Napoleon's Egyptian campaign. Laclos was certainly a friend of the Dolomieu family (which, incidentally, came from Dolomieu in Dauphiné), and it was as a result of a meeting with the geologist in Milan in 1801(2) that he was led to toy with the idea of writing a new novel to demonstrate that "il n'existe de bonheur que dans la famille."

This is enough for René Peter to conclude,

"La destinée offre de ces ironies: le frère de celui qui avait inspiré à Laclos un héros de l'ancien libertinage projetait de composer avec ce même Laclos une apologie des nouvelles vertus domestiques."(3)

Thus, for Peter, everything is neat and tidy. This certainly is a tempting picture, but it must be stated that Peter's romanticised work is not to be taken too seriously(4), and, as is the case with the other attempted identifications, there is not a scrap of real evidence to support it, although the geologist's brother was in the army as a captain of dragoons - at Le Mans (5).

The only other character for whom an original is hinted at in Tilly's account is Prévan. Here, a "M. de Rochech..., officier supérieur des mousquetaires" is suggested, and Cucuel puts forward the name Rochechouart to fill the bill. Mistler, however, points out that nowhere is there a mention of a senior officer of musketeers of this name(6). Mistler also dismisses the

1. op. cit., pp. 51 & 133-4.

2. Lettres inédites de Laclos, pp. 238-9.

3. René Peter, op. cit., p. 134.

4. For example, Peter quotes works like La Faction d'Orléans mieux dévoilée as authoritative accounts of the relationship between Orléans and Laclos. He even suggests that the projected new novel may have been the result of the reported conversation between Laclos and Stendhal. This, on many counts, is extremely unlikely.

5. Mistler, in L.D., Monaco, 1948, xv.

6. ibid.

L.I./

alternative suggestion that Prévan was François-Horace de Barral de Rochechinard, who was born at Grenoble in 1743 and died in 1829. In 1758 he was in the mousquetaires gris, but in 1759 we find him in the dragoons, whilst in 1763 he obtained a company in the Régiment de Royal-Navarre cavalerie. In 1788 he became a colonel and in 1791 a maréchal de camp. Subsequently he emigrated, returning after the 18 Brumaire, when he was well-received under the Consulate and the Empire, becoming a baron in 1809.(1) However, as Mistler points out, there is no trace of any anecdote which shows any parallel between his life and that of Laclos's Prévan. Mistler arrives at the conclusion that in these circumstances,

"on accordera sans doute que cette identification ne présente d'intérêt que pour les amateurs de mots croisés."(2)

More than one key was suggested at the time of publication(3). Some names belonged to Parisian society and others to that of Grenoble, whilst Charles Nodier said that in his youth every French garrison town of any size boasted supposed originals for Laclos's characters(4). Not everyone sought to avoid this rather doubtful distinction: Alexandre d'Arblay went out of his way in his attempt to be recognised as the original of Laclos's Danceny. The Avertissement de l'Éditeur to his Opuscules du Ch^{er} D'Anceny, ou anecdotes en vers, recueillies et publiées par M. d'A---(5), announces that "tout le monde sait quel a été son début dans le monde...", and an explanatory footnote says, "Voyez Les Liaisons dangereuses."

1. Dictionnaire de biographie française, 1951, Vol. V. Another possibility is Pierre-François-Paulin de Barral (1745-1822), who joined the musketeers in 1765 and became a colonel of grenadiers. He married twice, once to the notorious Zoé de Mondreville, the intimate of Pauline Borghese and the model for La Vénus victorieuse.
2. Mistler, loc. cit.
3. cf. Dard, p. 49.
4. Ch. Nodier, in Bulletin du bibliophile, Oct., 1834; Dard, p. 49.
5. Metz, 1787, pp. v-vi.

But if Tilly's evidence is genuine - and this is by no means certain - at least one of the characters stems from Grenoble, and therefore that town has a special claim upon our attention. The Prince de Ligne is explicit on this point:

"... une partie de ces caractères et aventures s'est trouvée dans une société de Grenoble que je connois." (1)

The Prince de Ligne does not go into details. But J. G. Dubois-Fontanelle, the young Henri Beyle's literature teacher, said of the roués, in a lecture given at the École Centrale in Grenoble,

"Le roman où ces sortes de caracteres ont été traités avec le plus de profondeur est sans contredit celui des Liaisons dangereuses, qu'on peut regarder comme le meilleur qui ait été fait depuis longtemps. Si les mœurs qu'on y peint ne sont pas bonnes, elles ont été, malheureusement, celles de la classe relevée et polie que l'usage étoit d'appeler la bonne compagnie. Les peintures quoique exagérées, si celles-ci le sont en effet, n'en sont pas quelquefois moins fidèles." (2)

These remarks, spoken in Grenoble, bring us to the evidence of Henri Beyle himself.

Stendhal has a good deal to say on the question of the sources of the characters of Laclos's novel. He claims that the model for Mme de Merteuil was a certain Christine-Marie-Félicité de Montmaur (3), who was, incidentally, not a marquise but a baronne. In her old age, we are told, this lady took to the young Beyle, and fed him on "noix confites" (4). According to Stendhal, he had often heard the ageing beaux of Grenoble dwell on the adventures of Mme de Montmaur (5). She was born in 1739, and was therefore about forty years of

1. Prince de Ligne, Oeuvres choisies, Genève, 1809, 2 vols., II, 305.
2. J.G. Dubois-Fontanelle, Cours de Belles-Lettres, Paris, 1813, 4 vols., IV, 232-3
3. Montmaur, and not Stendhal's Montmore, is the correct spelling (cf. H. Martin-eau, Petit Dictionnaire Stendhalien, Paris, Le Divan, 1948, p. 343)
4. Vie de Henry Brulard, Divan, Paris, 1927, I, 86 & II, 217-8.
5. ibid., I, 86-7.

age when Laclos may have known her. Her age at that date, however, does not necessarily rule her out, although it does mean that she was older than the Marquise de Merteuil in the novel. She was a widow at the time, her husband, Henri d'Agoult, baron de Montmaur, having died in 1772.

Stendhal further claims to have seen, when visiting the Marquis Berio in Naples, a manuscript by Laclos which consisted of a chronicle of the scandals of the day, and which may have been a preparatory notebook for Les Liaisons(1). Unfortunately there is no other reference to this mysterious manuscript (although Cucuel mentions a story that an artillery officer at Lyons received a copy of Les Liaisons dangereuses with the real names of the characters written in the margin(2)), and it is also a fact that Stendhal's references to Laclos are singularly confused. This is particularly true of his use of dates. In Souvenirs d'Egotisme, he claims to have met Laclos in Milan. Martineau shows that this meeting could only have taken place during the second fortnight of September, 1800, or the second week of April, 1801(3). This rather limits things, and matters are further confused by a note in De l'Amour(4) in which Stendhal situates the meeting in Naples. This contradiction in itself raises doubts concerning the authenticity of Stendhal's claim to have met Laclos, especially since, as both Martineau and Mistler point out(5), Stendhal could never have met the author of Les Liaisons in Naples since he did not set foot in that city until 1811, when, of course, Laclos had long been dead. Moreover, when Stendhal wrote his Journal in 1811, he began chapter XIV with an

1. De l'Amour, Divan, 1827, II, 159.
2. Cucuel, op. cit., cf. Interméd. des Chercheurs, III, 1868, p. 166.
3. Divan, 1927, 131 & note, p. 398; cf. also Martineau, Petit Dict., 282-3.
4. Divan, II, 75, note: "Il faut avoir entendu parler l'aimable général Laclos, Naples, 1802".
5. Martineau, op. cit., p. 283 & Mistler, Les Liaisons, Monaco, 1948, p. xviii

analysis of his life in Milan after the battle of Marengo, (14 June 1800), and here he says,

"Je n'avais jamais vu le monde, pas le plus petit bout mais en revanche j'avais senti tous les romans possibles, et entre autres l'Héloïse; je crois que dans ce temps j'avais lu les Liaisons dangereuses et j'y cherchais des émotions."(1)

That is all he has to say of Laclos and his novel in connection with Milan.

There is no mention here of a meeting in a box at La Scala as there is in

Souvenirs d'Egotisme: the general's name is not even mentioned. Beyle was certainly capable of romanticising himself to the greater glory of Stendhal, and one is inclined to say with Mistler,

"Nous espérons qu'on ne nous accusera pas de sceptisme systématique si nous disons que la rencontre d'Henri Beyle et de Laclos a dû avoir lieu dans l'imagination de Stendhal, entre 1811 et 1832!"(2)

If this is so, may not the unsubstantiated stories about Mme de Montmaur(3) and the mysterious manuscript similarly be discounted for all practical purposes?(4) It is at least possible that Mistler is right when, writing of Stendhal's comments concerning Mme de Montmaur, he says,

"Ils prouvent l'existence d'une tradition grenobloise, ils n'en garantissent pas l'authenticité, et si Henri Beyle était né à La Rochelle, il aurait peut-être parlé d'une Mme de N--- qui lui donnait des angéliques confites - toute la boîte..."(5)

In his correspondence with Mme Riccoboni, Laclos maintained that there was no single model for his heroine, who had been created in a manner akin to that used by Molière. In that case, the search for a model is sterile. Even

1. Journal, Divan, IV, 244.

2. Mistler, op. cit., p. xviii.

3. The Beyliste Gabriel Faure boldly entitles a whole chapter in his Stendhal Compagnon d'Italie (Paris, 1931), Chez Mme de Merteuil. This chapter, dealing with Mme de Montmaur, brings no new evidence whatsoever to substantiate this identification.

4. Martineau, op. cit., 344, refuses to pronounce on this issue.

5. Mistler, op. cit., xviii.

if one of the Mmes de la Tour du Pin-Montauban or Mme de Montmaur play a part in her composition, they are not alone.

Mme de Merteuil is not the only character in the novel for whom Stendhal suggests a key. According to him the original of Cécile de Volanges was a certain Mme de Blacons, the daughter of a family noted for "la dévotion et l'ultracisme"(1). The Blacons were another old Dauphinois family, and at the time Laclos was in Grenoble there were three young ladies of this name, all the daughters of Charles-Philippe d'Armand du Forest, marquis de Blacons, Olympe-Marie-Madeleine, Marie-Madeleine-Françoise, and Marie-Catherine-Alexandrine, and all three of them chanoinesses at the time when Laclos left Grenoble in 1775. At this time the youngest of them, Alexandrine, was eighteen years of age. It is she who is proposed by Martineau as the possible original of Cécile. She died in 1777 at the home of François-Édouard-Auguste-Venables-Hippolyte, marquis d'Agoult, and in the words of Martineau,

"Sans doute est-ce une de ces trois soeurs qui eut une aventure de jeunesse et fut l'héroïne du roman de Laclos, et peut-être peut-on penser plus particulièrement à la dernière qui... ne mourut pas chez elle et eut un enterrement des plus modestes."(2)

However, although the family's reputation might be said to fit in with the attitude of Mme de Volanges, this is all very tenuous. If there is a possibility that she is the original of Cécile it remains true that this is only a very slight possibility.

The whole process is a search for a needle in a haystack, and indeed the needle may well not even exist. Moreover, even if originals could be found, this would be of only minor interest, going no way towards an explanation of

1. Vie de Henry Brulard, I, 86-7.

2. H. Martineau, *op. cit.*, p. 82. Cf. also Mistler, *op. cit.*

the literary merit of Les Liaisons for, as we have already pointed out, were this merely a roman à clef it would have sunk into oblivion long ago.

In view of Laclos's own rather vague and even conflicting (if we accept Tilly's evidence) remarks about the originals of his characters, and the unsubstantiated claims of Stendhal, the Prince de Ligne and others, we must then conclude that no satisfaction can be obtained from a search for identifiable originals amongst Laclos's contemporaries(1). There still remains, however, the question of how far the characters of the novel are, even if not the artistic transpositions of identifiable individuals, an accurate reflection of the general behaviour of members of eighteenth-century French society before, during or indeed immediately after the time at which Laclos was writing. How far is Laclos's picture the result of accurate observation, and how far is it the product of the imagination?

For a concise statement of one side of the argument we may (without wishing to return to discussion of the novel's morality) refer to Jacques de Boisjolin and George Mosse(2):

"(Laclos) n'est ni un grand écrivain ni un penseur profond mais il a fait une œuvre d'observation, d'enseignement, de moralité... Les deux éléments des Liaisons dangereuses sont: 1° la Vie Mondaine; 2° la Décadence de l'aristocratie à la fin du XVIII^e siècle."

The precise extent of this decadence is in itself problematical, but there can be

1. If one sets aside Tilly's evidence, not once does Laclos give a clue to any possible original. Silence can be eloquent and although Laclos's failure to refer to Grenoble ^{originals} in his letters to his wife on his return to that town need not be significant, his attitude in his letters to Mme Riccoboni (quoted earlier in this chapter) is more instructive.
2. Boisjolin & Mosse, Notes sur Laclos et "Les Liaisons dangereuses", Paris, 1904, pp. 19 & 24.

no doubt that, largely in reaction against the moral tightening-up of the end of Louis XIV's reign, the eighteenth century got off to a flying start, so far as moral decadence is concerned, under the Regency. There is ample literature on this period to spare us the necessity of going into details.

René Peter uses Laclos's choice of epigraph, "J'ai vu les mœurs de mon temps et j'ai publié ces lettres", as an excuse for seeking a key, and in so doing stretches the meaning of this borrowing from La Nouvelle Héloïse unreasonably. We must now turn to a more accurate interpretation of this epigraph. How far, casting aside the hope of a precise identification of the characters, can we see Les Liaisons as an accurate general reflection of the manners of French society in the eighteenth century? As F. C. Green has said,

"peindre les faiblesses et les vices de l'humanité n'est pas ce qui distingue particulièrement le romancier de mœurs des autres faiseurs de romans. Au contraire, sa tâche est beaucoup plus circonscrite et se borne à reproduire fidèlement les mœurs des contemporains immédiats de l'auteur."(1)

It is obvious that the characters of Les Liaisons come from a restricted social field. It may well be, as we have already implied, that the novel presents too black, too one-sided a picture of that society for it to be considered anything like an objective novel of manners. It is this suggestion that we shall now seek to justify.

The common picture of the morals of Ancien Régime society in the eighteenth century is summed up by Lord Chesterfield in a letter to his son,

1. F. C. Green, La Peinture des Mœurs de la Bonne Société dans le Roman français de 1715 à 1761, Paris, 1924, p. 7.

written in 1750:

"Un arrangement, which is in plain English a gallantry, is, at Paris, as necessary a part of a woman of fashion's establishment, as her house, table, coach, etc."(1)

The brothers Goncourt, declaring that

"Volupté! c'est tout le XVIII^e siècle!"(2),

go on to say that the love of Cherubino - not always rejected by the Countess Almaviva in real life - is characteristic of the eighteenth century: "la Passion remplacée par le Désir." A selection of remarks from Chamfort illustrate this point of view:

"L'amour, tel qu'il existe dans la Société, n'est que l'échange de deux fantaisies & le contact de deux épidermes";

"Le tems (sic) a fait succéder dans la galanterie le piquant du scandale au piquant du mystère";

"Le Mariage, tel qu'il se pratique chez les Grands, est une indécence convenue";

"Je me souviens d'avoir vu un homme quitter les filles d'Opéra, parce qu'il y avait vu, disait-il, autant de fausseté que dans les honnêtes femmes."(3)

If it is true that, in Les Liaisons dangereuses, we are not, in the main, concerned with the love of Cherubino(4), these remarks of Chamfort's do appear to have a certain relevance, although it should be noted that usually Valmont is not interested in "le contact de deux épidermes" for its own sake - when this is his concern, he goes in fact to a "fille d'Opéra", Emilie. Nor, in his liaison with Mme de Tourvel and Cécile are we presented simply with "l'échange

1. Chesterfield, Letters to his Son & others, Dent & Dutton, London, n.d., p.179.

2. Goncourts, L'Amour au 18^e siècle, Paris, 1875, pp. 4 & 31-4.

3. S.-R.-N. Chamfort, Produits de la Civilisation perfectionnée. Maximes & Pensées, Caractères & Anecdotes, Paris, 2 vols., 1953, I, 185, 188, 192 & 188.

4. Although cf. in some respects the Danceny - Mme de Merteuil relationship.

de deux fantaisies". Here we have no mere idle fancy, but a deep-laid plot of domination. The "piquant du scandale" however, is essential to the philosophy of Mme de Merteuil and Valmont alike. Mme de Merteuil needs Valmont to know of her triumphs, even if she is keeping up a front of respectability for society at large, and Valmont and Prévost show the roué's typical concern for publicity and notoriety. Chamfort's third remark is much less applicable to Laclos's novel. Here we have none of the blatant disregard for the concept of marital fidelity to be found in so many of the novels of the eighteenth century. Of the principal characters, Valmont, Cécile and Danceny are unmarried, and Mme de Merteuil is a widow. Mme de Tourvel goes through the motions of protesting her conjugal bliss, although as we have pointed out her failure to appeal to her husband indicates that this is little more than a surface attitude. Both Mme de Volanges and Mme de Rosemonde are reputed to have had aventures, but in them there is not cynical disregard of the marriage vow. It is true, & of course, that the fact that Mme de Tourvel is married in no way deters Valmont and he is prepared to use her husband, in the Dijon letter episode, to further his ends. Again, Mme de Merteuil deliberately sets out to ruin Gercourt's hope of marrying a virgin in choosing to debauch Cécile as a means of revenge over him. Nevertheless, the "official" attitude of those who are married, are about to be married, and (with the exception of Mme de Merteuil) have been married (i.e. Mme de Tourvel, Mme de Rosemonde, Mme de Volanges and Gercourt) is far from being "une indécence convenue." (1)

1. Cécile, of course, is a special case. She is too immature, too much a toy of her instincts, to have any firm attitude at all, on this or anything else.

Equally interesting in connection with Les Liaisons and particularly in connection with Valmont and Mme de Merteuil are the conclusions of La Mettrie that "l'homme est une machine" (it is the latter who describes Cécile as a "machine à plaisir"(1)), that "tout dépend de la manière dont notre machine est montée"(2), that "le plus beau spectacle du monde est une belle femme", and that "la vue des plaisirs d'autrui nous en donne."(3) It is not, after all, so very far from this last remark to the notion that the spectacle of the sufferings of others can give us pleasure, an idea exploited by Laclos and to a far greater extent by the Marquis de Sade.

The eighteenth century devoted itself quite as much as any other period to a consideration of the relationship between the two sexes. Many of the findings were not pleasant. Thus Duclos, writing of women in the Avertissement to his Mémoires pour servir de Suite aux Considérations sur les Moeurs de ce Siècle(4), declares,

"Ce n'est pas la raison qui détermine leur choix, ce n'est pas l'amour, ce n'est pas même le plaisir, c'est la folie qui leur chauffe l'imagination pour un homme qui devient successivement l'objet, le complice & la victime d'un caprice. Un amant leur plaît sans autre raison que de s'être présenté le premier; & il est bientôt quitté pour un second qui n'a d'autre mérite que d'être venu le dernier."

The same writer, in his Considérations sur les Moeurs(5), remarks a little less immoderately,

"Je suis persuadé qu'il y a toujours dans le monde une distribution de vertus et de vices à-peu-près égale; mais il peut y avoir, en différents âges, des partages inégaux de nation à nation, de peuple à peuple. Il y

1. CVI, 275. She and Valmont, of course, are determined to be the controllers of such machines.
2. La Mettrie, L'Homme Machine, Leyde, 1748, pp. 174 & 37.
3. La Mettrie, L'Art De Jouir, in L'Homme Machine, suivi de l'Art de Jouir, Paris, 1921, pp. 179 & 200.
4. 1777, n.p., p. 35. This title first appears in 1765, presumably in an attempt to sell the work by association with the better-known Considérations. Its original title was Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire des Moeurs du XVIII^e siècle (1751).
5. C.U.P., 1939, pp. 57-61.

a des âges plus ou moins brillants, et le nôtre ne paroît pas être celui de l'honneur, du moins autant qu'il l'a été..... On n'est certainement pas aussi délicat, aussi scrupuleux sur les liaisons, qu'on l'a été..... Le relâchement des mœurs n'empêche pas qu'on ne vante beaucoup l'honneur et la vertu..."

Such views, accurate or not, that all depends on "le hasard du coin du feu", were common coin, and minor writers formed a chorus to echo such remarks as those of Duclos. Thus, in his L'Ami des Femmes(1), Boudier de Villemert writes,

"Qu'elles apprennent donc que la beauté ne mérite nos hommages qu'autant qu'elle accompagne une belle âme";

and, as for men, they should learn that

"... on ne cherche point à déshonorer ce qu'on aime, encore moins à corrompre son esprit après avoir corrompu son cœur; c'est cependant la marche de la plupart de nos hommes à bonnes fortunes, qui, non-contens (*sic*) d'attirer une femme dans leurs dérèglements, veulent encore les lui justifier en détruisant des idées d'ordre qu'ils traitent d'incommodes préjugés."(2)

But Boudier de Villemert is gentler towards the fair sex than is the later writer of Réflexions philosophiques sur le Plaisir, par un Célibataire(3) who, although he blames the restrictions of convent education for the degeneration of feminine morals, and recognises that

"on avait autrefois une Maîtresse par goût, on l'a aujourd'hui par vanité",

nevertheless maintains that

"les Femmes sont en grande partie cause de la dissolution des mœurs actuelles."

The situation is frightful:

"On se prend, on se quitte, on se reprend; tout est égal....."

1. n.p., 1758, p. 28.

2. *ibid.*, p. 117.

3. 2e édition, 1783, pp. 31-3. Various attributed to Grimod de la Reynière & G. F. Lantier.

He concludes:

"Rien n'est si rare à Paris que la Jalousie..... Au bout de six mois de mariage, on ne permet plus à un Homme de veiller sur sa Femme, sous peine du ridicule le plus ineffaçable.... On s'est ennuyé d'être Jaloux; on s'est accoutumé à être trompé: les Maris eux-mêmes en plaisantent, et la Société n'est plus qu'un échange d'infidélités réciproques."(1)

All this represents a very black picture of eighteenth-century French society, and there has not been an absence of writers willing to discourse learnedly upon it. Martin Turnell speaks of the depreciation of the word "gloire" in eighteenth-century French by comparison with the language of Mme de La Fayette, and says that

"The Court is replaced by the Salon, the battlefield by the boudoir."(2) That the centralisation of the nobility at Versailles and the destruction of much of their real authority had over the years an effect on their general psychological outlook is undeniable(3), but the implications of Turnell's remarks must be subjected to a careful examination. The same applies to Roger Vailland's generalisation that by the eighteenth century

"la haute société a adopté le libertinage, mais n'en a conservé que l'aspect le plus aimable.... De toutes les libertés proclamées par les libertins de l'époque héroïque, elle n'a retenu pour elle-même que la liberté dans les moeurs. Le libertinage... est devenu un jeu de société."(4)

The question to what proportion of high society Vailland's remarks apply is not answered. The same applies to those of Dominique Aury in her essay La

1. *ibid.*, pp. 54-5.

2. M. Turnell, The Novel in France, London, 1950, p. 62.

3. As the Gentleman's Magazine rather complacently put it in a review of Crébillon fils's Le Hasard du Cœur du Feu in August 1789, "That which, amongst a free people is the amusement under a despotic government ranks as the business of life. We therefore doubt not that the late revolution in politics will introduce a striking change in the national taste and character of France".

4. R. Vailland, Préface to Les Liaisons dangereuses, Paris, Bibliothèque mondiale 1956, I, 12.

Révolte de Mme de Merteuil:

"Il est curieux de voir, dans une société aussi élégante et policée, les règles du jeu reposer au fond sur une conception d'une brutalité et d'une grossièreté toutes paysannes, telle qu'on l'entend exprimer encore par les fermières qui parlent de leur fils adolescent: 'Mon coq est lâché, gardez vos poules.'"(1)

For these writers then, France in the eighteenth century, or at least polite French society, is characterised by elegant vice. If this is so, then we shall have to accept Les Liaisons dangereuses as an accurate reflection of that society. Laclos's picture of it is, at any rate, no less sombre than that of Duclos, Vailland and the others. How accurate are they?

Hippolyte Taine sums up the relationship between the sexes in the eighteenth century in the following terms:

"On se pique de jouer avec l'amour, de traiter une femme comme une poupée mécanique, de toucher en elle un ressort, puis l'autre, pour en faire sortir à volonté l'attendrissement ou la colère..... On va plus loin, et, dans les âmes foncièrement sèches, la galanterie tourne à la méchanceté."(2)

This presents another possibility: even if we cannot ultimately accept Les Liaisons as an accurate picture of the whole, or even the greater part of polite society, it may be a valid representation of a small minority, the "âmes foncièrement sèches" of whom Taine speaks. But the Goncourts will have none of this. For them the manners depicted by Laclos were general:

"Que l'on ne croie pas que ces types si complets, si parfaits, soient imaginés. Ils ne sortent pas de la tête de Laclos, ils ne sont pas le rêve d'un romancier..... Le seul embarras est qu'on leur trouve trop de modèles."

1. Dominique Aury, in Les Cahiers de la Pléiade, XII, 1951, p. 92.
2. H. Taine, Les Origines de la France contemporaine, I, L'Ancien Régime, Paris, 1876, p. 207.

After all, this was the time when it was estimated by Père Élie Harel in his Les Causes du Désordre public that there were in Paris "soixante mille filles de prostitution, auxquelles on ajoute dix mille privilégiées, ou qui font la contrebande en secret,(1)" the time when such erotic societies as L'Ordre de la Félicité, Les Aphrodites, and La Société du Moment were flourishing(2).

The Goncourts go on to suggest three of these "modèles", Choiseul, Louvois and the Comte de Frise(3). Other names spring to mind: Tilly, Richelieu. And as possible parallels with Mme de Merteuil there are such women as Mme de Genlis, Mme du Tencin and the Maréchale de Luxembourg. There have been plenty of writers to draw such comparisons, amongs them Georges Grappe(4), Jacques Faurie(5), and Émile Dard(6). André Maurois advises us, if we doubt the existence of such persons as those described by Laclos in his novel, to consider the adventures of Lord Byron, and directs us to the poet's correspondence with Lady Melbourne(7)

1. Quoted by the Goncourts, Histoire de la Société Française, Paris, 1854, p. 239.
2. Goncourts, L'Amour au 18e siècle, 64-8.
3. *ibid.*, 120-2.
4. Mme de Merteuil - Mme de Genlis. Chronology rules out any such direct copying by Laclos as that hinted at by Grappe. Sous le Feuillage Classique, Paris, 1922, p. 151.
5. Valmont-Richelieu-Lauzun, Essai sur la Séduction, Paris, 1948, pp. 49,50,55.
6. Valmont-Duc de Richelieu, Mme de Merteuil-Maréchale de Luxembourg, Laclos, 1905, p. 41.
7. A. Maurois, Sept Visages de l'Amour, Paris, 1947, p. 97. As Maurois points out, there are differences, and ultimately these outnumber the parallels: Byron spares Lady Frances Webster (whom Maurois sees as similar to Cécile, whereas in fact she is rather more like the Présidente de Tourvel: "She managed to give me a note and to receive another, and a ring, before (Webster's) very face, and yet she is a thorough devotee, and takes prayers, morning and evening, besides being measured for a new Bible once a quarter." (Lord Byron's Correspondance,

ed. John Murray, 2 vols., London, 1922, I, 195. To Lady Melbourne, October 10th, 1813.) Another difference, not mentioned by Maurois, is that at the time Lady Melbourne, the "equivalent" of Mme de Merteuil, was sixty-two years of age! There are superficial similarities, as for instance when Byron writes

P.T.O.

The Comte de Tilly, whose self-association with Laclos naturally leads one to speculate on his own career as a "lady's man", has found himself a champion in Havelock Ellis, who writes that

"unlike Valmont, Tilly was... 'a sentimental roué' who had fallen under the influence of Rousseau and was by his friends considered 'romantic'",

s/

and sees

"an amusing irony in the fact that Tilly, who is still fettered by the old-world notion that Les Liaisons dangereuses was an outrage on morality, has sometimes himself been considered as the embodiment in real life of the accomplished seducer whom Laclos depicted, Valmont en personne." (1)

Whatever may be the rights and wrongs of Havelock Ellis's summary of Tilly's character, there can be no doubt that the seducer of something approaching Valmont's type is a historical phenomenon, or thinks he is— for exactly how much is true in the memoirs of these gentlemen (including Tilly), and how much is fiction inspired by some distorted desire for self-aggrandisement, is open to question. Horace Walpole went so far as to suggest in his letters that by comparison with their English counterparts, the French dandies were as nothing. He certainly did not consider the society of the Ancien Régime diseased.

However, Barrère, in the preface to his edition of Richelieu's memoirs, states:

"On s'est étonné de la corruption que supposait dans les mœurs le roman des Liaisons dangereuses; mais les fictions de Laclos restent bien en arrière des réalités qu'on va lire...." (2)

It should be stated at once that the tone and atmosphere is very different here,

1. Havelock Ellis, From Rousseau to Proust, London, 1936, pp. 194 & 207.
2. Barrère, Bibliothèque des Mémoires relatifs à l'Histoire de France pendant le 18^e siècle, Paris, Vol. XVI, 1869, p. 326. "It is the high-born Richelieu, who has immortalized this depravity of that elevated class.." (Lady Morgan, France, London, 1817, Bk II, p. 89)

and in the memoirs of other womanizers such as Casanova, from that to be found in Laclos's novel. The mammoth struggle between Valmont and Mme de Merteuil finds, of course, no parallel. Nevertheless, there is an interesting similarity between some of Valmont's remarks(1) and, for example, the description of Mme Michelin in Richelieu's memoirs:

"Cette femme, qui avait un cœur tendre, l'avait porté vers Dieu, ne trouvant aucune créature digne de le posséder, et c'est ce cœur que je voulais disputer à la Divinité."(2)

In Richelieu's remark we find the same libertinage and the same stress on vanity as the motive behind the piety of a person celebrated for devotion. Two points occur: the first is that perhaps the very fact that a person is celebrated for piety is a sign that this piety may not be all that it seems to be, and the second is that Mme Michelin partakes of the characteristics of the stock dévoté of much fiction of the eighteenth century (not to mention the seventeenth), so that we are left wondering whether the historical character under Richelieu's pen (or rather that of his scribe, the Abbé Soulavie) became invested with the characteristics of a fictional type rather than the fictional characters being inspired by a type of woman who really did exist.

Nevertheless, we must inevitably admit that moral corruption existed in the eighteenth century: it would have been more than surprising had this not been so. But the Duc de Richelieu, the Maréchale de Luxembourg and their kind do not compose the entire picture. Despite their remarks quoted

1. e.g. "Qu'elle crie à la vertu, mais qu'elle me la sacrifie... Je serai vraiment le Dieu qu'elle aura préféré" (VI, 46); "C'est moi qui réglerai son sort" (XXIII, 78); and, above all, "J'oserai la ravir au Dieu même qu'elle adore" (VI, 46)
2. Mémoires du Maréchal Duc de Richelieu, in Barrère, op. cit., XVI, p. 371.

elsewhere in this chapter, the Goncourts point out that even if

"un de Sade vint pour mettre, avec le sang des guillotines, la Terreur dans l'Amour... l'amour véritable n'en a pas moins eu sa place dans le XVIII^e siècle."

They quote as an example of this dichotomy Crébillon fils himself; despite the nature of his writings he knew

"une mystérieuse passion, un bonheur et une religion voilés, l'amour de Mlle de Strafford. - Voilà le siècle: il a affiché le scandale, mais il a connu l'amour." (1)

If this is to be our line of argument, then we must mention once again the contrast between Les Liaisons dangereuses and the family life of its author.

But we do not need to confine ourselves to one or two writers to make the necessary if rather obvious point that the eighteenth century was not all corruption. This is obvious if one but thinks about it, but the popular image of the eighteenth century as an age of unmitigated elegant licentiousness among the upper strata of French society is so deeply entrenched (largely as a result of revolutionary polemic) that it can do no harm to state the obvious as forcibly as one can in this instance. The Goncourts point in this connection to some extremely interesting letters of the time, amongst them those written by the Circassian Mlle Aïssé to Mme Calandrini about her love for the Chevalier d'Aydie. An idea of how far the tone of these letters is removed from that of the memoirs of Richelieu and company can be obtained from the following brief passage taken from them:

1. E. & J. de Goncourt, L'Amour au 18^e siècle, pp. 125-9. André Bellesort remarks on this fact that "au XVIII^e siècle, le désaccord est manifeste entre la conduite de l'homme et les idées de l'écrivain." As an example of the reverse of the case of Laclos and Crébillon we may take Nivelle de La Chaussée, a real "homme de la Régence in his contes and his private life, who, reserved his sensibility for his plays (XVIII^e Siècle et Romantisme, Paris, 1941, pp. 66 & 69.

"C'est un mouvement naturel chez les hommes de se prévaloir de la faiblesse des autres: je ne saurois me servir de cette sorte d'art; je ne connois que celui de rendre la vie si douce à ce que j'aime qu'il ne trouve rien de préférable; je veux le retenir à moi par la seule douceur de vivre avec moi. Ce projet le rend aimable; je le vois si content que toute son ambition est de passer sa vie de même." (December 1728)(1)

Sainte-Beuve remarks in his Notice to these letters,

"Il est intéressant de voir, dans une histoire toute réelle et où la fiction n'a point de part, comment une personne qui semblait destinée par le sort à n'être qu'une adorable Manon Lescaut redevient une Virginie."(2)

A similar contrast is presented by the letters of Mlle de Lespinasse to the Comte de Guibert(3) (in which we are shown the passion and yet at the same time the loving self-effacement of a woman in love with a man some years younger than herself) and by the letters of the Princesse Louise-Adélaïde de Bourbon-Condé to M. de la Gervaisais, a captain of carabiniers. The last words of her last letter to him read,

"Adieu encore une fois, mon ami: on peut changer de conduite quand on a du courage; changer son cœur, j'ignore si cela est possible."(4)

In the words of the Goncourts,

"Chez ce fier sang des Condé, c'est un phénomène curieux que l'humilité de cette princesse dans l'amour."(5)

There was then in the eighteenth century, from the Regency right through to the eve of the Revolution, another language, another attitude, besides that of the roués. Georges Grappe recognises this, when he describes Mme de Tourvel as "soeur de Mlle Aïssé, de Julie de Lespinasse"(6). Unfortunately,

1. Lettres de Mlle Aïssé à Mme Calandrini, Paris, 1846, p. 193. These letters cover the years 1726-33 & were first published in 1787.
2. *ibid.*, p. 5.
3. Correspondance entre Mlle de Lespinasse & le Ctd de Guibert, Paris, 1906, covering 1773-6. cf. esp. letters XXV, XXVI & LX.
4. Lettres écrites en 1786 & 1787, Paris, 1834, XXI, p. 250.
5. L'Amour au 18e s., pp. 162-3.
6. *op. cit.*, p. 158.

however, as we have shown, although Mme de Tourvel has her own brand of sentimentality she is far from being the personification of virtue or humility. She has just as large a measure of the same vice of vanity as Mme de Merteuil and Valmont, although in her it takes on a different guise. This fact is crucial to Les Liaisons, although in a sense it robs it of some moral force.

The idea that in Mme de Tourvel Valmont succeeds in seducing a truly devout woman is false. It may be true, as the brothers Goncourt say, that in the eighteenth century,

"l'on voit, non-seulement le soir dans le salon, mais encore tout le jour dans la rue, à toute heure, passer la femme décolletée, provocante, et promenant cette séduction de la chair nue et de la peau blanche qui dans une ville caressent les yeux comme un rayon et comme un rayon et comme une fleur."(1)

As an overall picture of the period, however, this is too highly-coloured by far. Similarly that there were rouées is undeniable, but this does not mean that all women were as cynical in their relationship with the opposite sex as it would appear from Richelieu or Chamfort; nor does it mean that genuinely virtuous women did not exist, as Laclos's tableau would lead us to believe. If he meant to portray one he failed.

Servais Étienne has a valid point when he states that

"Le relâchement de la morale ou plutôt l'expression littéraire de ce relâchement n'indique pas un affaïssement des mœurs, mais marque la fin du prestige de l'enseignement religieux. L'homme ne changea pas dans son fond de misère et de grandeur; seulement il expliqua par des motifs nouveaux des actes éternellement semblables."(2)

Étienne adds, quite rightly, that the noblest effort in this direction was made

1. E. & J. de Goncourt, L'Amour au 18^e siècle, p. 6.
2. S. Étienne, Le Genre romanesque en France depuis l'apparition de la Nouvelle Héloïse jusqu'aux approches de la Révolution, Bruxelles, 1922, pp. 9-10.

made by the true philosophes. Marcel Ruff(1) acknowledges that there was a considerable degree of moral corruption in eighteenth-century France.

"Ce tableau impressionne," he writes. "Est-il tout à fait convaincant? Le XVIII^e siècle a pris grand soin à se noircir et certes il y a là de quoi retenir notre attention. Mais il reste à prouver que cette réputation est authentiquement fondée."

Ruff makes the point that Bussy-Rabutin was as bad as Lauzun, and reminds us that the Cardinal de Retz admitted to having dreamed of doing "le mal par dessein, ce qui est sans comparaison le plus criminel." The eighteenth century's habit of blackening itself is important. As Ruff says,

"Tout s'accorde à confirmer que cette société française du XVIII^e siècle, tant décriée pour ses mœurs, a quelque peu usurpé le renom dont elle s'est elle-même gratifiée. Elle n'est guère pire ni meilleure que les autres, car la somme du bien et du mal qui se fait ne varie qu'en de faibles proportions. Il n'est pas de même de celui qui se dit."(2)

Or, in the words of Baudelaire,

"Ne disons pas: Autres mœurs que les nôtres, disons: Mœurs plus en honneur qu'aujourd'hui."(3)

Moreover, it must be remembered, as Ruff insists, that the novelists and moralists of the period directed their attention more or less exclusively to a very small minority within French society, a minority

"dont on ne peut s'étonner que, vouée par sa condition à une oisiveté totale, elle soit une proie facile pour le vice et les dangereuses fantaisies."

And yet even within this restricted society, as we have shown, there were what Ruff calls "passions sincères et respectées"(4), those of Mlle Aïssé, Julie

1. M. Ruff, L'Esprit du Mal et l'Esthétique baudelairienne, Paris, 1955, pp. 12 et seq.
2. *ibid.*, pp. 16-17.
3. C. Baudelaire, Notes on L.D., in O.C. of Laclos, p. 738.
4. Ruff, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

de Lespinasse and the young Princesse de Condé. Furthermore, within this small group were to be found exemplary households, those of La Trémouille, Périgord, Maurepas, Vergennes and Necker. In short, concludes Ruff, French morals of the time can be compared favourably with those of eighteenth-century England.

Laclos's picture of society in Les Liaisons dangereuses is, then, far too one-sided to be acceptable as an accurate reflection of the times. Richard Aldington suggests that

"the novels and memoirs of the period show that the situations and characters such as Laclos depicted with almost mathematical precision were by no means impossible. I should say that they had more real life basis and owed less to the imagination of a gifted satirist than Major Evelyn Waugh's bright young people."(1)

We have expressed certain reservations about some of these memoirs, and we shall have more to say about the novels in a later chapter. We can, at any rate, go no further than Aldington, if indeed as far. The characters in Les Liaisons are all, without exception, corrupt. Laclos presents only one side of life. Valmont and Mme de Merteuil assume the proportions of demi-gods of vice. As Augustin-Thierry remarks in his essay on Laclos, Dante's

"Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'è entrati"

would be a suitable epigraph for the book(2).

Certainly the most one can do is to agree with La Harpe when he describes Laclos's novel as

"au fond... l'histoire d'une vingtaine de fats et de catins qui se croient une grande supériorité d'esprit pour avoir érigé le libertinage en principe, et fait une science de la dépravation."(3)

1. R. Aldington, Intro. to Great French Romances, London, p. XXVIII.
2. A. Augustin-Thierry, Les L.D. de Laclos, Paris, 1930, p. 111
3. La Harpe, Corr. litt., Paris, 1820, XI, 473; in O.C., 723.

"Une vingtaine de fats et de catins" - or, as André Maurois puts it:

"Entre les deux guerres, de 1920 à 1940, nous vîmes à Paris un petit groupe de trente ou quarante personnes alimenter de leurs permutations amoureuses, toute la chronique scandaleuse. Le reste de la nation menait des vies normales, mais les menait sans bruit, tandis que le petit groupe des cyniques illuminait les conversations de l'éclat de ses aventures."(1)

André Malraux, too, is inclined to think that the picture of morals given in Les Liaisons is no more typical of the France of the period than the morals of Montparnasse in 1939 could be considered typical of the entire nation(2).

To judge the whole of eighteenth-century French society - even of French aristocratic society - by Les Liaisons dangereuses would be as foolish as to consider the activities of certain frenzied members of the Hollywood community typical of the whole of American life in the twentieth century, or to consider Federico Fellini's film La Dolce Vita representative of the whole of Roman society in the 1960s(3). Yet Laclos did paint this picture, and obviously he must have obtained the idea for it from one source or other, whether by personal observation or some other means.

In our comments on the suggested keys to the novel, we have shown that it is tempting to make identifications between Laclos's fictional characters and individual real life contemporaries, in Grenoble particularly. We have also conceded that in the very highest flight of French society there were people

1. A. Maurois, Sur les L.D. de Chod, de Laclos, Paris, 1946, pp. 4-5.

2. A. Malraux, Laclos, in Tableau de la litt. française (17-18^e siècles. Cornille à Chénier), Paris, 1939, p. 427 reprod. in L.D.

3. Or, as Augustin-Thierry suggests, to condemn the society of the Second Empire, which Zola did not know, on the strength of the accumulated errors of the Rougon-Macquart series.

who might appear to act as justification for these characters, Richelieu, Mme de Genlis and the rest. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that, as Ruff has pointed out, unlike Lauzun, Tilly or Richelieu, Laclos was in no position by his birth or his career to know at first hand the high society of which he writes in Les Liaisons. He joined Orléans after writing his novel, and it is clear that in 1782 his experience of society was almost totally confined to garrison life in the provinces whereas, of course, the novel allegedly depicts Parisian society. Ultimately, as we have suggested, the originals for the characters are unimportant:

"Mme de Merteuil est Mme de Merteuil comme Emma Bovary est Emma Bovary; et Mme de Renal Mme de Renal." (1)

However, the fact that Laclos was in no real position to know the society he claimed to portray, does raise another possible means of uncovering originals - or at any rate sources of inspiration. It may be that the principle source of the society and the manners depicted in Les Liaisons is literary. We shall examine this possibility in some detail in our next ~~chapter~~ chapter but one.

II

The fact that at the time Laclos was writing Les Liaisons dangereuses he was living outside the high ranks of society - and more particularly of Parisian society - which his novel professes to portray, does not preclude the possibility of its being a work of deliberately revolutionary intent, "un des flots révolutionnaires qui a tombé dans l'océan qui a submergé la

1. Robert Kemp, Autour de Mme de Merteuil, in Nouv. Litt., 22nd April, 1948, p.30.

cour," to use Tilly's phrase(1). Several writers since Tilly have taken a similar line, and their views call for examination.

André Maurois writes:

"... au dix-huitième siècle, un homme comme Laclos, décrivant 'le grand monde', avait tendance à en exagérer les noirceurs. Déjà la Révolution couvait sous la cendre bourgeoise. Un officier pauvre comme celui-ci avait de vives rancunes contre les grands seigneurs. Les Liaisons dangereuses sont un peu, dans le roman, ce que Le Mariage de Figaro est au théâtre: un pamphlet contre une noblesse dépravée."

It should be noted, however, that Maurois sees fit to add, "non qu'on y trouve un mot de politique."(2) As for the exaggeration of the "noirceurs" mentioned by Maurois, there may be other reasons for this, which have nothing to do with politics or class warfare.

Richard Aldington develops this same theme. It seems to him "not at all impossible" that the novel was "one more of the innumerable and now forgotten propaganda writings of the pre-Revolution epoch." It is, he points out, "an obvious line of disparagement of a ruling class the propagandist hopes to discredit, to say that it is sensually profligate and at the same time cold-hearted and cruel." This, applied to the eighteenth-century French aristocracy, is, as Aldington points out, a "legend", for, as he says,

"as a matter of fact the fashionable fad in the 1780's was not to be one of the roués (that belonged to an older generation) but to live the simple life, to be benevolent, sentimental, gushing and an indiscriminate admirer of Nature and the Virtuous Poor."

Aldington goes on to say that

"the political bias of the book is slight, but decisive. Think back.. to La Princesse de Clèves - that is how the French aristocracy wished to be thought of, as dignified, sober, restrained, ready to sacrifice themselves quixotically to the idea of honour. Laclos is cunning.

1. Tilly, Mémoires, Paris, 1929, 221-227, in O.C., p. 734.
2. A. Maurois, Sept Visages de l'Amour, Paris, 1947, p. 89.

He does not deny, like a modern propagandist, all virtue to his enemy. On the contrary, he shows a virtuous Mme de Tourvel, a generous Danceny, an "innocent" Cécile, a Polonian Mme de Volanges. But they are all the easy victims of the "wicked" Marquise and her unconscious tool, the Vicomte. The argument of M. de Laclos is plain: 'True, there are virtuous members of the possessing class, but they are affected by the wicked ones and become like them. Therefore, let us overturn the social system, and find me a well-paid job.'"(1)

This last remark is surely a breath-taking example of reading into a text from an a priori position. Crébillon too shows the French upper classes as sensually profligate, cold-hearted and cruel, yet for all that he is not a revolutionary writer, nor was he thought so by those who bought his books. When Aldington suggests, however, that Les Liaisons is in a sense out-of-date, then we must agree with him. The attitudes expressed are those in vogue under the Regency rather than during the later eighteenth century. This fact in itself, coupled with Laclos's position as one outside the higher social ranks, a provincial, at the time he wrote his novel, acts as further justification for looking elsewhere for an explanation of the picture of manners and morals in Les Liaisons, a task we shall undertake in the next chapter.

The Bibliographie Gay describes the novel as having contributed "à jeter notre société polie dans l'abîme révolutionnaire"(2), whilst Georges Grappe describes it as "un document essentiel de l'histoire sociale du XVIII^e siècle," adding that without it "nous comprendrions moins bien la Révolution qui se dresse, comme une statue du Commandeur, devant Don Juan Valmont."(3) But it is Roger Vailland who is the chief apostle of the revolutionary Laclos.

1. R. Aldington, Introd. to Great French Romances, London, 1946, p. xxix.
2. Le C. d'I---, Bibliographie des ouvrages relatifs à l'amour..., Lille, 1897 II, col 851.
3. G. Grappe, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

We have already said something about Vailland's views in an earlier chapter, but we must here, as briefly as possible, go into them in a little more detail. Vailland accepts Tilly's evidence without question:

"(Laclos) a clairement exposé son dessein au Comte Alexandre de Tilly Il est rare qu'on possède un document aussi précis sur l'origine d'une grande oeuvre." (1)

In other words, Laclos prepared a bomb, "une bombe destinée non seulement à l'illustrer mais aussi à servir d'arme à la bourgeoisie, classe montante, contre l'aristocratie, classe privilégiée." (2) Vailland at least avoids one common mistake: "Laclos n'est pas Valmont." But he adds, "c'est l'en-nemi de classe des Valmont." (3) This insistence on the class war is not surprising, coming from a Communist, but its relevance to Laclos's novel cannot be accepted without question.

Much of Vailland's case is based on Dard's theory of ambition as the prime motivation of Laclos, which we have already discussed.

"Dans l'esprit de Laclos, et au moment où il les écrivit," says Vailland, "Les Liaisons sont... avant tout un pamphlet, une satire scandaleuse, où il stigmatise son ennemi de classe, comme nous dirions aujourd'hui, le fils de grande famille qui devient colonel sans avoir étudié la géométrie, le vicomte de Valmont, dont il nous précise bien (Lettre XXXII) qu'il possède 'un beau nom, une grande fortune...'" (4)

This is sheer divination. Is this quotation anything more than a means of throwing light on the character of Mme de Volanges? There is no evidence to tell us what was in the mind of Laclos at the moment of writing Les Liaisons (5).

1. R. Vailland, L.D., Club français du livre, Paris, 1957, p. xiv.
2. Vailland, Laclos par lui-même, Paris, n.d., p. 8.
3. *ibid.*, loc. cit. Vailland's italics.
4. Vailland, L.D., Bibliothèque mondiale, 1956, p. 9.
5. Such a generalisation is only one example of Vailland's disconcerting approach. On p. 165 of Laclos par lui-même he quotes a passage from Laclos's speech to the Jacobins in 1 July 1792 (O.C., 637) to depict Laclos as the defender of "libertés républicaines", omitting Laclos's demand that "(L'assemblée nationale) nomme provisoirement un régent."

Even if one accepts Tilly's evidence as authentic, then one still can not be certain that the dark design claimed for his work by Laclos in his supposed conversation with the émigré Comte was present in his mind at the time he wrote Les Liaisons. As we have seen, once the novel was published, Laclos found himself time and time again identified with Valmont, not only in sexual matters, but in political ones too. In his conversation in London the "expressions un peu oratoires" remarked upon by Tilly might well have been caused by exasperation with his importunate questioner and the desire to "give him a story" (once again, in Tilly's own words, "enfin l'ennui me le livra"). Or it might have been, as Cucuel suggests(1), that,

"entre 1782 et 1789, Laclos avait fini par se regarder comme un "génie ténébreux"....; désormais, il change d'attitude: Les Liaisons ne sont plus une oeuvre de moraliste, mais un pamphlet, ainsi qu'il le déclare dans les confidences qu'il fit à Tilly en 1790."

There are any number of possibilities along these lines. What is certain, however, is that Tilly's account is, on its own, insufficient grounds for us to accept Vailland's version of Laclos's state of mind prior to 1782.

But what about Vailland's theory of the class war in its application to Les Liaisons? For this argument to hold any water at all, it would be necessary to find a character in the novel to act as a foil to Laclos's "ennemis de classe", the Marquise and the Vicomte, a character personifying the virtues of the "classe montante". It might well have been possible to find such a character in Laclos's projected novel on conjugal bliss, had he ever written it. Vailland, however, by stretching his terms beyond breaking point, finds such a character in Les Liaisons: Mme de Tourvel. He

1. Cucuel, op. cit., p. 359.

writes:

"Le personnage 'sympathique' des Liaisons, la Présidente de Tourvel, la femme sincère et tendre, le grand coeur, la victime, la persécutée, est le seul qui ne porte pas un grand nom. Présidente, femme de magistrat, noblesse de robe, c'est-à-dire bourgeoise"(1);

"... comme par hasard, elle n'était pas née, femme d'un simple magistrat, le président de Tourvel, bourgeois comme les Choderlos si récemment devenus de Laclos."(2)

We have already said enough about the psychology of the Présidente to suggest that the epithets Vailland applies to her are not entirely justified. As for her being a bourgeoise, there is no evidence in the novel that any of the "noble" characters, Valmont included, look down on her because she is mere noblesse de robe (Nor, incidentally, is there any sign that she is poor, as Vailland makes her in the screen-play of Roger Vadim's film Les Liaisons dangereuses 1960). Indeed, as we have already remarked, the only snobbery shown concerning her social status, in a wonderful piece of psychological insight, is by Azolan, Valmont's servant(3). Does this make him Laclos's "ennemi de classe"?

There is not a shred of real evidence that when he was writing Les Liaisons Laclos looked upon it as a revolutionary pamphlet. Even if we accept Tilly's evidence, Laclos's revolutionary claims for his novel come after the event, and even Tilly admits that Laclos appeared to be striking a pose during their interview(4). Laclos's ~~own~~ claim (if genuine) and Tilly's outraged observations on it are then both posterior to the event of the Revolution of 1789, and therefore may well have been used by the one as a means of self-

1. Vailland, Laclos par lui-même, p. 8.

2. Vailland, L.D., Bibliothèque mondiale, 1956, p. 10. This doubtful argument is also used by Baudelaire: "La présidente (Seule, appartenant à la bourgeoisie. Observation importante)". Notes on L.D. in O.C., 741)

3. CVII, 280.

4. cf. supra p. 500, & Tilly, Mémoires, in O.C., p. 732, footnote.

justification(1) and by the other as a condemnation. As René Doumic puts it:

"Faut-il voir dans les Liaisons dangereuses une oeuvre de colère, un de ces pamphlets qui ont précédé et amené la Révolution? Laclos n'a pas manqué de nous y inviter (in his talk with Tilly); mais ce sont de ces interprétations qu'il est aisé de donner après coup. Rien n'indique que Laclos ait été si violemment enragé contre la société de son temps..."(2)

A far more likely origin of the novel than the conscious preparation of a revolutionary bombshell is suggested by Augustin-Thierry: the passing of time in garrison life by studying people and writing(3). Certainly, in the absence of more positive evidence than Vailland and the others can offer, it seems far more reasonable to see Les Liaisons dangereuses as a reflection upon human nature as a whole rather than upon a particular social class. After all, the cap fits - for all time.

Before going on to have a look at Laclos's literary precursors, it is appropriate here to say something about Les Liaisons in another light. The novel has been considered by some writers to be, even if not revolutionary in a strictly political sense, then at least revolutionary in a social sense. For these writers, Les Liaisons dangereuses is a work of feminism.

The germ of this idea seems to rest in a remark about Laclos made by Moufle d'Angerville in the Mémoires secrets on the 14th May, 1782:

"Parce qu'il a peint des monstres on veut qu'il en soit un..... Il est allé à son régiment travailler à une justification."(4)

1. The same applies to the review of Richelieu's Mémoires already referred to, if this review was by Laclos, and if the "fictions" referred to are L.D., cf. *supra*, p. 424, n. 2.
2. Doumic, Le Vertueux Laclos, in Revue des Deux Mondes, 15 January, 1905, p.456.
3. A. Augustin-Thierry, Les L.D. de Laclos, Paris, 1930, pp. 15-19.
4. Mémoires secrets, XX, 250: O.C., p. 729. Cf. *supra* p. 40, n. 2.

For the writers we have referred to this "justification" takes the form of the fragments (especially the first two) gathered together by Allen under the general title of De l'Education des Femmes(1). In other words, we are called upon to see Les Liaisons as a defence of oppressed womanhood. The fact that a "justification" was necessary would seem to indicate, as one of these writers, Roger Vailland, acknowledges, that the novel misfired.

F.C. Green writes in Mimuet(2) that

"His unfinished essay on L'Education des Femmes reveals him.... as a fervent Rousseauist, and casts a retrospective light upon Les Liaisons dangereuses, which is evidently an attack levelled not merely at eighteenth-century systems of feminine education, but at a system of civilisation which has resulted in the enslavement of woman by man. This idea is embodied in Mme de Merteuil...."

We have already pointed out that these fragments of naïve and ill-digested Rousseauism contain nothing new. They stand more or less unique in Laclos's production (if one excepts his private letters) and present a striking contrast with both his verse and his novel. Although the third fragment goes into some discussion of the novel, and especially Clarissa(3), there is no reference at all to Les Liaisons, and therefore no evidence that it was in his mind as he wrote. In these circumstances, a very strong case would have to be made out before one could accept any close relationship between the novel and De l'Education. As Seylaz puts it,

"Ces trois fragments sont postérieurs aux Liaisons, et sont nés dans des circonstances qui n'ont peut-être rien à voir avec le roman."(4).

1

1. For a discussion of this work, cf. supra pp. 40-60.

2. F.C. Green, Mimuet, London, 1935, p. 427.

3. O.C., pp. 478-9.

4. J.-L. Seylaz, "Les Liaisons dangereuses" et la Création romanesque chez Laclos, Geneva, 1958, p. 89.

Richard Aldington is another writer to suggest a feminist thesis behind Les Liaisons. In a footnote to the story of the Three Inseparables in Letter LXXIX in his translation of the novel(1), commenting on the fact that the story ends with one of the three women entering a convent, whilst the other two "languissent exilées dans leurs Terres", he writes,

"This end to this edifying adventure was occasionally a fact in eighteenth-century life, in spite of the general tolerance. It will be noticed that the women pay the price. Here again we find Laclos's 'feminist thesis' and incidentally a justification for the perfidy of the Mme de Merteuil."

Similarly, in a note to a passage in which Mme de Volanges expresses uneasiness about Cécile ("Ces mariages qu'on calcule au lieu de les assortir, qu'on appelle de convenance, et où tout se convient en effet, hors les goûts et les caractères, ne sont-ils pas la source la plus féconde de ces éclats scandaleux qui deviennent tous les jours plus fréquents") Aldington remarks,

"This states in one sentence one of the principal themes of this novel."(2)

Green and Aldington, however, are not the principal defenders of the feminist Liaisons. These are Émile Dard, Pierre Charpentrat and Roger Vailland. Before examining their views it will be useful briefly to recapitulate Laclos's argument in De l'Éducation des Femmes.

In the first fragment, the Discours sur la question proposée par l'Académie de Châlons-sur-Marne: Quels seroient les meilleurs moyens de perfectionner l'éducation des femmes, Laclos states that in the hypothetical state of nature woman was born equal with man but has since become his slave and, what is more,

1. Dangerous Acquaintances, London, 1952, p. 155; cf. O.C., p. 194.
2. ibid., p. 208; cf. O.C., XCVIII, 249.

is now his willing slave. Therefore, there is, in the present state of civilisation no way of improving woman's education "Sans liberté point de moralité et sans moralité point d'éducation " "Le mal est sans remède quand les vices se sont changés en mœurs "

In the second fragment, Des Femmes et de leur Education, Laclos repeats that "la femme naturelle" is, "ainsi que l'homme, un être libre et puissant." But if man, born free, is now everywhere in chains, this is still truer of woman, who bears the additional fetters imposed by man. But woman, even in her position of slavery, has the powers of seduction, the power to make the most of her charms, and it will be remembered that Laclos goes so far as to give a recipe for a cosmetic to help her use them. And indeed, he had already suggested in the Discours that if woman were sufficiently ashamed of her subservient position she could free herself

"Apprenez qu'on ne sort de l'esclavage que par une grande révolution. Cette révolution est-elle possible? C'est à vous seules à le dire puisqu'elle dépend de votre courage. Est-elle vraisemblable? Je me tais sur cette question..."(1)

Can we say, then, that Les Liaisons is a revolutionary work in this sense? This is clearly the view of Green and Aldington. According to both of them, as we have seen, the revolt against the enslavement of womanhood is embodied in Mme de Merteuil. Certainly, in Letter LXXXI, there is a provocative statement which seems to be the expression of some such revolution, when Mme de Merteuil describes herself to Valmont as

"née pour venger mon sexe et maîtriser le vôtre."(2)

1. O.C., 429.
2. LXXXI 199.

In this powerful autobiographical letter the Marquise tells us that she employed her youth "pour observer et réfléchir." As she says,

"... je n'avais à moi que ma pensée, et je m'indignais qu'on pût me la ravir ou me la surprendre contre ma volonté." (1)

Her clinical approach to life saw her through marriage to widowhood, and when her husband died,

"quoique, à tout prendre, je n'eusse pas à me plaindre de lui, je n'en sentis pas moins vivement le prix de la liberté qu'allait me donner mon veuvage, et je me promis bien d'en profiter." (2)

And so she began to "déployer sur le grand Théâtre les talents qu'(elle s'était) donnés." (3) In other words, it seems that Mme de Merteuil has decided to lead the "grande révolution" which is necessary if woman is to rise from slavery. She has set about giving herself the education in her pre-marital freedom, even if that freedom is only intellectual freedom, the freedom of her "pensée", and once she has recovered her freedom on the death of her husband she is determined to preserve it at all costs.

Now if the revolution referred to by Laclos is to mean anything it must be a revolution in the direction of a return towards the ideal of "la femme naturelle" and her simple morality - if not to the idyllic state of the golden age depicted in chapters V and VI of Des Femmes et de leur Éducation (4), then at least to some such approximation as that portrayed in chapter VIII, still heavily burdened with the memory of Rousseau:

1. *ibid.*, 200.
2. *ibid.*, 202.
3. *ibid.*, 204.
4. *O.C.*, 436-42.

"Créons à notre gré une femme parfaitement heureuse....., ce sera celle qui, née d'une mère tendre, n'aura pas été livrée en naissant aux soins d'une mercenaire; qui, plus grande, aura été élevée sous les yeux d'une institutrice également indulgente, sage et éclairée qui, sans jamais la contraindre, et sans l'ennuyer de ses leçons, lui aura donné toutes les connaissances utiles et l'aura exemptée de tous les préjugés; qui, parvenue à cet âge du plaisir, aura trouvé pour époux un homme toujours nouveau, amoureux sans être jaloux, assidu sans être importun; qui, devenue mère à son tour, aura goûté la douceur de l'amour maternel, sans en ressentir les inquiétudes perpétuelles, souvent suivies d'un affreux desespoir; dont l'imagination sage aura vu fuir sans regret son heureuse jeunesse; qui aura su, en vieillissant, éviter les maladies et les ridicules; qui, enfin, saura voir la mort sans effroi et s'endormir paisiblement de son dernier sommeil...."(1)

Much of this may well apply to Julie, but only by the very largest stretch of the imagination can any of it be said to apply to Mme de Merteuil, although her revolt is the only feminine revolution to be found in the book.

Her revolt, despite her isolated declaration to Valmont that she was born to avenge her sex, is not one of feminine solidarity, as Seylaz has rightly pointed out(2). She is, after all, quite prepared to betray members of her own sex: Cécile and Mme de Volanges, not to mention the way she plays with Mme de Tourvel. Similarly, Valmont is equally prepared to betray members of his sex: Danceny and Gercourt. Seylaz sums it up admirably in saying that, with the above exception (i.e. her declaration that she is "née pour venger mon sexe...."),

"l'érotisme (qui est bien une forme de 'la guerre des sexes') n'apparaît jamais dans les Liaisons comme une conséquence de l'ordre social, comme ce qui permettrait à Laclos de dénoncer cet ordre."(3)

There is, then, no justification for seeing Mme de Merteuil's activities

1. *ibid.*, 447-8.
2. Seylaz, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
3. *ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

as a revolt on behalf of womankind against their position of subjugation in society. It is, of course, true that in large measure western society is traditionally a man's society, a "redoutable franc-maçonnerie masculine", as Dominique Aury puts it(1). But although the Marquise is the only female character in the novel who could possibly be described as in a state of revolt, her revolt is purely personal, "une révolte de caractère et de tempérament plus qu'une révolte de raison."(2) In fact she does not put forward any feminine ideal at all. A revolution must be a communal movement. Her reaction is purely personal, designed to demonstrate her superiority over everyone else, regardless of their sex. Rather than liberty, what she seeks is licence, licence to do as she sees fit, licence to manipulate for her own gratification not only men but members of her own sex as well. Not only does she not put forward any feminine ideal, not only does she not seek to return to anything like Laclos's (or Rousseau's) state of nature, but her activities are in accord with the principles of western civilisation, man's civilisation. It is as though, subconsciously, she wishes to become a man. This accounts for her petite maison, for her attempts to outdo Valmont at his own age (the Prévan episode), and for the element of homosexuality in her relationship with Cécile whom, in fact, she seduces by proxy:

"Elle est naturellement très caressante, et je m'en amuse quelquefois...
... En vérité, je suis presque jalouse de celui à qui ce plaisir est réservé."(3)

No one, then, could be further away from the innocence of the "femme naturelle"

1. D. Aury, La Révolte de Mme de Merteuil, in Les Châliers de la Pléiade, XII, 1951, p. 94.
2. *ibid.*, p. 95.
3. XXXVIII, 105, my italics. (cf. LIV, 138, LXIII, 153, etc.)

than the Marquise. She does not even want the equality which Laclos declares to be her birthright. She wants supremacy, not for her sex, but for herself. She wants, in fact, to join the opposite sex - and subjugate them too.

Yet Charpentrat sees her as the agent of Laclos's feminism:

"Elle persécute, en la personne de la Présidente, la femme qui vit en fonction de l'homme, qui ose sacrifier au bonheur de l'homme son propre salut." (1)

It is, of course, true that the ultimate downfall of the Présidente is dictated by Mme de Merteuil, but this is incidental to her conquest of Valmont. It is true, also that the Marquise expresses contempt for "machines à plaisir", but it cannot be said that this is the result of a revolt on behalf of enslaved femininity. Anyone who is conquered becomes a "machine". This is true of Cécile in a particular sense, but it is also true of Mme de Tourvel, of Prévau once the Marquise has outwitted him, and when she persuades Valmont to send the letter to Mme de Tourvel it becomes true of him. Mme de Merteuil seeks to establish her freedom and her dominance as an individual, rather than as a woman. To her, all people are puppets.

For her to be a satisfactory expression of feminism, one would expect her to direct her attacks exclusively against men, and show solidarity with her sex by encouraging women to follow her example. It is true that she toys with the idea of making a disciple of Cécile, but she soon abandons this scheme, considering Cécile too stupid. This, of course, may well be true, but it also helps to emphasise her individualist approach, her belief in her own personal uniqueness. There is not a character in the book for whom she does not feel contempt.

For Charpentrat, then, Mme de Tourvel is "la femme qui vit en fonction de

1. Charpentrat, Les Liaisons dangereuses, Delmas, Paris, 1950, p. iv.

l'homme" or, in other words, the enslaved woman who has fallen from the state of idyllic equality known to "la femme naturelle". For Émile Dard, on the other hand, Mme de Tourvel, "la douce victime de Valmont" is 'la femme naturelle' égarée dans la société."(1) The same view is taken by Roger Vailland, who declares that in De L'Éducation des Femmes "Laclos vole au secours de la Présidente de Tourvel" in the form of "la femme naturelle"(2). Similarly, in Laclos par lui-même, Vailland declares that De l'Éducation des Femmes "constitue la clef des Liaisons dangereuses et de la pensée de Laclos", and according to him "la femme naturelle" of the essay "correspond trait pour à la Présidente de Tourvel."(3) In defence of this argument Vailland quotes at length from Letter VI Valmont's description of the Présidente and the incident in which he helps her cross a ditch, associating this with the lengthy passage from chapter VIII of De l'Éducation quoted above and another passage from Chapter XI describing the sensual charms sought for in a woman by man in the state of nature(4).

At the very least this comparison must be described as superficial. We have shown in our chapter on the psychology of the novel just how false her apparent virtue really is. She may have certain of the physical characteristics of Laclos's "femme naturelle", "la fraîcheur, la taille et la force"(5), but even before she gives herself up to her cult of Valmont she has none of the simple innocence endowed by "la nature". She is, one gathers, perfectly satisfied with her place in society, although she apparently has no real feeling for her

1. Dard, 103.

2. Les Liaisons, Club français du livre, Paris, 1957, p. xxii.

3. Laclos par lui-même, pp. 27 & 39.

4. O.C., 462. Vailland wrongly attributes this passage to ch. V.

5. ibid.

husband. She vegetates in her own little world, which she considers as her "état naturel." (1) Moreover, she has the "phrases élégantes" which Laclos assures us are characteristic not of "la femme naturelle" but "la femme sociale" (2). She is essentially the product of society, with all its hypocrisies, and indeed she revels in a position of servitude once Valmont has conquered her. In this respect, Charpentrat is a good deal nearer to the truth about her than is Vailland. It is impossible to substantiate from the text of the novel Dard's claim that the Présidente is Laclos's "femme naturelle" or Vailland's that she is his "femme idéale." (3) If one confronts the story of Mme de Tourvel with the passage from chapter VIII of De l'Éducation to which we have already referred, or if one imagines her answer to the following question by Laclos;

"Femmes sincères, c'est vous que nous interrogeons. En est-il une, parmi vous, qui ait joui constamment sans crainte, sans jalousie, sans remords, ou sans l'ennui pénible du devoir ou de l'uniformité?" (4)

one begins to see the vast difference between her and "la femme naturelle."

To say, as Dard, Charpentrat and Vailland in effect do, that Les Liaisons dangereuses is a roman à thèse, "l'œuvre d'un féministe" (5), is therefore a mostly unsatisfactory thesis. Moreover, Laclos himself never so much as hinted at this interpretation, in his prefaces, in his letters to Mme Riccoboni, or even in his conversation with Tilly. Seylaz seems to be right when he suggests that despite the ingenuity of Charpentrat and Vailland (who themselves have different views of Mme de Tourvel, as we have shown) the last adjective to occur to the reader of Les Liaisons is "feminist". It is untenable to suggest

1. Discours, O.C., 428.
2. Des Femmes & de leur Éducation, O.C., 441.
3. Laclos par lui-même, p. 33
4. Des Femmes et de leur Éducation, O.C., 441.
5. Charpentrat, op. cit., p. iv.

as Charpentrat does(1), that in his novel Laclos sets out to gain our pity for the victim of the war of the sexes, woman. Vailland in fact tacitly admits this (2) when he says that Laclos's reason for running to the help of the Présidente in De l'Éducation was that the novel, "l'ouvrage destiné à les (Valmont and Mme de Merteuil) dénoncer devient une sorte de poème à leur gloire." Vailland is right here in so far as the reader does in fact derive a certain intellectual pleasure from the spectacle of the manoeuvrings of the two accomplices. But what is interesting about Vailland's remark is that he links Valmont and Mme de Merteuil together: in other words, there is no division on the basis of sex. In fact, when Laclos comes to hand out punishment at the end of the book, he hands it out indiscriminately to both sexes. The Marquise, she who sets out to obtain freedom of a sort is punished, but so is the Présidente, she who, in Charpentrat's phrase, "vit en fonction de l'homme,... ose sacrifier au bonheur de l'homme son propre salut."

It is quite unjustifiable to seek to arrive, by a gratuitous juxtaposition of Les Liaisons and De l'Éducation des Femmes, at a feminist motive behind the novel. Seylaz has the last word on this:

"Il y a un Laclos disciple de Rousseau, qui connaissait sans doute l'Emile et qui avait certainement lu et relu la Nouvelle Héloïse, un Laclos bon époux et bon père..... Et il y a un Laclos qui, volens nolens, apparaît comme l'anti-Rousseau par excellence, et qui écrit un roman dont l'intrigue, le comportement des personnages aussi bien que la netteté dépouillée, la rigueur et les mécanismes impeccables suggèrent une vue de l'homme et un goût de l'intelligence qui se situent à l'opposé du tempérament comme des théories de Rousseau. C'est dire

1. ibid.
2. Les Liaisons, Club français du livre, p. xxii.

que si la publication tardive de l'Éducation des femmes a apporté des lumières, celles-ci éclairent l'homme Laclos beaucoup plus que les Liaisons."(1)

In other words, we are back to the "énigme Laclos".

If we look at the manners portrayed in the novel objectively, we may well be led to believe that, to quote the passage borrowed by Laclos from Seneca to act as epigraph to the Discours(2), so far as men as well as women are concerned, in Laclos's society "le mal est sans remède..... les vices se sont changés en mœurs." We have, however, already expressed considerable reservations concerning the extent to which the society depicted in Les Liaisons is an accurate reflection of eighteenth-century French society, and we have suggested that it is too black, too one-sided readily to be accepted as such. If the reason for this one-sidedness cannot be said to be either a deliberate revolutionary polemic against a particular social class or an equally deliberate feminist thesis, we must look elsewhere for an explanation. An obvious place to look is within literature itself. This task we shall now undertake.

1. Seylaz, op. cit., p. 91.

2. O.C., p. 427.